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Making the
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A Word from the Editor

The *arba'ah banim* of the Passover Haggadah could easily represent the four kinds of Jewish parents today. We all love the wise parents, who call to place their children’s names on our waiting lists as soon as the bris or naming has occurred. Then there are the simple parents, who know what a day school is and whether they can possibly afford to send their children there. There are also the wicked parents, who swear they will never send a child to a day school, no matter what. And finally there are those who’ve never even heard of a day school, confuse it with a day care center, and wish there were something other than Hebrew school to give their children a Jewish education.

How do we reach and teach these four kinds of parents? How do we reinforce the wisdom of the wise ones; inform and reassure the simple ones; reeducate and reverse the perversity of the wicked ones; and enlighten the ones who don’t even know what questions to ask?

This Passover issue of *HaYidion* addresses the questions of school choice. It provides a variety of articles on the topic of “making the case” for a Jewish community day school. When Jewish parents select an institution to provide the formative educational experiences of their children’s lives, they are in fact confronting the issue of whether to make Judaism a priority in their lives. While all of us engaged in Jewish community day school edu-

cation know that the “product” we offer is of superior quality, proven excellence, and demonstrated effectiveness and is one of the major factors in determining whether there will be a Jewish future, how do we communicate this to our “customers”?

How do we “sell” what we have to offer? How can we develop an “image” that makes us attractive and appeal-



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ing to the public we seek to engage? What do we do about the fact that using terms like “product,” “customers,” “sell” “image” and “marketing” makes us, as educators, somewhat uncomfortable?

Once again, RAVSAK rides to the rescue! (The influence of our Texas conference still resonates.) This issue of *HaYidion* contains a wealth of data, personal stories, excellent ideas and creative suggestions that will help each of our readers “make the case” for their schools. This is an issue from which you will copy articles for distribution to your parents, prospective parents, staff, board members, and community leaders—or maybe you will just order extra copies for dissemination. We feel sure that you will find it invaluable for responding to questions that are never raised, raised in innocence, raised with resentment, or raised in bewilderment. ז

From the Desk of Susan Weintrob, RAVSAK President

The week after our RAVSAK conference, I was invited by Josh Elkin, executive director of PEJE, to a think tank regarding "Alternative Perspectives and Compelling Vision of Leadership and Recruitment." I was honored to be in very illustrious company from across North America. We discussed the significant and powerful position of professional leadership in day schools. Edward Pauly, director of research at the Wallace Foundation, told us that studies show that professional leadership significantly affects student learning, second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors.

We are all aware of the importance of heads of school and principals to the schools they serve. Yet leadership often places an individual in a lonely and isolated position, and this position is a major factor in the attrition of school administrators. The RAVSAK conference provides a bracing antidote to the loneliness of the administrator. Each year, I return from the RAVSAK conference inspired by my colleagues and by the many new ideas I have encountered. The networking found at RAVSAK conferences

has sustained me on a personal level, as I know it does many of us, and creates and sustains connections to support both professionals and trustees.

Leaders are strengthened by knowledge development, which helps them ask the right questions and sustain the vision necessary for leadership. At the Houston conference, national leaders such as Josh Elkin, Arnee Winshall, and Bruce Powell helped frame important questions when they spoke to us. Many of us already started putting into effect the wise organizational ideas of Malachi Pancoast. Scott Shay stretched us to think of ways that tuition can be more affordable for all. The many sessions on governance, leadership, and head recruitment and development gave all of us specific information to move our schools to greater success and capacity. Other topics ranged from Hebrew language curriculum to time management, from Israel advocacy to G-d talk.

Teachers cite effective principals and heads of school as one of their main rea-

sons for teaching and remaining in their schools. Moreover, it is clear that training, mentoring, and support for school leadership is also necessary to achieve high and active levels of learning for stu-



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dents. With over 230 individuals attending the 2008 RAVSAK Conference from the U.S., Canada, Mexico (welcome!), and Israel, colleagues with similar challenges and needs are connected and provided with just such training, mentoring, and support.

We know that great learning is driven by great teachers and great schools are driven by great heads. Our professionals are responsible for creating a supportive environment for their students, teachers, and staff. We thank our staff and colleagues at RAVSAK for helping sustain us in the vital work that we do. ?

Interested in receiving additional copies of this issue of *HaYidion* for your board?

Contact Elliott Rabin, Director of Educational Programs at erabin@ravsak.org

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The Courage to Be Countercultural

by Rabbi Lee Buckman

One of the most frequent criticisms that I hear about Jewish day school education is that our students do not live in the real world. Critics feel that children are so sheltered at a Jewish high school that they cannot possibly be prepared to encounter the open world of the university. In the six years of the existence of the Jewish Academy of Metropolitan Detroit, our experience does not bear out that premise or the conclusion that our graduates are unequipped to face a world of diversity.

As enriched a Jewish education as one gets at the Jewish Academy, a student cannot help but encounter people of different religions, skin colors, strengths, beliefs, and backgrounds. They do so through the thirteen interscholastic sports teams we offer. (Ironically, our boys baseball team was the 2005 Catholic League champions.) Our students encounter the diverse world not just on

teachers and studied only Jewish texts and took only Jewish ideas seriously, they would still not be isolated from the “real world.” For school does not constitute the entirety of any student’s life. The real question, however, is not how do we prepare kids to fit into the “real world,” but how do we help them construct a Jewish world?

When our ancestors came to Ellis Island a hundred years ago, they had one question: How do I become a loyal American? Now, a century later, the question is: How do I become a loyal Jew? How do I pass on this legacy to my children and my children’s children in an open, liberal, free society in which there are no artificial barriers of anti-Semitism, ghettos, or real estate covenants to remind them that they are Jews? How do our children enjoy the beautiful melting pot of American soci-

Abraham, whom the Torah calls *Avraham ha-Ivri* because the world was on one side (*ever*) and he was willing to stand by himself on the other.

Abraham traveled the “real world” but had the courage to stand alone in opposition to that world out of profound conviction and love for a particular way of life.



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And because of that, Judaism became the cornerstone of Western civilization and ultimately the basis for all three major monotheistic faiths.

