



The RAVSAK Journal
רבס"ק
RAVSAK
 The Jewish Community Day School Network
 רשת בתי ספר קהילתיים

הילד לעוון

HaYidion

סתיו תשס"ז • Autumn 2007



Diversity



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A Word from the Editor

A famous Mishnah states, "When a human being makes many coins from the same mint, they are all the same. G-d makes everyone in the same image – His image – yet none is the same as another." (Sanhedrin 4:5) This issue of *HaYidion* examines the subject of diversity as it applies to the Jewish community day school. The ever-increasing heterogeneity of our schools poses both challenges and opportunities for day school leaders. The articles that appear in this issue are designed to provide both theoretical and pragmatic frameworks within which community day school leaders can approach the range of questions that arise from the growing diversity within our school populations.

Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, wrote a commentary on *Parshat*

Ha'azinu in which the Torah is compared to rain. Rabbi Sacks notes that this comparison is made "precisely to emphasize that its most important effect is to make each of us grow into what we could become.

We are not all the same, nor does Torah seek uniformity...The miracle of creation is that unity in heaven produces diversity on Earth. Torah is the rain that feeds this diversity, allowing each of us to become what only we can be."

We hope that this issue of *HaYidion* will help you to become what only you can be. Whether your school is large or small, urban or suburban, one of many or isolated, you are still part of the RAVSAK community. After two decades of association with RAVSAK, I am still amazed by how alike and yet how different we all are. Thus, the contributors to this fall's *HaYidion*



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seem to relate completely to many of the critical issues I face, while at the same time offering unique and original perspectives and solutions that will prove invaluable to me and, I truly believe, to you also. ■

HaYidion:

The RAVSAK Journal

is a publication of RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network. It is published quarterly for distribution to RAVSAK member schools, associate members, and other Jewish and general education organizations. No articles may be reproduced or distributed without express written permission of RAVSAK. All rights reserved.

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From the Desk of Susan Weintrob, RAVSAK President

Diversity not only comes in many colors; it comes in many voices. Nonetheless, typical of many schools' diversity definitions is the following goal from my neighboring independent school's strategic plan: "The school will seek to raise the percentage of students, faculty and administrators of color..."

Diversity should do more than create populations with different races, although that is a worthy goal. Diversity of voices and perspectives in our schools helps us to craft educational philosophy, a framework for community and a plan for outreach. Yet we know that any change brings tensions and challenges each day. At RAVSAK schools, with no specific rabbinic authority, no political guidelines, and no imposed educational standards, a school may struggle in its creation and implementation of its own community values.

Celebrating diversity should open the door to Jewish families, creating common ground for those in our community raising Jewish children. While we may

not welcome the tensions that diversity brings, they polish our values and aspirations, test our assumptions and stretch our notions of identity. These challenges help us confront whether we are comfortable dialoguing with those with whom we disagree, and help us to learn to respect those who may pray differently or eat with different standards. We should, with the right process and values, create a community with those whose families are structured differently and who may think or live differently.

While many other schools have diverse populations, few encourage the dialogue among families, staff and students that we generate in RAVSAK schools. We are used to exchanges of ideas. Once a Christian student of my husband asked me how we knew what the right way to read the Bible was. My answer was to show him a Talmudic page. "But which one of the rabbis' views is the truth?" he asked. I explained that all were considered holy. The study of many points of view is not only a commandment but a way of life.

Diversity in our schools should create a living Talmud page. The central text of *Chumash* becomes the school and the diverse rabbinic texts, which speak to each other across the centuries, become our



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ideas, our families, our students, our curriculum and our guide.

Jacob Neusner describes the Jerusalem Talmud as a text of many voices, but one melody. This is the vision that we share, the paradigm that we hope to create. How we bring the Talmudic pages to life is a day-by-day test of our leadership and values. In collaboration with our administration, staff, trustees, families and community, we find the many paths that will allow us to open our doors, grow our schools, and strengthen the next generation of Jewish children. ■

RAVSAK Launches High School Network

This past year the decision was made to bring the vision and programs of NAAJHS (North American Association of Jewish High Schools) under the RAVSAK umbrella to create a vibrant new Jewish High School Network out of the merger. Building on the pioneering work of NAAJHS and the unprecedented success and growing infrastructure of RAVSAK, we will be able to expand

the catalogue of programs and services offered to Jewish schools across North America.

Much hard work and planning have gone into this union and it is with great joy that we now invite all high schools to join our new-and-improved network. All Jewish high schools regardless of affiliation are eligible for membership. For those schools

that had been paying "double" dues in past years to both NAAJHS and RAVSAK you will have the added benefit of paying dues only once.

To register your school today as a member of the High School Network, please contact Robin Feldman, Director of Member Services at 212-665-1320 x303 or rfeldman@ravsak.org.

Socioeconomic Diversity

■ by Dr. Bob Berk

As educators we often forget that the word “socioeconomic” has two parts – “socio” and “economic.” Socioeconomic status has come to refer only to financial means. We have all but forgotten the first part of the word. There are many individuals within our communities with a rich diversity of experience and opinion. This diversity makes our schools better learning communities. We have children whose parents are first generation immigrants, artists, or carpenters. They are from Argentina, adopted from China. Some come from interfaith households, some have single parents. They may live in homes that are multigenerational or include extended families. They may have relatives to care for in other parts of the world. Some of these families are also poor.

They bring with them experiences that might not be typical in our full-paying families. These children often add an important and different outlook to class-

Why do I believe this to be true?

In community day schools we value pluralism, diversity of practice and a commitment to *Klal Yisrael*. Our Boards actively discuss these issues. What board has not spoken about how we recruit more Reform families... or additional Orthodox families? What board has not spoken about how we pray in the school? But in too many schools it is only the finance or scholarship committees that speak about our poorest families. In addition to questions about financial aid capacity, our lay and professional leadership should ask themselves the following questions: (1) What are we doing to specifically recruit the least affluent in our community? (2) What practices in our school make our least affluent families and students uncomfortable? (3) What can we do to make these students and families more comfortable? (4) How can

our recruitment process should allow for discretionary choice of recruitment strategies by the admissions director, we



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need to make sure that the least affluent do not receive the least personal recruitment methods.

We also know that some practices in our schools are difficult for our least affluent. Do schools have a mechanism in place to reduce the financial burden that enrichment events cause? Ice cream days, holiday gifts for faculty members, *tzedakah* drives, field trips, club fees, and book fairs...the random costs, as we all know, can get quite expensive. Does somebody at the school approach our least affluent families – well before an event – and offer to help financially so that these items are not an uncomfortable burden?

Perhaps the most difficult challenge that we face is making the least affluent feel valued within the community. We rarely ask them to serve on our boards. They often cannot take leadership positions in our parent-teacher organizations because they work full-time. And the truth is, even when we know that they could easily help on a project, it is often easier to call somebody who is more available. For us to truly recruit, welcome and retain our least affluent we must ask these families to make worthy contributions to the school. It is our job to figure out how to facilitate this difficult task.

In the last issue of *HaYidion*, Michael Steinhardt challenged us to work to appeal to more than just the 10% of the community that we currently enroll in

“Some of these questions are easier to answer than others. Do all our potential recruits get the same attention? Do some get invited to an intimate breakfast with the Head of School and others to an open house?

room discussions. Imagine exploring the exodus with children who, themselves – or whose parents – undertook their own. In high schools, imagine a conversation about a national health insurance program with some students who may not have coverage. Imagine debating the war in Iraq with students who know that some of their classmates’ parents are currently serving in our military. These discussions can occur when we welcome – and more importantly, actively recruit – our least affluent.

we help these parents to feel valued by the school – to know that they add more than they take?

Some of these questions are easier to answer than others. Do all our potential recruits get the same attention? Do some get invited to an intimate breakfast with the Head of School and others to an open house? Do some – but not others – get invited to Shabbat dinner at a current family’s house? Do some get handwritten notes and others get form letters? While

our day schools. He offered that in addition to doing what we are doing now, our schools need to appeal more to the values of contemporary Jews. This may be one path for competing with other high quality schools within our markets. Another way is to change the focus of our conversation about our poorer students. In many communities, day schools are now affordable for all those who desire a Jewish education. Let us continue to make sure that the financial aid is available. But let us do this quietly. The more pertinent work is to reconsider what we do to recruit and retain students from our least affluent families – are we doing what is required...or just what we have always done?

Summer is the time of year when all of our local print publications, school associations and, of course, the Federation allocation committee ask us to update

our school profiles. For most of those asking my job is simple, I simply report the hard data: 100 students K - 6, 12 students in our preschool, 20 FTEs (full-time equivalent) faculty members, 5:1 student teacher ratio, tuition equals

a day school education can receive one. Within the school, we are firmly committed to this as well. Our interests, however, lie beyond the individual. We believe that socioeconomic diversity is a compelling educational interest. In other words,

“ In community day schools we value pluralism, diversity of practice and a commitment to *Klal Yisrael*. Our Boards actively discuss these issues.

\$11,000 plus fees, the list goes on and on. Most organizations ask for similar data. The exception to this rule is our local Federation. They always want to know how much financial aid we plan to award for the upcoming year. Our Federation is interested in making sure that each and every Jewish child who wants

Jewish day schools need students from poor families as much as students from poor families need Jewish day schools. Let us make sure that our actions follow this dictum. ■

[See page 33 for a case study on economic diversity in Jewish day schools]

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Ten Steps for Day Schools to Become More Inclusive of Interfaith Families

■ by Dr. Kerry M. Olitzky and Eva Stern

Community day schools have the potential to become powerful points-of-entry for interfaith families. They can serve as pivotal institutions, acting as exemplars for the way that the entire community responds to the opportunity presented by interfaith marriage.

Yes, we said “opportunity.” We live in a different community today than even a decade ago. It has become clear that for as many Jews who supposedly “marry out” and leave the community, there are an equal or perhaps even greater number of households where spouses from other religious backgrounds have “married in.” While there are conflicting statistics on how Jewishly interfaith families raise their children, one thing is clear: there have been more children born to one Jewish parent than two Jewish parents over the past 15 years, and that trend shows no sign of abatement.

If we wish to help these families raise Jewish children—and we believe it is our moral imperative to do so—we must ensure that day schools offer a welcoming and supportive environment to the intermarried and their children. To reach out and welcome in interfaith families, “business as usual” must change.

Day schools have to be willing to identify the existing barriers that obstruct the participa-

tion of interfaith families and lower them, if not eliminate them altogether. Sure, a small percentage of interfaith families will enroll their children in our schools regardless of the obstacles, willing to participate without any changes while sometimes quietly enduring discomfort, slights or difficult conversations at home about “authenticity.” The majority of intermarried households, however, will have to be sought out through creative and targeted marketing and open educational programs, and promised a much more positive and inclusive experience. It is one thing to catch people when they are already running in our direction—winning over those who might be hesitant to join us is a different matter entirely.