A Jewish Academy student recognized this truth when he said, “Some people say that coming to a Jewish day school means that I do not experience diversity. But I say that when I get to college, I will be able to contribute to its diversity because I have learned who I am as a Jew.”

He was right. If we only say what everyone else says, and if we only do what everyone else does, who needs us? There are many authentic Gentiles in the world. The world does not need imitation ones.

Yes, we must live in the “real world.” We cannot avoid it. Most of twenty-first century Jewry lives in what Cynthia Ozick calls the “twin nobilities, the twin antiquities, the civilization that invented the telescope side by side with the civilization that invented conscience.” The true test is whether we will be as proud and positive about living in the Jewish kingdom as we are in the general kingdom. The question is: Do we have the courage to be countercultural?

“The real question, however, is not how do we prepare kids to fit into the “real world,” but how do we help them construct a Jewish world?”

the ballfield but in the classroom as well. They do so through the eyes of authors like the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe, who writes in *Things Fall Apart* about the clash between African culture and European colonialism and who balances the view of Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*. They are taught science from a young man of Indian descent, mathematics from a Buddhist gentleman from Sri Lanka, and history from a devout Catholic.

But even if our students did not compete with other schools in sports, robotics, and Model U.N. and had only Jewish

ety without allowing it to melt away their Jewish identity?

To remain as Jews in a world where Judaism is a choice and not a condition, we must be willing to be countercultural. If we are not willing to live by a different calendar, a different set of values, and a different set of priorities, we will not be Jewish for long.

Throughout history, we said no to rulers who enticed us with the carrot and dictators who threatened us with the stick, in order to preserve our Jewish identity. We followed the example of the first Jew,

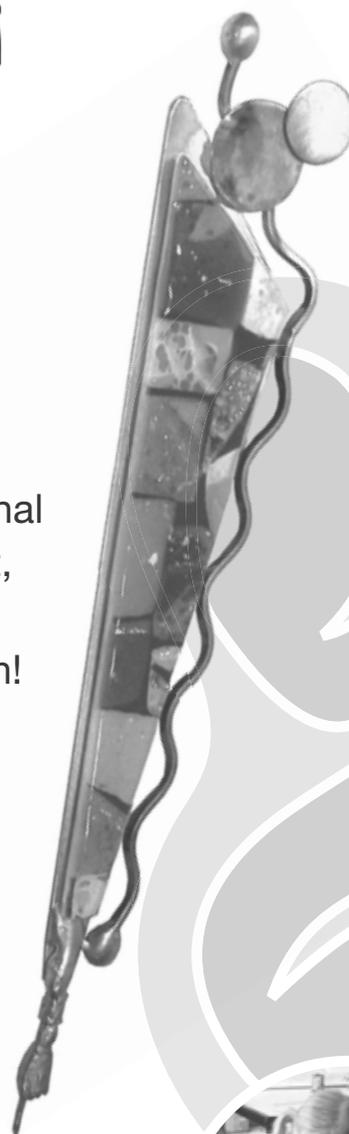


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Securing the Jewish Present

by Dr. Shaul Kelner

Chadesh yameinu kekedem. “Renew our days like those of yore.” Sung plaintively as the Torah scrolls are returned to the ark, this appeal captures one particular Jewish orientation to time. We venerate ancient days and hold forth their image as a model for a messianic era yet to come. From this perspective the present seems of little significance in its own right. It is simply a mile marker on the road from the past we lost to the future we strive to reach.

There is another orientation to time in Jewish tradition, however—one represented by the *Shehechyanu* prayer. Praising the One who has “given us life, sustained us and brought us to this day,” the *Shehechyanu* is rooted in the moment, affirming the blessings of the here and now.

In making the case for Jewish day schools, we often highlight their potential for transmitting the inheritance of our past to the bearers of our future. It is a potent appeal, one that has inspired much support. But in basing a fundraising strategy on the *Chadesh yameinu kekedem* claim about day schools’ potential contributions to the future, we all too

often neglect the *Shehechyanu* case that is already proving itself right now in the present.

be found by looking at the impacts that schools have, not necessarily on individual students, but on communities as a whole. Based on my experience with the Akiva School in Nashville, Tennessee,



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dividends to the bottom line of the Federation campaign.

2) Bridging Synagogue Communities. Like a JCC and Federation, a com-

see, where my children are enrolled, I offer here five ways in which the community day school contributes vitally to the overall health of the Jewish community of which it is a part.

1) Strengthening Local Federations. The financial relationship between community day schools and local Jewish Federations is typically thought of as a one-way flow of funds. Consider, however, that Federations must increasingly demonstrate to their donors that they are planting “the seeds for Jewish renaissance and renewal.” A Federation’s support for an independent day school signals to donors that Federation

munity day school brings together people from many different synagogue communities. More than a JCC and Federation, however, the school builds bridges around aspects of religious life—precisely those areas where differences tend to run most deep. By serving as a venue and as a catalyst for cooperation among local synagogues, independent day schools help strengthen the community as a whole.

3) Recruiting and Retaining Jewish Communal Professionals. Jewish communities now compete nationally to recruit and retain the best talent in the Jewish sector’s professional workforce. Jewish communities with strong independent day schools are able to compete more effectively to attract and keep the best young rabbis, communal service workers and educators. The presence of a day school is a key selling point to potential recruits. The absence of it is often a deal breaker. The reason is obvious: Those who choose careers in the Jewish sector often place high value on providing a rich Jewish education for their own children. The long-term health of a community’s synagogues, JCC, Federation, and agencies is directly bound up in the presence of a successful day school which can meet this demand.

4) Retaining Jewish Professional Couples. A portion of the Jewish com-

“Day schools are not only investments in the future. They are investments sustaining the health of local Jewish communities now, in the present.”

often neglect the *Shehechyanu* case that is already proving itself right now in the present.

How are Jewish day schools strengthening Jewish life not twenty years down the road but at this very moment? Like the *Shehechyanu* prayer which speaks in the first person plural, the answer is to

is committed to Jewish education. This support can become an important element in the case Federation makes when appealing for the annual gift. Moreover, the vibrancy of the day school serves as evidence of broader communal health, something which helps justify further investment in the communal system. A strong community day school returns

munal workforce in any city is likely to include a number of Jewish communal professional couples. Particularly in smaller communities, the ability to provide employment for both spouses is important for retention of either one. The jobs that day schools often provide to one half of these Jewish communal couples help synagogues, JCCs, Federations, and agencies retain the other halves in their employ.

5) Attracting Committed Lay Leaders. The American Jewish population is becoming more geographically mobile every year. Young families move first and foremost

“ The vibrancy of the day school serves as evidence of broader communal health.

for work, but often have choices about where they will move. Every Jewish community in the country should see itself as competing against every other to attract committed lay leaders. Just as a community day school is vital for attracting professionals to work in Jewish communal institutions, so too it is vital for attracting committed young Jewish lay leaders, and for the same reason.

Day schools are not only investments in the future. They are investments sustaining the health of local Jewish communities now, in the present. In a situation where Jewish communities increasingly find themselves competing against one another for mobile populations of communal professionals and lay leaders, a community either rises as one or falls as one. Such a situation demands systemic thinking. Does the community work well across institutions? Attract and retain the most talented professionals? Engage the commitment of devoted lay leaders? Exude the confidence that inspires even more participation? Communities that can answer yes to these questions will have the competitive edge that will enable them to go from strength to strength. More and more, the only communities that can hope to give such an answer are those with strong Jewish day schools.

We can still look with hope to the future that day schools promise, but we should encourage supporters to recognize that the schools are more than agents of children's education. They are indispensable elements of an integrated strategy for communal vitality and institutional well-being. They are not just building a better Jewish tomorrow, they are building a better Jewish today. ז

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Does It Fit? Unconventional Thoughts About Day School Choice

by Dr. Alex Pomson

Conventional research-based wisdom has it that when parents choose schools for their children, they weigh up four factors: (1) the academic reputation and quality of the school, (2) the school's record on discipline and safety, (3) the religion and social values to which the school is committed, and (4) its convenience—that is, how easy it is to reach from home. These are the considerations, according to scholars of school-choice, that shape parents' decisions to choose one school rather than another. Parents want a school that's safe, easy to get to, committed to values of significance, and that's going to help their child get somewhere in life.

If you're someone engaged in the recruitment of day school students, you'll notice that there's one major consideration missing from this list: the cost of tuition. If you've ever shown prospective parents around a school, you'll know that there are very few families who aren't anxious to know how much it's going to cost them if they sign up.

So, what's going on here? Is choosing a day school so different from choosing a

their children. What happened to these mostly religiously non-Orthodox parents once they chose a Jewish school is a story we tell in a book, published this spring, *Back to School: Jewish Day School in the Lives of Adult Jews*. In this context, let me share what we learned about day school choice and what might be the practical implications of these findings.

We found that the decision to choose a day school is shaped by a mix of four factors, only some of which are consistent with conventional wisdom. First, undoubtedly, parents are looking for a quality education for their children. As sophisticated consumers, they want schools to deliver an attractive educational product, although they have highly diverse ideas about what such a product should look like. Second, they're ready to consider a Jewish day school because they're concerned for their child's Jewish future. They want a day school to enable their child to make what they often call "informed choices" about his or her Jewish life when older. Third, and as a deterrent, they're concerned that their child might be disadvantaged by attending a

where they, and not only their children, fit. "Fit" is a key term in our data.

Cost, you'll note is not a determining consideration. Apparently, if all of these four factors line up, parents will some-



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how find the money, even if it means making significant life changes at home. Similarly, convenience is also not a key concern. Unless they're in a competitive day school market, day schools are rarely judged by their ease of access. If they're attractive on all other accounts, parents will find a way to get there, even if it takes a carpool from hell.

Together, these findings suggest that when parents choose an elementary school for their child they are not just interested in whether the school is on the inside track to the Ivy League. Schools assume they have to talk a language of educational excellence to parents, but, in fact, many parents are less interested in looking for excellence than for something that is good enough. That's because, perhaps counterintuitively, there are other factors that are also important to them in their child's school.

“ Literally and metaphorically, parents are looking for a school that speaks to them.

public school or any other independent school? Or is the cost of day school tuition overrated as a decisive factor in the school-choice decision?

Over the last few years, with various research associates, I explored what brought Jewish parents in America and Canada to choose Jewish day schools for

parochial school; they need to be convinced that day school will not ghettoize their child.

Fourth, and until now overlooked in research on Jewish schools, they're searching for an institution that can satisfy some of their own personal and social needs as Jewish adults; they're looking for a school

Literally and metaphorically, parents are looking for a school that speaks to them. Literally speaking to them means that few parents want schools to release them fully of the burden of educating their children; most want to be consulted as partners in their children's education. Metaphorically speaking to them means

that parents want to readily understand what a school stands for and whether they can see themselves standing with it.

Marketing a Jewish day school is not, then, just about making sure parents know where past students graduated and with what grade average. Certainly it is important for schools to achieve and demonstrate educational quality, but it is critical also for them to help parents see whether they, as parents, fit the school.

If parents are going to know whether they fit, there are a few things schools can do:

(1) They should create opportunities for prospective parents to meet current parents and not just to visit with the school's professionals. Parents want to see if members of the parent body are "their kind of folks."

(2) Schools' promotional literature

should include plenty of quotes from parents, and not just of the conventional kind where parents offer a paean to the quality education their children receive. These quotes should be about what parents do in the school and what they get out of the school. On the website of one of the schools we studied, one of the most compelling items is a quote from

“ Selling a school to parents isn't like selling a car.

a father who says, "We didn't just enroll our child in a day school, we joined a club."

(3) If parents are to decide whether an institution fits them and their child, the school must promote itself in language that goes beyond generic promises of educational excellence. If parents are prepared to select a school rather than

simply send their child to the most convenient local option, they seek clear and authentic alternatives, not cookie-cutter institutions whose mission statements are barely distinguishable from one another.