When considering changes to become more inclusive, day schools will have policies to grapple with such as cost or admissions—what some sociologists have named “the game”—but what we might find even more challenging will be creating a welcoming ambience about the school (what some refer to as “the spectacle”). The latter reflects the attitudes of the teachers and students that sometimes are expressed (both explicitly and tacitly) in unfortunate ways. Together, “the game” and “the spectacle” form the ecology of the day school, and as equal partners, attention must be paid to ensuring that both help to create an inclu-

sive environment for interfaith families. This can be done in ways that do not challenge the school’s understanding or

your website reflect the diversity of the institution.

2. Don’t wait for students and



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practice of *halakha* (Jewish law), though they cannot be addressed without challenging the school’s ecology.

Here are ten things that your day school can do to begin creating a welcoming environment for interfaith families:

1. Since websites have become the first point-of-contact for nearly every institution—as they present a safe, anonymous environment that can be accessed at any time and at any place—the homepage of your school’s website should prominently feature a message that clearly and warmly welcomes all. Don’t assume anything, and don’t make hints. Go ahead and say it: We welcome all students from all kinds of Jewish families. And make sure that any photographs that are included on

their families to come to you. Go out to where they are to recruit. Use what we at JOI call Public Space JudaismSM—low barrier events in public venues with easy access so that potential students and their families can “stumble onto” the Jewish community. Make sure that the event is not just about recruitment for your school. Instead, it should be a content-filled event—perhaps a holiday experience—that reflects the kind of learning experiences and educational opportunities that can be found at your day school.

3. Be a presence in their lives from the first day they encounter your school. By offering periodic programs as a service to all parents in the community (both in public spaces and your own) on topics such as birth, parenting,

early childhood tips, you can demonstrate that you are a resource and support network and can meet the universal needs that come with raising children. In this way, when it comes to choosing a school, interfaith families will see that your school is responsive to their parental needs and not just their Jewish needs.

4. Use inclusive language in all of the materials produced by your day school. While it is obvious to take such an approach to recruitment materials, this practice also needs to be taken into consideration when composing materials used inside the school, including the simplest forms and sign-up sheets. Inclusive language removes assumptions: assumptions that all parents are Jewish (or married, or same-sex), that all Jews know Hebrew or Yiddish, that all Jews practice Judaism in a certain way, and so on.

“ There have been more children born to one Jewish parent than two Jewish parents over the past 15 years, and that trend shows no sign of abatement.

5. Make sure that there are staff members who reflect the diversity that you are trying to foster, especially with regard to interfaith families. It is important that families and students see that adult members of interfaith families are welcomed and supported and can affirm their Jewish identity in positive ways, such as by teaching or working at a

Jewish day school. Intermarried Jews who have raised strongly-identified Jewish children can be role models for our community—as can be their non-Jewish spouses who helped them do so. The focus is on creating Jewish households.

6. All interfaith families are not the same. The majority of those that will send their children to day schools are not “interfaith” families at all. They are Jewish families where one adult partner comes from a different religious background. In most cases, that partner left the practice of that religion in childhood. Treat them as you would every other family in your school.

7. In these families, even those with strong Jewish individual and family identities, there will be extended family members who are not Jewish. Thus,

these children will be actively exposed to other religious cultures. Don't avoid this issue, but don't embarrass or shame students for it either. Use this situation as an opportunity to raise awareness of diversity and create a positive learning experience. Train your staff in maintaining the focus on Judaism while addressing the issue with sensitivity and

confidence. Celebrate the diversity of the student body as reflective of the modern Jewish community.

8. Be mindful of take-home assignments. Steer clear of projects that make assumptions or ask students to explore the religious identities/family background of two parents/caregivers. Also, strive to create a level playing field within the classroom by assigning work that can be handled regardless of Jewish cultural or religious memory. It is important to remember that not all students have parents who were raised in observant or culturally engaged families.

9. Emphasize the universal ethics and values (emerging from Judaism) that guide the curriculum and uniqueness of

the school. Highlighting these in your materials can alleviate parental concerns that the school's focus is too narrow or sectarian. Rather, try to communicate that the school understands the inherent value of its role as a part of the entire community.

10. Be a house of learning for all. Know that many parents—intermarried or inmarried—may feel uncomfortable with their children deepening their Jewish learning without having the opportunity to do so. Sensitive acknowledge and address these potential concerns through your literature and interactions with parents. Additionally, offer opportunities for parents to learn during evenings and weekends, through study groups, classes and workshops. ■

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The Sephardi/Ashkenazi Divide

■ by Chaye Kohl

The debate regarding homogeneous and heterogeneous classes has simmered for decades. Every educational journal and many a conference paper have wrestled with the issue: Is it educationally sound to have students of mixed abilities in the same classroom? Do we deprive students of growth opportunities if we group them according to academic ability?

As we debate, we also need to examine the effects that cultural diversity has in an educational institution. With so much emphasis being placed on “Whole Child” education, we should be asking: How does cultural diversity affect the social and emotional climate in an institution?

Demographics as well as parental and student choices affect the cultural make-up of the student body at a school. Administrative decisions often impact how the cultural diversity is treated. Are efforts made to quash the differences and create a melting pot? Is lip service being paid to the cultural differences? Or is there a concerted effort made to celebrate the diversity? Administrators can set policies and curriculum in schools that embrace the cultures represented by their students. Alternatively, they can ignore cultural differences, or even suppress any efforts young people make to proudly explore their cultural background. In the public school system, administrators and teachers ignore cultural diversity at their own peril.

This article will reflect on the workings of three schools with Ashkenazim and Sephardim in their student body. My observations regarding demographics and programming are based on on-site experience.

Yeshivah of Flatbush High School, in the 1980's - 1990's, with a student body of 750 - 800, was approximately sixty percent

Ashkenazic and forty percent Sephardic. The school day began with prayers, a requirement for all students. There were both Ashkenazic and Sephardic prayer services held each morning. The Judaic Studies faculty included both Sephardim and Ashkenazim.

Class make-up was often culturally homogeneous, a de facto result of choices made by students and parents. The Beit Midrash program, a Judaic Studies option which required more hours of Talmud study, was rarely favored by the Sephardic students. Families were mostly focused on building wholesale and retail businesses. The understanding was that Judaic Studies education was important, yet investing extra time in it would not benefit those boys who hoped to join their father's business. While Sephardic parents agreed it was valuable for girls to learn Talmud and sharpen their reasoning skills, they did not agree that girls needed to take on extra hours of Gemara. The expectation was that the girls would marry soon after graduation. There was a school policy – if a student married during the school year, she could not continue to attend classes. I saw this rule enforced twice. The young men were working summers in their dad's or uncle's businesses. One young man boasted to me: “I make more money in a summer than you do all year.”

He was right.

Students from homes of Ashkenazic heritage were college-bound as a matter of course. And Ashkenazi boys and girls from religiously observant homes expected to spend a year post-high school in Israel. Differing life views affected the way students of the two cultural backgrounds sometimes interacted. The lines drawn between the

material “haves” versus the “have-nots” were often drawn across cultural lines. Sentences beginning with “Rich SY” and “J-Dub” were used derisively by Ashkenazim and Sephardim respectively.



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Celebratory greetings by Ashkenazi students to newly engaged Sephardic girls were often followed by whisperings about “How crazy is that?”

Yeshivah of Flatbush faculty and administrators make a concerted effort to celebrate the cultural diversity of their student body. At their *Shabbatonim* they sing both Ashkenazic *zemirot* and Sephardic *pizmonim* at each Shabbat meal. The school's co-curricular activities include speakers from both communities. I clearly recall the excitement that rippled through the entire student body when YFHS hosted a visit of the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel.

At The Frisch School, in Paramus, NJ, with close to 700 students, there is a small contingent of Sephardim. Their *minyán* fills a classroom – fewer than fifty students. Some years the room is more crowded than others. The Sephardic students clearly see themselves as a minority. A number of them, having discovered my Yeshivah of Flatbush roots, would often quiz me on my knowledge of their cultural background, reveling in having an adult in the building who knew about kibbeh and lachmajee, and who knew that “*mabrook*” was the equivalent of “*mazal tov*”.

As assistant principal, I organized stu-

dents and helped run a Sephardic Culture Day at Frisch. The enthusiasm was palpable among both Sephardic students who were eager to show off their culture, and Ashkenazic students who were curious. There were exhibits of artifacts. Students created a corner “room” with cushions and draperies where students could join their peers, who were dressed in traditional Sephardic robes, and learn to play the drums and finger cymbals. The various food stations featuring traditional Sephardic foods, served up by other costumed students, were a big hit. Recorded music played and students learned some new dance moves to use at the next Sephardic wedding they might attend. The Sephardic students were gratified to be given a chance to share their heritage; the Ashkenazim found it fascinating to sample foods, and hear music. They marveled at some of the exhibits, which included photographs of family celebrations that featured Sebet celebrations and Henna ceremonies. Many were heard to remark: “They really do that?” “Your sister wore that costume?” “Are you going to do that stuff when you get engaged?”

The Hillel Community Day School in N.

Miami Beach, Florida has seen a cultural shift in its student body in the past decade. The shift is reflective of the Latin American Jewish community whose children now constitute a major portion

school graduation.

Hillel began doing a formal demographic study of its student body this year. My personal observations of how students

“Demographics as well as parental and student choices affect the cultural make-up of the student body at a school.”

of the student body. They come from Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela. Many of them have stories to share of actual kidnappings or close calls.

In comparison to Yeshivah of Flatbush High School, which is not the automatic default for all students in the YF elementary school, and The Frisch School, a high school with a number of local feeder schools that reflect the Northern Jersey Jewish community, Hillel is a Jewish community day school, which draws from diverse communities, although typically, students begin in pre-kindergarten and continue on until high

school graduation. Hillel began doing a formal demographic study of its student body this year. My personal observations of how students react along cultural lines, is intertwined with their religious practice as well as their ancestry. My observations were corroborated by others who have been at the school for many years. Eighty percent of the current student body of 1,100 students from pre-kindergarten through high school, come from families who are non-practicing or liberal in practice, yet the school follows Modern Orthodox guidelines. This provides an interesting conundrum. Hillel requires attendance at *tefilah*, and there is a Sephardic *minyan* available to middle school and high school students. There are approximately sixty students who attend

[continued on next page]



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[continued from previous page] this *minyán*. The high school seniors who were among the founding members of the Sephardic *minyán* at Hillel when they were in middle school are fiercely protective of the *minyán*. Yet the stark differences in cultural attitudes about Jewish education do not cut across the Sephardic and Ashkenazic lines; it plays out as American versus Latin American.