To put it crudely, selling a school to parents isn't like selling a car. It's not

just about the "specs," the quality of the product and its price. It's about helping parents—new parents especially—make a decision fraught with existential significance. This decision says as much about what parents want for their child, as about how they think of themselves as Americans and as Jews. When it comes to choosing schools, education is just the start of it.

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Using Systematic Data from College Age Alumni to Address Parental Concerns

by Dr. Leonard Saxe and Fern Chertok

Over the last decade, there has been substantial growth in day school enrollment, particularly among non-Orthodox students (see Marvin Schick, "A Census of Jewish Day Schools in the United States 2003-2004," available at www.avi-chai.org). Nevertheless, still no more than 4% of the children of non-Orthodox families attend Jewish day schools. Most of these students attend only elementary schools and, despite the availability of new "pluralistic" options for high school, Jewish high schools principally serve the most traditional students. In this article, informed by an article we have co-written with others entitled "The Impact of Day School: A Comparative Analysis of Jewish College Students" (available for download at www.brandeis.edu/cmjs or at www.peje.org), we consider the concerns that keep non-Orthodox parents from choosing a day school education for their children and suggest how systematic data from our national study of the academic, social, and Jewish trajectories of college-age day school alumni relate to these concerns.

Parents want to know whether day schools will prepare their children to succeed academically in college.

Although financial concerns are undoubtedly important, non-Orthodox parents who consider day school for their children want to know that they are not shortchanging them academically or restricting their options for higher education. In response to this concern, our research indicates that day schools provide top-notch preparation for a broad range of colleges and universities. College-age day school alumni are indistinguishable from Jewish peers with a public or private school background. Just like Jewish undergraduates who did not attend day schools, they gain entrance to a wide

range of universities—including the most select schools, and once enrolled perform just as well academically. In fact, students with day school experience demonstrate the highest levels of academic confidence. Day school alumni pursue major concentrations and seek higher degrees in similar percentages as their peers. In other words, day school alumni attain academic success in college and feel secure in their ability to master the tasks required to do so.

Parents are concerned that the lack of diversity in day schools will leave their children unable to function in a pluralistic society.

Like other undergraduates, day school alumni join student organizations and clubs, make new friends, assume campus leadership roles and become integrated into the social and extracurricular life of college. Although the most striking feature of their social networks is the density of their connections to Jewish peers, those who attended day schools show no greater likelihood of experiencing social network problems in college than their peers from public or private schools. At the same time, being a day school alum is associated with some advantages. Thus, for example, day school experience is associated with being more resistant, in particular to public school peers, to the type of heavy drinking that leads to other risky situations and behaviors. Our research indicates that day school alumni have demonstrated that they are able to move into the larger and more diverse social world of college while still avoiding the risky behaviors that often go hand in hand with an active campus

social life.

Parents want to know if their children will continue to be engaged in Jewish life once they leave day school.

Whether the criterion in involvement in formal Jewish learning, enrollment in Jewish studies courses, observance of



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holidays, programs on the Holocaust, Israel and Jewish culture, opportunities to do community service sponsored by Jewish organizations, knowledge of Israel or informal celebrations of Jewish holidays with friends, day school students stand out in their strong engagement with Judaism. Perhaps most striking is the demonstrated power of day schools to build strong Jewish identities and connections among students who come from a non-Orthodox background.

In addition, our research indicates that day schools succeed in imbuing students with Jewish values of civic and social responsibility. As compared with public and private high school peers, former

[continued on page 38]



Israel Ambassador to the United States

After a semester on a MASA program in Israel, Healey Heissler returned to her campus at Sonoma State University in Northern California to study Communications. She would like to "bridge the gap between the way the world views Israel and the real Israel".

Healey is just one of thousands of MASA participants. MASA offers over 150 programs, including a year in Israel after high school, a semester abroad during college, and post-college community service and resume building internships.

At a time when many Jewish young adults are alienated from Israel, it's encouraging to know that MASA participants like Healey return to their campuses and communities with a vibrant, enduring connection to Israel and a strong desire to serve as Israel ambassadors to the US.



Healey Heissler



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Why Jewish Day Schools?

by Rory Paul

The impact of assimilation

Some analysts believe that Judaism has remained vibrant and strong because of its ability to tolerate and embrace a wide variety of expressions. Others contend that opening the Jewish identity to a multitude of expressions has further fragmented the cohesion of the Jewish people. These views are central to the North American debate on assimilation and its evolving impact on the Jewish people over time.

Canada and the United States are both experiencing an increased concern for the ability of its Jewish communities to withstand the pressures and implications of assimilation on the Jewish people.

Their concern is reinforced by the findings in the 2003 National Jewish Population Survey which reported that only 53% of Jewish marriages involved two partners who were born Jewish and that 185,000 Americans who said they were raised Jewish indicated they practiced another religion. Although the Canadian situation is not as dramatic as the American findings (Charles Shahar, *The Jewish Community of Winnipeg*, Part VI), research indicates assimilation has had some impact on the character of the community. Why the discrepancy?

Shahar explains the more worrisome American statistic as a result of the distinction between the Canadian policy of "multiculturalism," which promotes distinct cultural expressions, and the American ideal of the "melting pot," where ethnic expressions are often absorbed into the overall cultural milieu. Another contributing factor to the differences between American and Canadian assimilation patterns may lie in the relative percentage of Jewish immigrants. In Canada, there are more immigrant Jewish communities than in the United States. In 2004, 85% of American Jewish adults were born in the

United States (Jonathon Ament, *Jewish Immigrants in the United States*), while only 60% of Canadian Jewish adults were born in Canada (Statistics Canada).

Does anything make a difference?

Every Jewish organization concerned with the fate of Canadian or American Judaism laments the current trends in assimilation. Jewish identification studies completed in the United States and Canada report that there is significant variety in the way people express their Jewishness. Measurements of identity and involvement revolve around synagogue attendance, ties to Israel, ritual observance, intermarriage levels, Jewish social and communal affiliation and Jewish education.

Many scholars and writers agree that Jewish education is both the deterrent and remedy to the declining trends in Jewish identity. Alan Dershowitz (*The Vanishing American Jew*) and Elliott Abrams (*Faith or Fear*) concur: Jewish day schools are the key to Jewish continuity. This belief is expressed in a report commissioned by the Council of Jewish Federations, which concluded that "intensive Jewish education is our most powerful vehicle for Jewish growth."

Are Jewish day schools the answer?

The most important responsibility of parents is the education of their children. Parents today face multiple challenges in this regard. They demand an education that aims for professional success, ensures mastery of the core curriculums of human culture, promotes the process of lifelong inquiry and study, develops values, and provides cultural and religious instruction, all in an environment which

is physically and emotionally safe.

In both Canada and the United States the number of Jewish children attending public school has declined significantly. Today approximately 37% of Jewish youth in both countries attend Jewish day school (Statistics Canada, The National Jewish Population Survey). While both secular independent school and Jewish day school enrollments have risen, enrollment at Jewish day schools has

risen dramatically: Jewish day schools continually prove their effectiveness.

Declarations that Jewish day schools graduate students able to compete for limited placement in universities and yeshivot as well as graduate students who emerge with a significant body of Jewish literacy are just the beginning of the list of benefits. Studies have also concluded that due to the Judaic curriculum offered by full-time day schools, graduates are more than twice as likely to marry Jewish partners, to join synagogues, to observe Jewish rituals, Shabbat and holidays, and to become involved members of their Jewish community upon reaching adulthood. A foundation of competency in Jewish text, history and philosophy translates into a preservation of Jewish identity and commitment. These findings should serve to encourage parents fearful of their children's assimilation, intermarriage and abandonment of Jewish tradition to consider day schools.

Jewish day school is a very attractive alternative for parents and students who view public school as less than ideal for



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providing a solid education. A student's time in school is important as it is a time for the integrated study of values, identity, menschlichkeit, and our people's history. Public and secular independent schools focus on academic preparation for university or other post-secondary institutions, but less on values, leader-

Given the recent trends suggested by the census statistics, the issue of day school would seem to require serious consideration on the part of community leaders. People who identify as Jews and participate through their own motivation have chosen to come to community events or participate in programs. What about those who

will maintain the Jewish nature of their communities in the future and begin to plan ahead. While statistics suggest that a significant proportion of children are enrolled in Jewish day schools, communities cannot rely on past trends. Canadian and American Jewish communities are now at a critical crossroads. There is finally recognition that Jewish continuity and survival, the fight to combat assimilation, cannot be sustained in a lifestyle devoid of Jewish education.

“ Every Jewish organization concerned with the fate of Canadian or American Judaism laments the current trends in assimilation.

ship, compassion, and identity. Secular independent and public schools are not capable of universally meeting this need.

Are Jewish day schools the answer for everyone?

Being Jewish means belonging. Jews have long relied on the commitment and participation of their fellow members to help shape the community in which they live.

have declined involvement and choose to stay at home? How can we make Judaism and Jewish life more attractive or relevant for them? Communities must continue to reach out and find ways to make Jewish day school education more accessible for the undecided parents who are now contemplating their children's future.

Community leadership will need to consider the factors and opportunities that

In the past it may have been sufficient to have minimal Jewish exposure such as synagogue membership, Jewish friends, attendance at the Jewish community center and a house in a Jewish neighborhood—all ensuring that your children would continue to value belonging, being Jewish. Today we have the research to know that children who are left without a Jewish education that confirms Jewish beliefs and practices have little chance of having Jewish descendants. Jewish communities need to change their approach to Jewish life. Jewish communities need to support Jewish day schools. ז

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“We Will Understand and We Will Do”

by Rabbi David Lyon

The first Jewish curriculum started at Mount Sinai. It began with two words, “*Na’aseh ve-nishma*” (Exodus 24:7). The Israelites said we will do and we will understand. Ever since then Jewish education has begun with the premise that Jewish learners must do first and understand second, if ever. Generations of Jewish learners who went to cheder retell their experiences with similar anecdotes. They tell about their weekday afternoons sitting on straight benches with primers filled with black Hebrew letters. The melamed (the teacher) barked orders and slapped hands to enforce the mitzvah to understand what they must do.

How far have we really come? Now, our benches are colorful chairs and our books are full of color and interesting exercises. Some books also contain opportunities to learn what the Hebrew words and prayers can mean to young learners, although time allotted for real religious discussion is very limited. Too many children on any given Sunday or mid-week Hebrew day arrive late, leave early, or miss class completely. Teachers scramble to meet their students’ needs and then tutors are hired to make up the difference just months before the Bar or Bat Mitzvah. Why send them to Hebrew school if it can all be accomplished by a specialized tutor?

The stunning commitment to the Jewish duty “to do” first has disabled us from taking important steps to reorient ourselves to the curriculum from Sinai. There is no other place in our modern world where doing comes before learning. Professional teaching requires mastery and certification; doctors take board exams and; lawyer must pass the bar exam; the best accountants are registered CPAs. Only Torah, the highest standard by which we measure all deeds, ritual and ethical, seems to require nothing more than the Sinaitic commitment

to do it, and to understand it later, if at all. Too many generations went without real understanding of the Hebrew words and rituals they uttered and performed. Today’s children demand more for themselves before they will own anything, let alone Torah. The promise at Sinai was always a vow to teach our children Torah, not simply to demand of them to do something they don’t understand.

After the promise at Sinai, the Israelites heard another commandment (Deuteronomy 6:7), “You shall teach them to your children.” The root of the word “teach” here is *sh-n-n*, which means to repeat and to sharpen. Current translations of the Torah verse include “teach them diligently” and “impress upon them,” as means of fulfilling this duty to teach the children. Before the myriad laws were written, accurate teaching depended on repetition of oral lessons, and modeling by example by educated parents or proficient teachers. In the case of parents who could not teach their own children, community schools were necessary agents of Jewish education (Bava Batra 21a). But nowhere is Jewish education described as a demanding or alienating proposition. The beginning of a child’s Jewish education has traditionally begun with honey on the top of the first page of Hebrew letters. Always associating Jewish learning with sweetness, the first year is marked by rituals and lots of picture taking. Unfortunately, when the honey is gone, so is the sweetness.