Hillel parents who are first-, second- and third-generation American are intent on their children acquiring a solid Jewish education typical of the Jewish community day school. A great percentage of parents and grandparents of current Hillel students (and a small number of third-generation students were born out-

side the United States) grew up with a different notion of Jewish education. In South America, Jews attended Jewish schools often as a security measure. Parents wanted their children to be safe from harassment, to have the opportunity to be among Jewish peers (insurance against intermarriage) and to learn something about their Jewish heritage. They did not expect an intense Judaic curriculum.

Hillel was founded by a group of parents who were of Ashkenazic background and Modern Orthodox in practice. The community day school they envisioned followed the American model where all Jewish children could be educated and Judaic Studies were vitally important. The mission statement they created re-

flects Modern Orthodoxy and Zionism as guiding ideals.

As the Hillel student body became more Latin, there was a shift on the board of trustees as well. The current board reflects a religiously left moving trend that is a reflection of the fewer strictly observant families joining Hillel. As is true in the Syrian Jewish community in Brooklyn, when Latin American Jews attend synagogue, they generally pray in the Orthodox tradition, but, that does not necessarily mean that their daily practice follows Modern Orthodoxy. This is informing the overall running of the school as well as the day-to-day programming. Parents who send their children to Hillel attend Shabbat services and have festive family dinners and/or lunches on Shabbat. The way they spend the rest of the day affects social interaction among students. The more observant teenagers feel isolated; they cannot join many of the activities planned by classmates for a Saturday afternoon.

The cultural divide, as informs religious practice, is at issue. To avoid complications, for example, Hillel provides all lunches and snacks. Judaic faculty monitor snack items that students bring, looking for Kashrut symbols, and school policy forbids home-baked goods on campus. Uniforms are the dress code; and they clearly prevent students from wearing debatably immodest clothing. Conversations among administrators include whether to implement punitive action for boys who do not wear their *kipot* during lunchtime.

Latin American students are proud of their heritage and many get involved in activities outside the school where they have the opportunity to meet up with their fellow Latinos. There are dance troupes that perform for and athletic teams that play against other Jewish teens in Brazil and Argentina. Spanish is spoken in the corridors among Latino students. The Spanish Language program has classes on each level for Spanish speakers and non-speakers. Recently there were parents who asked to remove Hebrew language as a school requirement because of the level of difficulty. Those among the parent body who advocate for this feel that their children can learn what they need to know about their heritage by reading the Bible and other Judaica in translation.

In all three schools I saw how cultural diversity is embraced and often celebrated. Students in Jewish high schools tend to be accepting of their peers, except when they are not. Creating friction is one characteristic of adolescent behavior, and though it may stem from something else entirely, cultural diversity, often compounded by lack of cultural knowledge, can exacerbate these situations. Sensitive administrators and faculty members can use teachable moments to celebrate differences. In a country where diversity is part of the cultural landscape, celebrating differences can lead to tolerance and appreciation of others – Jew and non-Jew alike. There are valuable lessons about our differences that we need to impart to our students. ■

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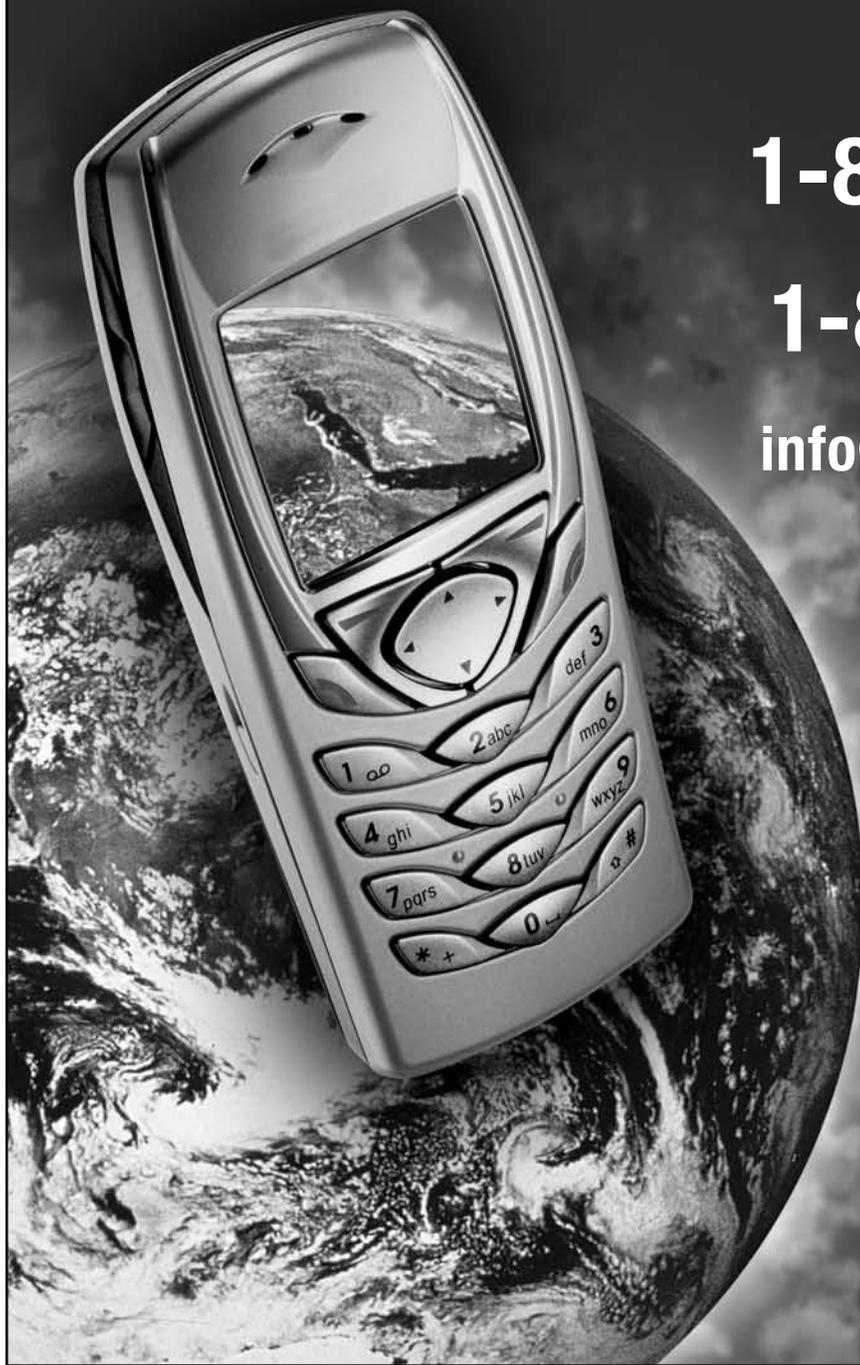


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A Few Thoughts on Jewish Diversity

■ by Dr. Marc N. Kramer

One of the questions I am asked most often is “What is a community day school after all?” This query is frequently followed by the questioner’s attempt to answer it himself: “Schools where anything goes... Judaism-light... private schools for Jewish kids...Orthodox schools disguised as liberal schools... schools that can’t make up their minds what they want to be or who they want to serve.” In an attempt to avoid a second round of Q&A (question-and-assume), I offer that a Jewish community day school is “created in the image of the local community in which it is found, and that the school understands Jewish diversity as a strength and not a threat.” Of course, this begs an explanation of what we mean by Jewish diversity, and given the theme of this issue of *HaYidion*, I attempt to offer one now.

“Pluralism” is an express ideology that suggests that divergent paths can and will be positively altered in the presence of others. “Peoplehood” suggests the potential for a powerful collective identity (both praiseworthy, if complicated school missions). Jewish diversity in the Jewish community day school setting is an unbiased, non-hierarchical acknowledgement of the vast potential that will arise by welcoming and honoring the myriad expressions of what it means to be a Jew into one school.

Most Jewish community day schools use the term “pluralistic” to describe their position in the day school marketplace, highlighting the fact that they are not movement affiliated or theologically dogmatic. Research on community day schools suggests that most are non-denominational, meaning that the school holds at bay all trappings of denominationalism, or trans-ideological, meaning that a range of denominational expressions is captured in the life of the school (often Reform-to-Conservative or Conservative-to-Modern Orthodox). Few, in fact, are authentically pluralistic, and

within these limited ranks, the more sophisticated schools see their pluralism as a goal, not a given.

So if not pluralistic, then what? I posit that “Jewish diversity” may be a useful term and lens through which to view our schools. The 1990s conversation on diversity, despite much Jewish leadership, was largely about race, economics and to a lesser degree, gender. Jews were by and large assumed to be “white” and “middle class” and as such, were lumped into the majority. While most Jews did not see themselves in the “of color” camp, placement in the “not of color” column was equally fallacious. The upshot of this unfortunate matter is that within the Jewish community “diversity” as a term has room to grow.

Just as the United States and Canada, at their theoretical best, are an amalgamation of hyphenated-North Americans, so too is the Jewish community day school an ingathering of hyphenated-Jews: Torah-observant-Jews, black-Jews, Jewishly-unaffiliated-Jews, Sephardic-Jews, intermarried-Jews, liberal-Jews, gay-Jews, working-class-Jews, cultural-Jews, single-parent-Jews, very-Yekkish-Jews, Jews-by-choice, synagogue-affiliated-Jews, Jews-who-need-more-than-one-hyphen-Jews, and certainly more.

Bringing together Jews of all stripes is in and of itself a lofty goal; of course, we are in the schooling business, so the focus cannot rest on gathering alone. Jewish community day schools that are committed to Jewish diversity must be prepared to meet diverse needs. Rather than suggest simple solutions to complex challenges, allow me to instead posit a theoretical framework for attending to a Jewishly diverse population:

1. Clarify the school’s mission, vision and

Core Jewish Values. To quote a long-time colleague, “you are nothing without these.”

2. Use these key documents to frame your thinking about how the school can serve the widest range of Jewish children and their families. Be realistic, but think big. Envision including *every* Jewish child. Envision excluding *any* Jewish child.

3. Name and explore your biases and blind spots: Put on the table a lack of experience or comfort with certain types of Jews and see what you can make of it. It’s okay to say that you know nothing about



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Persian Jews; this acknowledgement opens the school up to the possibility to learn and grow.

4. Know your community: Assume that demographic studies are useful but flawed and fail to capture many of the families you – a school of Jewish diversity – want to serve.

5. Review your curriculum: Is it reflective of and open to Jewish diversity? Does it overlook certain Jewish experiences? Are some Jewish perspectives given honor at the expense of others? Will all children see and hear images of Jewish kids like themselves, or do we in some way ask them to take non-speaking roles in the script of school life?

6. Examine your teaching staff and your board: To what degree do these essential structures reflect or ignore your Jewish diversity? For many, enrolling their

[continued on page 15]



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Including LGBT Jews

■ by Gregg Drinkwater

Despite recent advances in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) rights and visibility, both in the world at large and in the Jewish community, homophobia is still endemic in our society. Anti-gay bias is also acutely felt in our schools.