From Sinai to today, too many remnants of old-school remain to despoil what should be a natural inclination to take hold of Torah for a lifetime. “To do” properly and happily must come with proficient understanding. “*Nishma ve-na’aseh*” is not a heresy; it’s a reality. At best it is understood fluidly, constantly

changing places as learning follows doing, and doing follows learning. Practice does make perfect, but doing without knowing and the potential for lifelong and joyful Jewish learning produces incompetent, disconnected, and apathetic



Rabbi David Lyon

is Senior Rabbi at Congregation Beth Israel, Houston, Texas, and represents the CCAR on a national taskforce on the future of Reform Jewish Day Schools. He can be reached at dlyon@beth-israel.org.

Jewish adults. We want for our children the same things past generations wanted for theirs, but the means have changed and the opportunities today are much richer.

Jewish day schools are emerging as reliable providers of Jewish education because they have made understanding integral to Jewish doing. Conservative and Reform Jewish children are ripe for participation in community day schools and Reform Jewish day schools. The environment is ready for enrollment of children who come from Jewish families with various levels of current Jewish involvement.

Principally, the obstacles that have prevented children from attending supplementary schools are eliminated when they attend school where Jewish and secular education is integrated in an excellent educational setting, and where relevant courses are taught by the best secular and Jewish teachers. Where community support, financial and otherwise, comes together there is ample opportunity for our children to feel that their place in all aspects of Jewish life will not be limited by their Jewish understanding. In fact, their Jewish deeds will be enriched and enhanced by their Jewish understanding. There is no threat that Jewish under-

standing necessarily leads to Orthodoxy; rather, it leads to meaningful Jewish practice, personally chosen.

Rabbis are the principal agents of enrollment in community and Reform Jewish day schools. True, rabbis have a stake in their congregations' supplementary schools because they serve as gateways to membership and pathways to Bar/Bat Mitzvah and Confirmation. Yet rabbis have new opportunities to promote excellence in understanding so that "doing" the Bar/Bat Mitzvah and Confirmation are not exits from Judaism, but rather doors through which knowledgeable Jewish young people may continue to choose Judaism for themselves and Jewish learning for a lifetime. Statistics demonstrate that despite our best efforts in supplementary Jewish school settings, it is Jewish camps, trips to Israel, and Jewish day schools that enable young Jewish men and women to view Jewish studies in college and beyond as interesting choices they will make for themselves.

Mount Sinai still represents a decisive moment for our people. It's hard to mess with success; but, if the Mountain only causes us to tremble when we consider its implications then we will be forever frozen in the past where Jewish duty meant doing and then understanding. Wouldn't it be inspiring for our children to walk as proudly with their Hebrew and Jewish studies books as they do with their math and science books? "Nishma ve-na'aseh" means giving our Jewish children the greatest advantage in Jewish understanding so that they may enjoy the fruits of their lessons demonstrated in the works of their hands.

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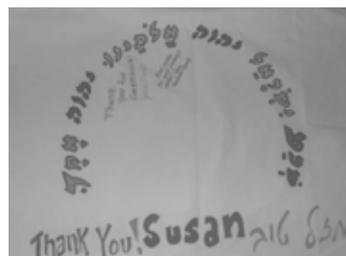
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A Parent's Perspective

by Linda Kamras

Thirty years ago when we decided to leave our New York home to settle in Sacramento, California, our families were devastated. We were leaving the Jewish Mecca and would be living with our young children in an unknown environment and uncharted Jewish territory. We would not have the benefit of an East Coast community to insure a Jewish infrastructure in which our three toddlers could flourish. It could be argued that those fears and concerns were based in reality. There was no kosher butcher, one Conservative synagogue and one Reform congregation, and the afternoon Hebrew school was the extent of Jewish education in town.

But we saw a very different set of circumstances. We recognized the opportunity to become part of an existing, growing Jewish community. This West Coast suburb was eager and ready to expand its Jewish identity by providing greater Jewish education to foster a love for and an understanding of the heritage with which we have been entrusted. The trends of assimilation and intermarriage were gaining momentum, concern for which led to support the concept of a Jewish community day school. It would not be an easy accomplishment, but avoiding the task before us was not an option. Today, our Jewish community day school, known as Shalom School, goes from 3 months of age through grade 6 with an enrollment of over 250 students. I have the benefit of hindsight to reflect on the success of my children, but more importantly the extraordinary value of day school education.

Parenting is not an exact science and has few definitive guidelines, yet it is the most profound and complex responsibility. The fact remains that we can only measure our own sense of performance and accountability by the way our children mature into young adults. Therefore, it

is essential to seek or create choices that will assist us in providing the kind of environment that will lead to desired goals. Those of us who are Jewish parents must see the education of our children in terms of harmoniously bridging the gap between two worlds and two cultures. Our children must find meaning and relevance in their Jewish heritage to guide them to become active participants in the civic and cultural life of our nation.

I am often asked what truly differentiates our day school from well established private or high achieving public schools. The answer is not so much about the specifics of curricula and after-school activities or varied sports programs. It is not that we offer a demanding dual program intended to challenge the mind and body or that we emphasize how hard work is essential for self-satisfaction and goal-oriented aspirations. The big difference is that our program teaches students the Jewish view of life and personal accomplishments. They are keenly aware that Judaism insists on meaningful action in both the religious and secular worlds; that *doing and giving* is more essential to our value system than *feeling and getting*.

Students understand that we are all born in the image of Hashem and that each of us has an intrinsic and unique value to be respected. They learn that the quality of our character is of far greater import than the quantity of our assets. They learn that behavior has consequences and that placing blame is only a way to avoid accountability. The laws of kashrut and Shabbat mitigate reckless self-indulgence and illustrate what daily personal sacrifice and commitment mean. It sanctifies one day a week when the family can come together to escape and deflect the frenetic schedules of the

past six days. Our students understand that it is not what we preach, but rather the way we use our time and resources that are the real indicators of our value system.

Within their classrooms they are taught that an accepting attitude toward differences in people and style are important



Linda Kamras, a founding parent of Shalom School, received her M.A. Ed. from New York University and is now a professional volunteer residing in Sacramento. Linda can be reached at lkamras@aol.com.

elements in the establishment of world peace and prosperity. Shalom graduates are encouraged to follow a passion and to know that the fulfillment of dreams involves the courage to fail, the perseverance to begin anew and the humility to succeed. We challenge these students to be the best ambassadors in the community by their behavior and tikkun olam projects, to be the messengers of truth about Judaism and to educate those who espouse baseless, ignorant bias.

To parents who are hesitant about day school education, I can with some degree of certainty assure you that this experience will not transform children into religious, observant zealots or insulate them from the world in which we live. Quite the contrary! It will teach a child to think, question and challenge. It will enlighten a child about this heritage that has sustained us through centuries of victimization so we will be victims no more. They will learn that Judaism is more than a religion, a people, and a land, but that it is a way of life that has standards for interaction with others and a commitment to respond to suffering and injustice in the world. And they will learn that our heritage encourages us

to forgive, not forget, so that revenge and anger do not dictate our behavior and that history does not repeat itself.

It will give a child the knowledge to make informed, well-considered choices with respect to their Judaism in the 21st century. Knowledge is power, and Jewish knowledge earns respect within the larger community. Today more than ever before, modernity has introduced a mechanization that has made life impersonal and has homogenized us to a series of numbers and icons. This creates a state of anonymity that can erode human dignity and one's sense of responsibility to a cause greater than oneself. The longer we can surround our children with nurturing human interaction, in an environment where they can ask those difficult questions, the stronger their value system and self-confidence take root.

I would like to conclude with a letter I received from my son when he was a junior at college because it so eloquently speaks to the subject of Jewish education.

Over the past semester I have been

pretty lax in participating in the Jewish community on campus. I haven't been to services in months. But tonight I decided to go to Hillel for dinner with some friends. After bentsching the Birkat Hamazon, which I instinctively knew from my years at Shalom School, it was suggested that we go see the movie Shindler's List. So we crammed into a car and drove off to Market Fair Mall on Route 1 just outside of campus much like we would any other night. This evening, however, the conversation was a bit different. We all wondered what we would feel after seeing what many critics were calling the Holocaust film. I had no idea how I would react.

Oddly enough, I left the theater that evening with a disturbing sense of fulfillment. I wasn't as upset or overly angry or disheartened as I thought I should be. In fact, I felt a bit happy. I was pleased not only because I was a member of a unique group of people which had survived Nazi Germany, but more importantly because I had been taught by example and through formal education how to be an active participant in that

group. I was happy that my father had taught me Kiddush, that my mother lit candles for Shabbat and all the chags, that my grandfather taught me how to daven and that Shalom School taught me how to read, write, and speak Hebrew. I was happy because my parents, my entire family gave me the necessary education with which to be an active Jew.

In no way did their educating me guarantee that I would participate or practice my Judaism. As I said, I haven't been to services in months. But when I did go, I was not a stranger to my own customs. I called home that night to thank my parents for using me as a guinea pig in those early years at Shalom School, for dropping me off at Camp Arazim, for taking me to all the USY events and for sending me to Israel on various programs. Had I left the theater that night not knowing how to say the Birkat, not knowing how to write my name in Hebrew, or not knowing at least where I could look to learn, I would have been disheartened, for then six million of my ancestors would have died in vain. ז



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An Education in Care and Community

The point guard for the Heschel 7th grade boys team has just stolen the ball. He heads up court as fast as he can and begins an easy layup. Inexplicably, he turns to see my son Jonah hustling down the lane and he passes him the ball. Jonah catches it and scores and the beautiful new gym at Abraham Joshua Heschel Day School reverberates with cheers and applause. Jonah has just scored his first basket of the season. My wife and I, to the complete embarrassment of our son, are cheering the loudest. We are cheering for our son and for the unselfish play of the Heschel point guard.

We are only in our second year at AJHDS, but this is a common theme of my son's class. The values and morals that they are taught in their classroom are constantly being put on display outside the classroom. My wife and I are constantly asking ourselves, "Why did it take us so long to find Heschel?"

My wife and I never had any interest in sending any of our children to Jewish day school. We had little interest in having them go to school with only Jewish children and we figured they could get their Hebrew at Temple

Judea as they prepped for becoming bar mitzvah. Our neighbor had both of their boys at Heschel and raved about it. We gave Heschel a brief thought for our older son, Zach, but he went to local prep schools and is now a freshman at Northwestern University. Why not the same path for our second son, Jonah?

Jonah's class gathered in the Beit Midrash to celebrate his bar mitzvah. Jonah reads from his Torah portion and his classmates do the aliyahs. My wife and I hold hands. As this simple and heartwarming ceremony comes to a close Rabbi Adam

looks out into this small pond of 7th graders and asks if anyone has something to say about Jonah. I shuffle a bit wondering if Jonah has been at Heschel long enough to engender any kind of peer response. Hands go up. Each child has something to say. Some are sweet, some are funny, but all are important to us. We quickly wipe away tears so we don't embarrass our son.

Michael Spound

is an actor and writer residing in the Los Angeles area with his wife Heidi Bohay and their three children Zachary, Jonah, and Gabriel.



Jonah didn't thrive in private school like his brother did. He struggled with math; the teachers suggested outside tu-

toring. This is difficult to swallow when we were already paying tuition. There were no sports or decent arts programs. The class size of fifteen that seemed so perfect at first now seemed so limiting socially. Jonah was bored and never looked forward to a school day. When we found out that he would have the same homeroom teacher for three years in a row, we knew we had to do something.