According to the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network's 2005 National School Climate Survey, two thirds of LGBT students report being verbally or physically harassed at school because of their perceived sexual orientation. Three quarters of students surveyed for this respected, nationwide study reported feeling unsafe in school, with predictably negative impacts on their school performance.

The severity of the problem may be news to many educators because these same students rarely report incidents of verbal and physical harassment to school authorities or parents, in part because they doubt any action will be taken. This perception is fueled by the fact that nearly 20% of respondents reported hearing homophobic remarks from faculty and staff, and over 83% reported that faculty and staff do not regularly intervene when they hear anti-LGBT language.

Although the GLSEN data covers students at all schools, public and private, the world of Jewish education is not immune to the problems of homophobia and exclusion. A survey of seven Jewish day schools conducted in 2003 by Rachel Timoner, now a rabbinical student in her 4th year at Hebrew Union College, found that "almost every Jewish day school reported anti-gay name-calling, teasing, harassment, or use of gay epithets." Timoner's research also found that "gay and lesbian students and teachers in Jew-

ish day schools reported experiences of ostracism and judgment." The lack of response from educators, rabbis, and other authority figures is pervasive. "Teachers, students, or parents complained of discrimination, invisibility, harassment, or a 'deafening' silence," the report found.

Without a more recent follow-up to Timoner's 2003 study, we have no way of confirming that the situation in Jewish day schools has improved, although the anecdotal evidence points to progress. For example, Keshet (www.keshetonline.org), a Boston-based LGBT advocacy organization, has seen incredible interest in its powerful new film, "Hineini: Coming Out in a Jewish High School", documenting teenager Shulamit Izen's courageous fight to establish a gay-straight alliance at her Boston-area Jewish high school. Keshet's Shalem Education Project, which includes Safe Schools trainings for Jewish educators and other school staff, continues to expand.

Scheduling a screening of Hineini, or holding a diversity workshop for faculty and staff are both important and highly recommended steps that every Jewish day school should take. But deep and sustainable progress will only come when the leadership at Jewish day schools proactively makes LGBT inclusion a systemic element of school culture. Steps toward systemic change include:

Adding formal and explicit language about LGBT inclusion to the school's public outreach materials (newsletters, website, etc.), the school's student conduct policies, and all formal employment policies and procedures;

Planning regular professional development opportunities for faculty and administration around LGBT issues and diversity in general, including intensive training for the school's counselors and other key staff;

Evaluating the school's curriculum to find age-appropriate opportunities to incorporate LGBT-relevant content, particularly within Judaic studies;

Demonstrating commitment to an inclusive culture through a leadership that models respect for everyone in the school community.



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Some school leaders might agree that pro-active change around LGBT inclusion is all fine and well, but in a world of competing priorities and limited resources, they simply can't push this to the top of the agenda. And besides, how many students would this really impact, anyway?

All Jewish day schools have lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender students, and most have LGBT faculty. With LGBT people comprising between 3-5% of the population, it is nearly statistically impossible for a school to claim it has no students who currently, or will in the future, identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. And any school with 100 or more

students is sure to have LGBT students in every grade level. But perhaps even more important than creating an affirming environment specifically for LGBT kids, is fostering a climate of respect for all people. The bulk of anti-LGBT harassment in schools is directed at kids who identify as straight, but who are the victims of the pervasive efforts of their peers to police behavior along rigorously gendered lines. Calling someone a “fag” may not reflect a bully’s belief that the student in question is actually gay, but is a way of humiliating and marking the student as other, as outside, and as suspect. It should come as no surprise, then, that kids who are questioning their own sexual identities find they have no one to confide with and nowhere to turn.

Elementary and middle schools are not immune, either. Although we may prefer to avoid talking about the sexual development of Jewish adolescents, according to researchers in the field, the average age at which boys who will later identify as gay or bisexual first become aware of

same-sex attractions is 9. For girls it is age 10. On average, boys have their first homosexual experience by age 13, and girls by age 15. Whether we’re ready for it or not, students in our schools are already grappling with these issues at ever younger ages.

For elementary schools, kids may not yet be exploring such feelings (although for people who will later identify as transgender, research indicates that most are aware from as early as 2-3 years of age that their gender identity does not match their biological sex, or social expectations about their gender role). But more and more day schools have students with LGBT parents, and the numbers are growing as more LGBT people have kids, and more LGBT Jews live more openly in their communities.

One of the most enriching aspects of being a Jewish educator is the opportunity to expose the next generation of Jews to our community’s deep commitment to inclusion, openness, justice, compassion,

and respect. As a recent Jewish Mosaic study of Colorado’s Jewish community showed, Jewish institutions that are open and welcoming of LGBT Jews tend to be open and welcoming of all Jews. And as one participant in the study stated, “Being open and welcoming is a sign of a healthy Jewish institution.”

It takes leadership to transform our sometimes insular school environments into communities that are open and welcoming of all Jews. But such leadership is essential if we want our Jewish day schools to continue attracting the best and brightest Jews from across the country, as American Jewish society becomes more and more diverse.

As a father, as someone who has taught Jewish teens, and as someone who has worked with Jewish educators from every Jewish movement and in every type of educational institution, I consider the opportunity – and duty – to share Jewish values of inclusion with our youth to be an honor and a blessing. ■

[continued from page 12]

child in a Jewish day school is already a stretch; for some hyphenated Jews, taking the plunge may be contingent upon seeing Jews who look/sound/live like them with leadership and faculty ranks in order to take the plunge.

7. Train your team: We would all benefit from training in how to listen, how to ask questions, and how to benefit from a range of perspectives. The recent “Conference for Change” identified countless lay and professional leaders from across the spectrum of Jewish life who are eager resources for your school.

8. Retune your message: Actively outreach to the wide range of Jewish communities you seek to educate through

your community day school.

Jewish diversity is too important an issue to limit to this column. We invite all readers to go to: www.ravsak.org/jewishdiversity to share how your school attends to Jewish diversity. You are welcome to post under your own name or anonymously.

It strikes me that one of our obligations as Jewish educators is to give our students a better, richer, more purposeful Jewish life than the ones we live. If Jewish diversity can be woven into the tapestries of our schools – side by side with threads of Torah, Hebrew, Zionism, Jewish values, and *gemilut chasadim* (acts of righteousness) – then we may be one step closer to fulfilling that dream. ■

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Day Schools: Preparing Students to Engage with the World's Diversity

■ by Rabbi Josh Elkin, Ed.D. and Suzanne Kling

So many of us are engaged in the challenge of introducing new people to the marvelous world of Jewish day school education. One of the concerns that day school advocates hear most frequently from potential parents or donors is the perception that day school culture is, by definition, too homogenous to adequately prepare graduates for life in “the real world.” Even more than they express misgivings about the cost of day school education, parents worry that sending their children to a Jewish day school may socially cripple them or leave them ill-equipped to deal with the diversity so prevalent—and so exalted—across North American society. To many, the day school appears to be only a sheltering cocoon, at best a place for young children to receive a foundation in Jewish culture and values before joining the rest of their peers in that ever-bubbling melting pot, public high school.

As we consider this concern about day schools, though, a few voices resonate.

The first voice is from remarks of a recent graduate of Gann Academy, a pluralistic Jewish high school in Waltham, MA:

“During Shabbatonim, school wide holiday celebrations, Judaic classes, and morning and afternoon prayer, we are forced to confront our diversity in order to achieve religious experiences that are acceptable, comfortable, and religiously legitimate for each student and faculty member. This process is not easy and is something that the community as a whole has been grappling with for as long as I’ve been a student. The Gann community will continue to struggle with it for years to come because this struggle is the essence of this kind of education. While in many public schools students need to tolerate diversity, here, each student needs

to navigate through the many religious options in order to formulate his or her own Jewish experience and identity.”

The author, who was educated in Jewish day schools from kindergarten straight through high school, captures the tension of what diversity looks like in Jewish schools. Even at schools that are not religiously pluralistic in mission, we know that students from different socioeconomic or cultural backgrounds are forced to confront differences among themselves. Jewish day schools are certainly more diverse than meets the eye.

When prospective parents mention diversity, it is almost always linked to a concern about how their children will manage in life beyond “the bubble” of Jewish day school. The second voice, then, emerges from groundbreaking research on day school alumni that PEJE just released, together with Brandeis University’s Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. Analyzing surveys from over 3000 Jewish college students, researchers found that:

The “social bubble” of day school is not a sealed social network but is more akin to a safe foundation from which day school students venture forth to meet new friends. Even as they maintain strongly Jewish social networks, undergraduates with a day school history are also immersing themselves in all aspects of campus life and making friends through these activities.

Along with the entire day school field, we at PEJE celebrate these findings. Having data that proves that day school gradu-

ates not only survive but thrive amidst the cultural smorgasboard on college campuses validates anecdotal stories like the Gann graduate’s with solid evidence. If we want our children’s education to prepare them for diverse environments, day schools are a great choice.

The third voice is a bit more provocative and counter-intuitive. The concern about lack of exposure to diversity usually emerges from a belief that living in a more diverse community makes people



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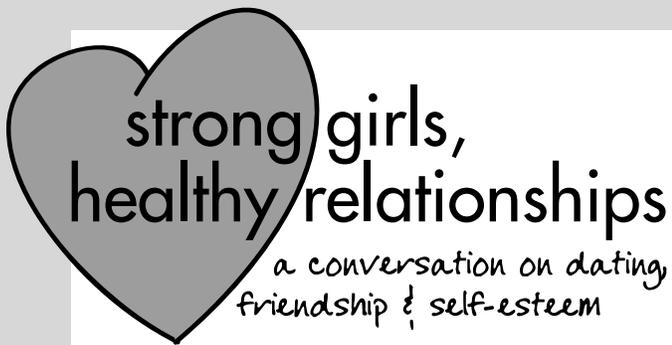


Suzanne Kling

is PEJE’s Communications Officer. Suzanne can be reached at suzanne@peje.org.

more tolerant and more engaged with the challenges of multiculturalism. Good citizens, we have been convinced, are at their best in diverse environments. Erica Goode, a science editor at The New York Times, recently spotlighted surprising research conducted by social scientist Robert Putnam, the well-known author of Bowling Alone. Putnam’s research upends the conventional wisdom that being in a diverse environment makes one more accepting and open to diversity. Goode, responding to Putnam’s finding that diversity seems to trigger social isolation, ponders this idea:

[continued on page 29]



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The Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE), founded in 1997 by Michael Steinhardt and Rabbi Yitz Greenberg, is a national organization of visionary Jewish philanthropists seeking to establish a vibrant and sustainable Jewish future through strengthening the Jewish day school movement in North America. In its first nine years, PEJE's model of making grants, providing expertise, and advocating for the day school movement reached over 150 elementary, middle, and high schools and invested a total of over \$20 million in the field. PEJE has contributed to the opening of over 60 new Jewish day schools.

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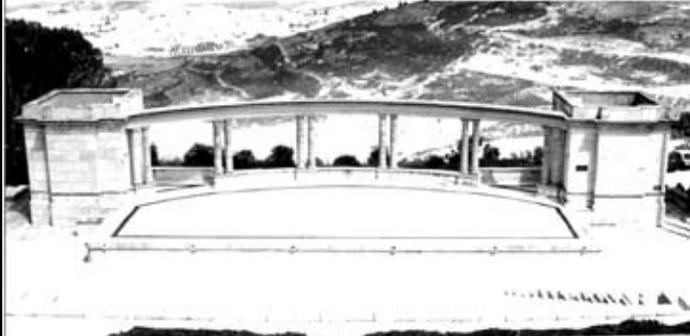
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■ Interview

A Conversation with Donald R. O’Quinn, Head of School, Yavneh Academy of Dallas

Yavneh Academy is a Modern Orthodox high school located in Dallas, TX on land rented from a Baptist church from \$1 per year, and supervised by a Pentecostal headmaster. Founded in 1993 by a core of six committed families, Yavneh had been through three campuses and as many heads in its first five years. That’s when Don O’Quinn comes in.

Of all of the journeys to headship we have ever heard, yours is certainly one of the most unusual. Tell us how you wound up at Yavneh Academy of Dallas.

In 1998, I came to Yavneh as a physics teacher. With degrees in physics and math, I had worked in Texas public education for 32 years as a teacher, football coach, bus driver, department chair, planetarium director, assistant principal, and principal. When I came to Yavneh, as a favor to a colleague, I was teaching physics at a local community college, and working as a consultant specializing in improvement of mathematics scores on state-mandated graduation tests, and in staff development.

I was in-place and available when the headmaster announced that he was departing and, in truth, there were few options for the board to consider in making a mid-year change. While there are approximately 60,000 Jews in the Dallas/Ft. Worth Metroplex, and close to 50 rabbis in the area, few possess experience in high school education.

Approached by the president-elect of the board, we discussed the state of the

school, and I suggested things that needed to be done in order for the school to grow. After interviews with president of the board, the director of the Education Committee, and a group of close to 30 people, committed to Jewish education but most too young or too old to be high school parents, there was a symbiosis of an educator, with little knowledge of the Jewish faith and a sincere Jewish group, with little comprehension of the world of educational administration.

I brought to Yavneh the knowledge and skills necessary to the daily operation of a high school, a network of education resources, and a reputation as a student-centered, teacher-supportive administrator, one that quickly helped me recruit experienced teachers. Completely absent from my education were the rules of *Kashrut*, modest dress, Shabbat, *Torah Umada*, and the ritualistic customs of weddings, funerals, and other traditions that were way of life for my students and teachers. It was here that I embarked on the greatest adventure of my lifetime.

What are the pitfalls of being a non-Jewish head of a Jewish day school? How are they manifest in day-to-day work?

Board members usually do not understand the role of the board, the role of the headmaster, and the relationship that must exist between the two entities. Thus, board retreats and instruction of

new board members are both important. This usually manifests itself with board members assuming the powers of administration dealing with issues. The rationalization would be that the non-Jewish headmaster just doesn’t understand.

A culture which is based upon thousands of years of customs, practices, and rules, which wishes to maintain all of those, is difficult to understand and to work with in the short run. This manifests itself in a myriad of ways ranging from with whom you can and cannot shake hands to appropriate behavior at a funeral, a *bris*, a wedding, a Shabbat meal, when and how to wash your hands before a meal, what to say to a bride at her wedding, how to behave when you visit someone who is sitting *shiva*, and many more. The diversity of the culture, through, and even within the branches of Jewish observance, adds to this; I’ve never been to any two funerals,

or weddings, that were identically performed.

The mistrust that some Jewish parents have of a non-Jew when dealing with issues of education or environment for their children manifests itself in the need to have one of our rabbis join the conversation. For most of our families though, as we’ve spent time together, they’ve come to trust me.

Once the community realized that I was working to achieve the goals of the community, a strong Jewish education paired with a rigorous college preparatory education, Jewish allies appeared



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from all directions. Yavneh's curriculum was divided into secular and Judaics programs of study and a bright, young rabbi heading the Jewish school undertook my own Jewish education. He invited me for Shabbat meals, explaining the meaning and importance of each facet of the meal and it was there that I realized the Shabbat meal is one of the most beautiful and important aspects of the Jewish family, keenly feeling its absence from Christianity.

Are there any advantages to coming at the work of Jewish school leadership from an "outside" perspective?

The very fact that I'm from the "outside" brings a new vision for problem-solving because the expertise was developed in a different world. When I came from the "outside," I brought a network of advisors, consultants, teachers, coaches, administrators who came to work with the school and who helped to build its reputation as a strong dynamic institution. Our success speaks to how "inside" the caring and respect of children can, and should be, regardless of religious affiliation.

Often, I serve as the cushion to intolerance of Jewish affiliations for each other and it seems that no one trusts me completely, everyone wishing that I was one of them. My parents do believe though that I will serve as a moderator and in my years at Yavneh, no student has changed affiliation. Over four years of attendance at Yavneh students tend to become stronger, more knowledgeable participants in their own synagogues and no student has changed affiliation. When they leave home for college, Yavneh students tend to hold to their faith and to their practices.

I don't regularly attend synagogue services and other Jewish community events. On the occasion that a student or staff member must be disciplined or terminated, I'm able to make the hard decisions and take the difficult actions necessary to the operation of any school without having to live within a community that is

displeased about something that I have done. This also saves the local rabbis from having discordance where I a member of their congregation.

What, if anything, should Jewish day schools do to be more welcoming and more supportive to teachers and administrators from other faith-cultures.

I believe that, while there is a natural tendency to segregate along religious lines, school communities need to accept the premise that the education of its youth to the highest quality possible is the most important function of the school. Administration must act in such a way as to produce an integrated faculty of colleagues while understanding that many activities need to be explained and that strong efforts need to be made to assimilate everyone into the school community.

To what degree, if any, does the presence of non-Jews in a Jewish day school (we'll call this "interfaith") inform positions about Jewish diversity (which we'll call "intra-faith")?

There is no such thing as a homogeneous group of anything living. A faculty made of completely of Orthodox rabbis still has diversity because of their own personalities, talents, skills, wisdom, and commitment. A faculty which has a mixture of Jewish affiliations has another degree of diversity and a faculty which includes different faiths has another level of diversity still. At Yavneh, only one faith is being taught, Judaism. English, however, is taught by highly trained, highly experienced, and highly successful teachers, none of whom are Jewish. This year, of the 17 students who took the Language and Composition AP test, fourteen scored either four or five. There are three perfect 800's on the SAT for this year's seniors and it is the third consecutive year that there has been a perfect 800 on the SAT. It is the best teacher for the position that I consider, not the religion of the person, which has resulted in performances that

have put committed Jewish students from Texas into many of the major universities of the country.

In terms of another aspect about the concern for diversity, I would observe that people of the Jewish faith, by large numbers, place their students into private secular schools, send their students to public schools, send their students to Catholic and Episcopalian schools and donate large amounts of money to those institutions. None of the places that I have named have large numbers of Jewish faculty or administrators.

When you began as Head at Yavneh, the school was considering closing its doors. How are things today?

The enrollment is now 120, approximately 30 students per grade level, and I couldn't be more proud. This year, three of our students recorded perfect 800's on the SAT – the third consecutive year that a Yavneh student has scored an 800. We have students at Columbia, Barnard, Harvard, MIT, Penn, NYU, Brandeis, Maryland, University of Texas, Texas A&M, as well as many *yeshivahs* in Israel. The school is a recognized basketball power in the state, both boys and girls. Yavneh is a powerful secular school, yet all but three members of the senior class participated in the March of the Living, and over 50% of the senior class will spend a year of study in Israel before starting college. Our students are noted for taking the lead in Jewish activities wherever they go. ■

The executive committee and staff of RAVSAK wish you a

**שנה טובה
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Day School Through the Lens of an Interfaith Family

■ by Michael Brent

Perhaps it goes without saying that every interfaith family is different. Some families celebrate the holidays of only one religion. Others create an amalgam of their separate faiths. Others still navigate the calendar from one secular celebration to the next.

But every family – secular or religious, interfaith or in-married – always wants to do the best for their children, particularly when it comes to their education.

I would call our family a “Reform Jewish interfaith family.” We belong to a Reform temple but celebrate an American secular version of Christmas and Easter in our home in addition to the Jewish holidays. Although our community is home to a large number of private schools- many of them are Christian schools- we never really considered parochial education for our kids. We expected our children would go to a secular school and we would provide them their religious education at home and at temple.

The year before our children were to enter kindergarten, we went to our temple’s open house and a Jewish day school

Our young, small school didn’t have much of a track record yet but it did have a well developed curriculum and a willingness and ability to tailor the program to each individual child’s need. The school was a cost-effective alternative to our area’s outstanding public schools. The school cost about 1/3 more than our children’s pre-school day care but provided a huge amount of educational content for the extra money including a foreign language, lessons on morality and ethics, Jewish traditions, history and rituals. Most importantly, they made our family feel welcome and accepted without negative bias. We were not asked to explain our observances, defend our family decision, nor agree to assume religious practices at home as a prerequisite for enrollment. We soon learned that the openness and understanding expressed by the head of school was to be found throughout a school committed to Jewish diversity.

Why is a Jewish community day school a good fit for our family? For us it has been that word “community.” When we came to the school, we were a family looking

after and food was brought over. Celebrations were shared. The school provided a simple framework for us to use outside of school and grow the community, with reminders of providing for those who keep kosher and not scheduling parties on Shabbat or other Jewish holidays.

The school uses a similar philosophy in its Judaics program to create an atmo-



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sphere where everyone can feel comfortable. All students participate in all parts of the Judaics program without regard for religious affiliation. The program takes a historical perspective and religious instruction focuses on process. Students learn rituals and can worship comfortably in any synagogue. They learn and understand the mitzvot and respect their observance. The emphasis is on the universal nature of these commandments. This education allows students to feel comfortable participating in discussions about what it means to be Jewish with Jews and non-Jews in any Jewish, non-Jewish or secular community. Students take pride in being part of the Jewish People; a religious people, a cultural entity and members of the family of nations in the world through Israel.

Finally, the school need not change or augment the curriculum for interfaith or non-Jewish families. All they must do is show respect for each family’s differences. With these efforts Jewish community day schools can develop, grow and maintain religiously diverse student bodies. ■

“ The school need not change or augment the curriculum for interfaith or non-Jewish families.

caught our eye. This Jewish day school courted and eventually won us over. The next year our children entered the school’s kindergarten and today our children are now entering 4th grade with our sights set on continuing at our school all the way through middle school.

How and why did we make this decision? Good academics was at the top of the list.

to expand the community we had found at our synagogue to the broader Jewish community. There were families from all the branches of Judaism. There were non-affiliated Jews. There were secular Israelis. There were Russians and Romanians. There were interfaith families. And it was a community. Families looked out for each other. In the event of an emergency or sickness, children were looked



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Using Diversity: The Possibilities of Pluralism in Community Day Schools

■ by Dr. Susan Shevitz

Diversity is a fact of Jewish life today. The radical openness of American society, where individuals craft their own identities based on choices they make for themselves, leads to – and celebrates – all sorts of hyphenated and hybridized identities. Marriages to non-Jews, inter-marriage and adoption mean Jews, who have never been monolithic, are multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-racial in ways not known before. Consider the Jewish daughter of a Korean mother and WASP father who at the end of high school converts to Judaism – and, now married to a non-practicing Italian-American from a Catholic family – brings her child to a day school, or the self-proclaimed Wiccan whose Jewish parents send her to a Jewish high school, or the adopted daughter of a single Jewish/Buddhist parent or.... Driven perhaps by demographic worries, populations that were previously ignored by much of the Jewish community, such as Jews of color, inter-marrieds, single parent families, GLBT individuals and families, and others are now being acknowledged and courted by the leadership of the Jewish community. Whether they choose to acknowledge it or not, all Jewish educational institutions deal with different types of families and learners.

Community day schools represent an additional dimension of diversity, as well. Attracting families who range from secular to Orthodox in practice and/or belief, they operate without either a predetermined consensus about matters of educational practice or policies determined by one of the religious movements. Having accepted the mandate to educate all kinds of Jewish children every community day school faces basic questions: what does it do in the face of its diversity? Does it tacitly accept the Jewish community's patterns of minimizing meaningful discussions among Jews with very different approaches to Jewish life or go by the well-known "frummet common

denominator" (i.e. the ritual practices of the most stringently traditional families?) Or does it challenge these patterns by presenting another model, one which is truly pluralist?

Approaches to Pluralism

Interested in pluralism, I have been studying Jewish schools that are not affiliated with any particular Jewish denominational movement. Some call themselves community, others non-denominational, trans-denominational or pluralistic. Whatever their names, they all must develop stances about what their diversity means and the extent to which it will be used for educational purposes.

I have found that at least three orientations to diversity characterize in these settings. The first, "demographic pluralism," is the most limited. The school enrolls a diverse population and creates conditions in which most families will be comfortable. It doesn't use the diversity to explore aspects of American Jewish life and Jews' various patterns of religious belief and practice.

A second approach, "co-existence pluralism" attempts to use its diversity as an element of its educational program." It actively seeks demographic diversity, and wants individuals and groups to learn to respect each other and the different ideas and ideologies represented. As a senior at a school I am studying put it, "I have learned the importance and necessity for tolerance. It is a message engrained in the very idea of [the school] --- a pluralistic day school tolerant of all forms of Jewish religious practice."

A third approach that I am calling "generative pluralism" goes further. It incorporates the elements of demographic and co-existence pluralism but is based on the abil-

ity to hold and grapple with multiple, even contradictory interpretations and perspectives. It expects students to learn to articulate their own ideas, engage with others' ideas, become more thoughtful and through this possibly change their own positions or together generate new approaches. As expressed by a twelfth grade student:

The Jews are a wandering people, both geographically itinerant and spiritually roving. A Jew can never stay in one state of mind



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for too long. We debate; we change our minds; we amend. [School] allowed me to change my opinions and alter my beliefs in an environment where I can gracefully cede even my strongest certainties to new ideas.

This approach to pluralism expects people to generate new personal and/or communal understandings and actions. Diversity becomes the grist for the pluralist mill.

Pluralism as Active Engagement with Diversity and Peoplehood

Community schools are uniquely positioned to prepare their students to embrace Jewish peoplehood. In an era when the Jewish world is factionalized and where barriers to joint efforts and new thinking abound, providing students with tools to define their own positions while also learning to understand and work with different sorts of Jews is vital to our collective future. How this is done will of course look different in elementary and secondary schools and will also be influenced by the particular characteristics of the school, its surroundings and

stakeholders. There is no one way to “do” pluralism, though there are principles that guide practice.

Three principles of generative pluralism that I have seen in practice, each of which is rooted in the rabbinic and biblical traditions (but that is a subject for another article), are at the heart of the endeavor: (1) students need to know who they are and articulate this to themselves and others; (2) they need to encounter people with different ideas and perspectives and engage in meaningful dialogue with self-awareness and openness; and (3) they will be intellectually and emotionally prepared to further understanding and determine acceptable practice. Rather than imposing, however gently, the views of the dominant group while downplaying the needs of the others, processes are developed for people to explore different approaches with the expectation that the group will find acceptable solutions. In this kind of environment the school’s policies and practices –from what content will be taught to the range of speakers and programs at assemblies -- are looked at through the lens of its commitment to, among other things, pluralism. With structures in place to allow people to look at what divides them in order to generate ways to work together, the school is building Jewish peoplehood.

This approach is as fitting for contemporary life in western society. A leading scholar of religious pluralism in American society, Diana Eck, puts it well: pluralism means “being committed to being at the table – with one’s commitments.” Jewish day schools that take pluralism seriously cultivate this stance. Their students gain the tools to use their own commitments as they engage and work with others around issues of importance to the wider community.

Moving Beyond Diversity: What Can Be Done Now?

Immediate actions can be taken to support schools that want to use their diversity for educational purposes. These few ideas intended to start a conversation about steps to be taken.

On a School-wide Basis:

To be clear about its purposes, the school needs to consider how it relates to its religious (and other) diversity. A task force on pluralism might study the subject and look at the school: Where on the pluralism continuum does it now fall? Where does it want to be? How can it move in that direction?

On an Inter-school Basis:

Schools that are “doing pluralism” can be convened, whether through a series of conferences, a network (real or virtual), or some other means, to share what they have learned, strategies and methods they have developed and questions they face. Schools that want to deepen their commitment to pluralism can be paired with others to guide them.

On a National Basis

Teams of researchers and practitioners can document and disseminate effective practices, analyze problems, and investi-

gate the effects of pluralism on students and families. In-depth studies of teachers, curricula and other programs can guide schools. Effective material can be gathered and shared.

Community day schools are uniquely poised to make a powerful contribution to *Klal Yisrael*. They can prepare a new generation to build solid bridges where few currently exist. Discussing the need to “make a *minyan*” at a pluralist day school, a student bases his comments on the traits of the biblical Aaron who both loved peace and pursued peace:

“Sometimes neither *minyan* would happen, and sometimes Egal[itarian] would compromise and go to *Mechitza*. However, the spirit in which these discussions took place shows the kind of pluralism that I experienced here. The purpose of these discussions was the pursuit of peace, because the goal was to help the *minyanim* coexist, and they were conducted with love for our fellow humans, because we were respecting each other’s needs and beliefs. This is how compromise and pluralism . . . works.” ■



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Women in Leadership: Are We Still Talking About This?

■ by Susan Weidman Schneider

I was recently part of a 24-hour think-tank aimed at speeding the recognition of diversity in Jewish life. The three categories of Jews considered in need of attention were Jews of color; gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Jews; and—are you sitting down?—women.

Why are women—51% of the Jews—still on our list of those minority populations in need of “inclusion”? Why still in the category of disadvantaged groups?

Here is part of the answer: Women are still underrepresented in the leadership of our communities. Girls outnumber boys in some Jewish camps and youth groups, but the leaders of co-ed groups are usually still the guys. In the adult Jewish world, women are rarely the featured speakers at community-wide events, and even less frequently invited or hired to head prestigious commissions and institutions. Women rabbis protest the stained-glass ceiling and young Jewish women professionals are forsaking the Jewish nonprofit world when they realize how slight are their chances of advancement.

Why does this matter?

For one thing, we’re missing out on a lot; the Jewish community could certainly use the talents, insights, brains and energy of a whole subset of the Jewish population. And for another, well-educated Jewish women are voting with their feet, taking their skills and their smarts into the secular world. Jewish women—the best-educated females in North America, according to the National Jewish Population Study—see multiple opportunities for themselves in the outside world as professionals, as volunteers, even as philanthropists, but paradoxically see fewer doors open to them in Jewish life. All of us who care about the creative survival of the Jewish people need to take responsibility for opening the doors wider

to the halls of leadership, making sure that at the very least women are interviewed for executive-level jobs and nominated to serve in lay leadership positions.

But why should it matter that females are underrepresented on the boards of most Jewish day schools? Or that there is not yet gender parity in the Jewish institutions of communities supporting these schools? Isn’t this some kind of narrow-minded single-issue bean counting? Don’t we simply need to nominate the best leaders, hire the best educational administrators, support the best policy-makers, independent of their gender?

No.

We also need to mirror the people who are being led, being served, being educated. If the experts who teach are all or mostly male, if the revered figures in a school—including those historical figures whose visages decorate the corridors—are exclusively male, if the community leaders whose work is honored at the annual fundraiser are all guys, then it’s hard for girls to imagine themselves someday assuming those leadership roles.

Day schools, community centers, and the whole alphabet soup of Jewish organizations have a large part to play in making sure girls and women are seen—and heard—in the community. Three simple steps toward greater gender inclusiveness (and I’m sure you can come up with steps four through 40):

- Try, yourself, whoever you are, to listen harder and better. The personal is political. A young woman who has not been listened to and heard, had her strengths recognized and supported, who has not

had a chance to lead, to work with a critical mass of other women, and who—importantly—has not had strong female role models is at risk as she makes her own career and life decisions. She may not even feel empowered to reject unwanted sexual encounters, or may not feel she can assert herself in myriad other classroom and social circumstances.

- Encourage diversity training for classroom teachers and school administrators, federation and JCC personnel. Being conscious that a teacher calls on male students more often than female, or that



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Editor in Chief of Lilith magazine (www.Lilith.org) since its launch 30 years ago, is the author of several books, among them *Jewish & Female: Choices and Changes in Our Lives Today* and *Intermarriage: The Challenge of Living with Differences Between Christians and Jews*.

school committees are staffed more often by boys than girls, or that girls’ athletic activities are funded skimpily compared to those sports played mostly by boys, or that girls are discouraged subtly from taking advanced math or boxing or Talmud, can help reduce the disparities.

- Make sure community events—panel discussions for parents, for example, or school assemblies, graduation speakers, honorees at fundraisers—feature female as well as male experts. Women Talmud scholars or Middle East policy mavens or social justice activists, for example. (*Lilith* magazine maintains a Talent Bank of women in fields from AIDS to Zionism, and can point you towards other resources as well.) Girls need to hear women’s voices—and to see that these voices are heeded, are heard with respect. Women role models are crucial for female as well as male students to be able to envision a more inclusive Jewish future. ■



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Being Out at Work

■ by Dr. Susie Tanchel

Coming out at work was one of the scariest things that I have ever done; I was frightened that I was going to lose my job because I am a lesbian. At that time I was chair of the Bible department and knew of no other Jewish school that had a(n out) gay or lesbian chair of a *limudei kodesh* (Jewish studies) department.

I love the Jewish high school in which I work and would never want to do anything to harm it. Before I came out, I was anxious that when I revealed the truth about my sexual orientation others would view me as harmful to our school, whether in terms of recruitment or retention. I also walked around school frequently wondering whether certain teachers and students would still respect me if they knew about a crucial part of my identity. Despite my intense fear, and with some sleepless nights, I chose to come out to our Headmaster; in the final analysis, this was the only acceptable option. The most compelling reason behind my decision was that which guides hundreds of my decisions as an educator: I wanted to serve my students better. This required being authentic in my community and true to myself. Since hiding takes so much energy, being in the closet meant that I was not as good an educator as I should have been. Despite fears swirling around in my head and in my heart, I came out. I have never regretted it.

Still the path has not always been an easy one. I have had to endure some uncomfortable conversations, including one in which a teacher said to me, “Susie you are a sinner, but we are all sinners.” While his words stung, I could see in his eyes and hear in his tone how he was struggling to hold both his caring for me and his deep allegiance to *halakhah* (Jewish law). We continued to discuss Judaism and homosexuality in many conversations, and our friendship was strengthened by the new

honesty. Indeed this teacher continued to invite me for Shabbat lunch with his family, and now my girlfriend was included too.

The students, too, had to grapple with having a lesbian *TaNakh* teacher. An Orthodox student relayed to me how when he first learned of my sexuality, he had wondered whether he could still learn *TaNakh* from me. In the end, he determined that I “was not perfect,” but none of his other teachers were either. He decided that he could still learn from me because “had learned Rabbis from teachers who did not observe Shabbat and (I) knew a lot of Torah.” I feel badly that he had to grapple with this issue, but in the end what mattered was my subject matter knowledge and what kind of teacher I was, not my sexual orientation.

To this day not everyone in my school community thinks that living a gay life is (*halakhically*) acceptable. But no one at school - not a single faculty member, administrator, student or parent - has ever treated me with anything but deep respect. I understand that differences of opinion need to co-exist, and I also know that all teachers need to feel accepted and comfortable in the school in which they work in order to do their best work.

Having ‘out’ teachers at a school can also be a positive, as they can serve as invaluable resources. Over the years, administrators, teachers, and even some parents have approached me with questions or a need of assistance in working with a gay/lesbian/bi-sexual student. Moreover, each year, a few students who are struggling with their sexual orientation find their way into my office. I do not seek them out, but they come seeking a supportive adult Jewish presence in their

lives. Many of them are scared about how those around them will react when they learn the student’s truth, while others have already suffered painful experiences. Some wonder about how to reconcile their sexual orientation with their commitment to Judaism. Having a safe



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space to go is essential for helping these students grow into healthy adults. Too many gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual Jewish adolescents feel isolated, alone, and unaccepted. I work to provide these young men and women with a place in which they are can express their fears and their dreams. I also implicitly function as a role model for them by offering one possible way of living a committed Jewish life. This, hopefully, opens up different possibilities for how they might choose to live their lives.

Several years have past since I first came out. Looking back, I realize that the far majority of my interactions with students, faculty, and parents are no different from those before I came out, except each feels radically different to me. I no longer have to use some of my energy to hide; I no longer live in fear. I feel accepted and strengthened, and thus am a more productive and better contributor to my school.

When I recently got married, my *simcha* was treated like those of my straight colleagues. The faculty had a small celebration in our honor, and my *TaNakh* class threw me a surprise party. These events meant a great deal to me as they symbolized my full acceptance into a community

that I hold so dear. As our school treats heterosexual and same-sex couples equally, offering them the same benefits and privileges, my partner is a recognized member of our school community. This is part of what makes it possible for me to continue to work at my school and to grow as an educator. My erstwhile fears have been replaced with an acknowledgment of all parts of my identity. I feel deeply blessed to work at an educational institution that believes that each person is created *betzelem elokhim* (in God's image) and deserves the opportunity to realize his or her potential. ■

Editor's Note: *LGBT people can opt for invisibility. Unlike Jews of color, LGBT Jews can mask "gayness" in ways unique in the diversity community, and in fact, many opt to do so while others feel compelled to do so. It is both possible and likely that there are unseen LGBT people in your school – students, parents, and faculty. The question becomes, are they closeted from you or because of you, and what can your school do to be a more welcoming place?*

[continued from page 16]

But what if diversity had an even more complex and pervasive effect? What if, at least in the short term, living in a highly diverse city or town led residents to distrust pretty much everybody, even people who looked like them? What if it made people withdraw into themselves, form fewer close friendships, feel unhappy and powerless and stay home watching television in the evening instead of attending a neighborhood barbecue or joining a community project?

Goode paints this "unsettling picture" based on Putnam's nationwide research. If living in a diverse environment can have these unintended consequences, perhaps "diversity for the sake of diversity" is a less compelling argument. Instead, strong in-group bonding, such as day schools promote, prepares young people to embrace the diversity they will inevitably encounter with self-confidence, toler-

ance, and a grounded desire to make a positive difference in the world.

So the question of diversity and day schools is complex. By only scratching the surface, we know that day schools are in fact more diverse than meets the eye, first of all. And second, if the unspoken fear behind the concern for diversity is how day school graduates will function in "the real world," we now have quantitative evidence that supports the day school case. Finally, we are urged to reconsider the late 20th/early 21st century assumptions about living in a diverse community.

Let us celebrate the diversity within our schools—and the cohesiveness of the day school community—as we prepare our students to participate actively in the mosaic of life which lies beyond the day school walls. And let's get the word out to more potential parents! ■

Brandes Foundation to Underwrite Merit Scholarships at San Diego Jewish Academy

What may be the largest commitment ever made for private school merit scholarships in San Diego was announced today by the San Diego Jewish Academy and the Tanya and Charles Brandes Foundation.

Starting with the 2007-2008 school year, the Brandes Foundation will donate to San Diego Jewish Academy the funds necessary to provide half the yearly tuition per student for up to 10 meritorious students for up to four years per student.

Each year, the Brandes Foundation will add another group of 10 scholars until potentially 40 students are receiving the scholarships. Thereafter the Brandes Foundation will continue to fund up to 40 scholarships on an ongoing basis, making the total contribution of over \$365,000 per year.

"This generous commitment from the Brandes Foundation will enable additional bright and accomplished students to receive the best combined Jewish and general education possible. The ongoing commitment is the equivalent of a large endowment," said SDJA Executive Director Larry Acheatel. "It is as if the Brandes Foundation deposited \$7 million in a bank account and told us to withdraw 5 percent, after interest earnings, every year for this purpose."

"The objectives of this open-ended commitment is to recognize outstanding students, help grow the enrollment of the school, further enhance the student body, and enable the continued growth of a wide array of educational opportunities for all of the students."

Acheatel said that SDJA plans to utilize

"scouts" who will identify junior high school students who have distinguished themselves in competitions such as; math and science fairs, athletic events, music recitals and other areas of excellence; and then invite them to apply for the scholarships. Unsolicited applications will not be accepted, Acheatel said. "We are going to recruit, 'keeping our eyes and ears open' for fantastic kids."

In making their gift, Tanya and Charles Brandes said: "We are honored to partner with the San Diego Jewish Academy. Through this gift, we hope to assist SDJA in recruiting and retaining exceptional students. With the skills and values learned, in an environment of academic excellence and values education, these students will be prepared to become ethical leaders in their communities and professions." ■

“Color” in the Jewish Community: A Matter of Perspective

■ by Yavilah McCoy

As the Executive Director of the Ayecha Resource Organization, I have had both the pleasure and opportunity of gathering networks of support for Jews of Color while providing educational resources to the greater Jewish community on appreciating difference and building sensitivity and tolerance. Through our Rabbinical Advisory Council, Training and Curriculum, Relief Fund and Annual Shabbaton, Ayecha has brought people of various backgrounds and affiliations together to consider what binds Jews to each other despite difference, and to ex-

amine the misunderstandings around difference that can, unfortunately, keep people apart.

What is most interesting, to me, about working with Jews of Color, is that for many Jews of darker skin tone, differences in “Color” are not an issue. Through participant discussions at our various workshops and correspondence, I have found many Jews of Color who refuse to identify themselves around the color of their skin due to a feeling that doing so would represent a misplaced notion among Jewry. I have met many Jews

of Color who feel strongly that skin color should not be used as a means of defining their primary identity because it describes their physicality and not their spiritual affinity, which is what makes them Jews. In fact, many have posited that one role that Jews of dark skin tone can play in the Jewish community is to remind the Jewish people, as a whole, that it is not the exterior that makes the Jew, but the internal spirit, and the content of the Jewish character. Over the course of the last few years,

with this aspect of their physical package to counteract the negative stereotypes and misinformation that exist around color in American society and,



Yavilah McCoy

is the executive director of Ayecha in St. Louis. Yavilah can be reached at: yavilah@ayecha.org.

at times, inform social interactions between Jews of different racial backgrounds in the Jewish community.

Unfortunately, it is often the misinformation that exists around “color” in the Jew-

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I have met many Jews of Color who feel strongly that skin color should not be used as a means of defining their primary identity.

since Ayecha’s formation, our members have discussed this topic and many others that relate to the understanding of “Color” in the Jewish community. In contrast to Jews of Color who avoid identifying by the racial aspect of their physicality, there have been others who have voiced feelings to the contrary. For these Jews, even though “Color” is not their primary identity, they would still like to create some positive identification

ish community that presents the strongest need for an organization like Ayecha. Mistaken assumptions around Jews having a monolithic racial identity, that is chiefly “White” and European, can lead to situations where Jews with dark skin tone, including those from the Middle East and North Africa, are considered to be other than “normal” or “standard” Jews. Mistaken assumptions around Jewish identity can also lead to situa-

tions where Jews with dark skin are blankly assumed to be converts and where instead of being celebrated as an aspect of mainstream Jewishness, they become exoticized, strange, curiosities that remain outside of definitions for normalized Judaism.

Stereotypes and prejudices that exist within the United States, regarding various racial, ethnic and cultural groups, have been damaging to American society as a whole, but are particularly virulent when brought into the communal interactions of the Jewish community. Jews rely on each other for community in countless ways that bring people together around food, prayer, observance of holidays, and the celebration of Jewish life. When we buy into prejudices, it plants hurtful separations in the places where our religion naturally provides us with community and contributes to a deep level of isolation that is akin to being separated from one's family. The entire community is robbed when we allow the supposed boundaries of "color" to keep us from making deep and meaningful relationships with each other.

Even though Ayecha has had the pleasure of celebrating the warmth and welcome that many Jews of Color have found in a variety of Jewish communities, both in

Israel and the United States, each shared instance of difficulty presents us with the challenge of making welcome, integration and retention in the Jewish community a reality for all of us. As an organization, Ayecha hopes to improve our community by offering Jews a safe "space" to talk about their experiences with "color" and explore what has worked well in the past and what needs to be fixed for the future.

trospetion on where he stood within his purpose for being created. As Jews, we are a people with tremendous potential to give praise to our Creator through our harmonious representation of the diversity of our world. I have often asked participants in our workshops to imagine for a moment the look, feel and sound of a moment when all the Jews who currently exist in the world are gathered together

“Stereotypes and prejudices that exist within the United States, regarding various racial, ethnic and cultural groups, have been damaging to American society as a whole, but are particularly virulent when brought into the communal interactions of the Jewish community.”

Individuals who join our organization, regardless of color, can both contribute to and learn from discussions, programs and activities that stand to move us forward in our communal acceptance of difference. Ayecha is an organization that poses a question: "Where do you stand?" Our commentaries teach us that G-d asked this question of Adam, after the sin of the Tree of Knowledge, not to find his physical location but to inspire his in-

in one location. With all the different languages and customs, there would still be one word for G-d and one word for our people, "Yisrael." For those who are already standing in the Garden of Eden, the question "Ayecha" is moot. But for those who have the courage to look out into an imperfect world and see where their hands and perspectives can make a difference, the question becomes a call to action. ■



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RAVSAK coordinates a leading-edge professional development conference designed exclusively for lay and professional leaders of community day schools. Open to Heads of School, Judaic Directors, other key administrators, Board Presidents and other lay leaders, the annual conference is a four day intensive exploration of themes connected to academic excellence in an environment of Jewish Peoplehood.

Project SuLaM

In partnership with the AVI CHAI Foundation, this fully funded course of study provides professional day school leaders with a meaningful Judaic studies experience through study, leadership and mentoring.

Placement for Heads of School and Judaic Directors

RAVSAK conducts a limited number of customized searches each year for Heads of School and Judaic Directors from the initial advertising and screening process all the way through contract negotiation. We have a near-perfect track record of aligning the right professional leaders with the right schools at a fraction of the cost of a placement firm.

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National Affiliation/Representation

RAVSAK is the voice of Jewish community day school education around the world. We represent the vision and needs of our schools with major educational and Jewish communal organizations including the AVI CHAI Foundation, PEJE, JESNA and others.

Networks and Communication

Website

RAVSAK maintains a state-of-the-art, interactive website that reaches some 55,000 people each month. The site features a map of all RAVSAK schools across North America, an archive of RAVSAK research and publications, the latest information on trends and issues in Jewish community day school education, educational job opportunities and password protected membership information for member schools. Please visit our website at www.ravsak.org.

Journal

HaYidion, RAVSAK's renowned quarterly journal, features articles and information on key issues in day school education and Jewish Peoplehood. The journal also showcases funding opportunities, relevant government programs and other national initiatives.

International School Directory

RAVSAK maintains the most comprehensive guide to Jewish community day schools throughout North America. Updated annually, this directory is provided to all member schools and facilitates communication between colleagues.

Research and Publications

RAVSAK regularly conducts research on current issues in Jewish community day school education. Recent projects include: Salary and Benefits, Administrative Structures, Demographic Studies, Judaic Policy and Operational Protocols. We also conduct customized research projects for member schools.

Case Study: Economic Diversity

Originally presented at the 2007 RAVSAK Annual Leadership Conference in Los Angeles, this case study accompanies Dr. Bob Berk's article on pages 4-5.

The Goldberg Hebrew Academy, a pre-K to 8th grade community day school of 300 students is located in Platinum Park, CA, an affluent suburb of Los Angeles infamous for million dollar price-tags on even the smallest of homes. By all measures, Goldberg Hebrew Academy is a school of excellence – beautiful facilities, a top-notch academic program, a rich Judaic curriculum, prize winning sports teams, a state-of-the-art performing arts center, and a highly trained teaching faculty deeply devoted to student achievement. Not surprisingly, Goldberg Hebrew Academy is seen as a leading independent school highly desired by Jewish families from Platinum Park and across the Greater LA area.

Like most Jewish day schools, Goldberg Hebrew Academy serves a largely middle and upper-middle class population. Annual tuition increases – needed to stay at the forefront of the independent school market – have had little impact on the most well-to-do families, for whom rising tuition remains in reach, and equally little bearing on the least affluent families, for whom their limited means call for significant financial assistance. Historically, Goldberg Hebrew Academy has been able to offer its lower income families the aid necessary to be present in the school.

In preparing the budget for the coming school year, the head of school and business manager agree that they will need to recommend that tuition be set at \$19,000 per student in the lower school and \$21,000 in the middle school, an increase of 12% from the year before. Without this sharp increase, the school will be unable to offer raises to teachers

and will again need to reduce its contribution toward faculty health insurance. The director of admissions, who understands her job to be as much about retention as it is new recruits, raises the concern that an additional 17% of the student body would now qualify for financial aid, but that these “on the cusp” middle class families have been known to leave the school rather than “admit” the need for aid. She also questioned the impact that such a tuition hike might have on the school culture – as is, the older students speak of the “LKS” and the “FKs” (Lexus Kids and Ford Kids) and teachers joke about leaving the profession to become household help in students' homes.

Working the Case

The Board Chair has assembled a task force composed of lay and professional leaders to explore the challenge at hand. To be sure, this task force is not being asked to balance the budget – they are asked to report back to the Board their ideas for maintaining economic diversity with the least negative impact on the school's vibrant reputation, school culture, and fiscal bottom line.

For now, your task is as follows:

You and your tablemates are the task force charged with understanding the impact of becoming a high-tuition institution on the school and its constituencies. How will you go about this work? What research will you do? How will you determine the real financial thresholds for current and future families? What recruitment and retention initiatives would you undertake? How will your decisions impact the teachers? Your current stu-

dent body? Your perception in the community? How will your work mesh with the school's vision of what it means to be a community day school? How will you implement your plan? How will you pay for it?

Factors to consider:

- The school currently assumes 20% of potential tuition will be abated as financial aid.
- Rumors of the proposed tuition hike have begun circulating and some families have quietly looked at other, less costly schools.
- Money is a factor: The school is struggling to meet its \$3.8 M annual budget.
- Each class (average of 32 students) is currently arranged into 2 sections of 16 kids per year. School bylaws cap class size at 18; a significant drop in enrollment could lead to classes of fewer than 10 – a financial, social, and educational problem.

Please assign the following responsibilities within your group:

- Conversation facilitator
- Scribe
- Time keeper
- Reporter

You have 30 minutes to work on this case with your tablemates. At the end of the half-hour, your reporter will be asked to share a few of your group's insights. ■

Mazel Tov to Project SuLaM's Cohort II on Completing Their First Summer Session.

PARTICIPANTS

Steve Adleberg, Administrator
Gesher Jewish Day School

Nora Anderson, Head of School
Westchester/Fairfield Hebrew Academy

Susan Cohen, Teacher
Hebrew Day School of Central FL

Amir Eden, Hebrew Chair
Donna Klein Jewish Academy

Gayle Green, Middle School Principal
David Posnack Hebrew Day School

Howard Haas, Head of School
Hyman Brand Hebrew Academy

Dr. Janice Johnson, Head of School
Jess Schwartz Jewish Community H.S.

Idit Moss, Student Life Coordinator
Yavneh Day School

Patricia Schwartz, Interim Head
Portland Jewish Academy

Marilyn Sherman, Principal
David Posnack Hebrew Day School

Dr. Deborah Starr, Head of School
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Claire Steingo, Primary School Director
David Posnack Hebrew Day School

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Miriam Weissberger, Head of School
Hebrew School of Monterrey Mexico

MENTORS

Rabbi Tzvi Berkson, Judaic Director
Donna Klein Jewish Academy

Rabbi Achiya Delouya, Principal
Addlestone Hebrew Academy

Karen Feller, Head of School
Donna Klein Jewish Academy

Mariashi Groner, Director
Charlotte Jewish Day School

Susan Koss, Principal, Lower School
Melvin J. Berman Hebrew Academy

For more information about Project SuLaM please visit www.projectsulam.org.

Project SuLaM Cohort I Update

Judy Miller, Head of School, Milwaukee Jewish Day School

I am thrilled to tell you that the transformative experience I had with Project SuLaM has already infused more Jewish life into our school. As I was reflecting on our last Shabbaton, I thought about the “low hanging fruit” of which we spoke. It occurred to me that although our graduation ceremony is held in synagogue sanctuaries, have Jewish music and prayer throughout, the graduates only receive a diploma—but no Jewish symbols. Knowing that our graduation was fast approaching, I called my Shabbaton partners, Middle School Principal, Diane Wolfson, and Lay Leader, Moshe Katz. We discussed various possibilities and decided to start the tradition of presenting each grad with an MJDS Chanukiah, engraved with their year of graduation.

Tonight is the ceremony and we look forward to presenting each child with a diploma and a Chanukiah. We will give them a *mazel-tov* and tell them that as they light the candles each year, they should re-dedicate themselves to the values of Torah that they learned at MJDS.

Although this is a small change, it reminds our families, staff and students that we are part of a Jewish community day school. Our grads receive so much more than “reading ‘riting and ‘rithmetic!”

Sue Einhorn, Middle School Director, Greenfield Day School

RAVSAK is pleased to announce that Project SuLaM Cohort I participant Sue Einhorn, Middle School Director at

Greenfield Day School in Miami was the recipient of the Targum Shlishi award. The Teacher Excellence and Creativity Awards recognize teacher excellence, dedication and contribution to the field of Jewish education. Recipients are selected based on their educational talent, demonstrated by outstanding practices in the classroom, school and community. In addition to this recognition, recipients receive a \$1,000 grant from the Targum Shlishi Foundation to be used for professional growth and development.

Sue believes that Project SuLaM is the reason behind all of her learning and growth as a Jewish educator. She credits SuLaM with being the catalyst for her desire to pursue her Judaic Studies masters hopefully to be completed by next summer via Siegal College. ■

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—Ari Stern



"Every day I think about last summer. I think about the places I saw and the Israelis I met and how inspiring they were. And most of all I think about the feelings I had...when I realized I was in the most beautiful place on earth. My experience has given me the drive to make a difference in the world."

—Dori Goldman



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