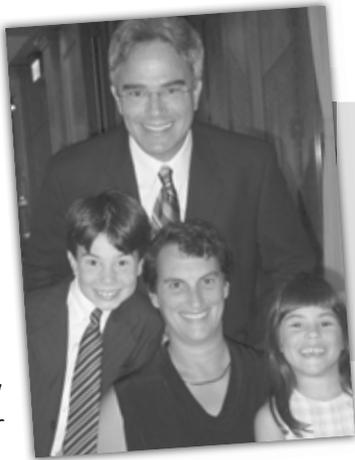
My wife and I look back on this circuitous route to AJHDS with some regret. Jonah still needs help with math, but the teacher always gives it to him with some extra time on the side or a phone call. All of the teachers, coaches, and administrators at Heschel seem to give a little bit extra. Our feeling is that they actually care about Jonah beyond the classroom. We think it is because education is their passion and not their job. Our fear of too much Hebrew and Judaic studies has melted away. When we went to Jonah's first bar mitzvah rehearsal in the sanctuary at Temple Judea, the cantor complimented Jonah on his Torah reading. My wife and I smiled. It took us a while to get to Heschel, but at least, and at last, we are there. ז

The Cases That Convinced Us

HaYidion asked parents from a number of RAVSAK schools to share their own story about how they came to choose day school education for their children. What were the different factors they weighed? What made their local day school stand out from competing alternatives? How did their own lives and stories influence the values that led to their decision? Here are their illuminating, candid responses.

Finding Community

Our family is an interfaith couple with a Jewish-identity preference, which is aligned with our local extended family support system. At the time of our school search, we were not affiliated with a congregation, but we were actively seeking a Jewish community for our young family. We strongly valued the importance of providing our children with the best education possible, both academically and socially in our local area.



Lisa and Terry Bennett

are an interfaith couple married 20 years and raising their two children in Kensington, California. Lisa is a licensed psychologist in private practice and Terry is an information technology manager for an insurance company.

We found and settled on Tehiyah Day School when our first child was in his last year of preschool and preparing for kindergarten the following fall. Although our local elementary school was one of the best in the district, the overall public school system was underperforming due to the various challenges modern public schools face today. The local elementary school administration responded coldly to our inquiries about their educational programs and what we could expect the following year. Armed with these concerns, we started our search for alternatives.

Our search included a survey of the local private school options. We were genuinely welcomed by the Tehiyah community to come see the classrooms, review the curriculum, meet the staff, and ask any questions. Lisa, the Jewish partner, felt immediately "at home" in the Tehiyah environment. Terry responded to the warmth and joyous interactions of the children. Both of us were drawn to the clear Jewish content complemented by the strong academic structure that we were looking to provide our children. We looked no further. Our fifth and second graders have now been there since each was in kindergarten.

**More day school parents
on the next page >**

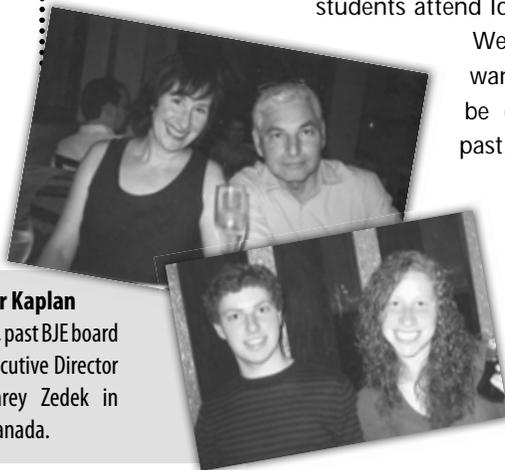
Connection with the Jewish Future

I graduated from Joseph Wolinsky Collegiate (now part of the Gray Academy), the local Jewish high school, in 1979 with fluent Hebrew and spotty French, a solid understanding of the rhythms of Jewish life, comfort in my synagogue skills, an appreciation of Jewish history and unconditional love for Israel. I knew all the Israeli folk dances, had read Hebrew literature and Tanach in the original and graduated with 50% more credits than necessary. My identity as a Winnipeg Jew was established. I enjoyed my first year of college at Hebrew University surrounded by

Jews from around the world, astonished at the connection and sense of familiarity between us.

But was a Jewish day school the right decision for my husband and me to make for our children? Local opportunities for an excellent education had increased since we were in school. The public schools now offered a Hebrew language immersion program, though it was an inadequate alternative to the rigorous training at Gray Academy. We decided that intensive French immersion was unnecessary, since English is the international language. Private schools wouldn't give them a sense of being Jewish, though many Jewish students attend local private schools.

We realized that we wanted our children to be connected to their past, and part of the future of world Jewry. We want Jewish grandchildren.



Faith Maureen Linder Kaplan

is a day school graduate, past BJE board chair, and currently Executive Director of Congregation Shaarey Zedek in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

My husband attended Joseph Wolinsky too, though he graduated from

a public high school. We were determined to provide our children with the same opportunities we had been given by our parents. They would learn Jewish history and language and culture and Torah and appreciate the contributions made by our people. We would ensure they were challenged by a dual track program and prepared for university, as we were. And for the most part, we have not wavered in our decision: Adam will become a second generation Jewish day school graduate in May, and his sister Yael will join him as an alumna in 2010.

Preparation for Life

If you had asked us ten years ago whether we would consider sending our children to a Jewish day school, which for us meant a parochial school, our answer would have been a resounding “No.” Although we are both very committed to and involved in the Jewish community, we were admittedly “academic snobs,” determined to provide our children with what we understood to be the best education possible. As newcomers to Minneapolis, we had heard that the premier schools in the Twin Cities were the private college-preparatory schools. As we began the rigorous admission process at these schools for our eldest son (then an entering kindergartner), we decided to explore other private and public school options, mostly to convince ourselves of what seemed a foregone conclusion.



So our first encounter with the Minneapolis Jewish Day School (MJDS) was based in skepticism. We had many concerns and preconceived notions—Was the quality of secular studies up to our expectations? Were the facilities adequate? Was the level of religious observance going to mesh with our own? But as soon as we walked in the door, we were impressed. The curriculum was comprehensive, striking the fine balance between secular and Judaic studies. The school’s mission and philosophy of creating students to become lifelong learners within a values-driven environment was pervasive; and the community of teachers, staff, parents, and students was warm and welcoming. After serious consideration, we decided to follow our hearts and enroll our son at MJDS, foregoing other acceptances at highly competitive and selective private schools.

Our instincts were correct: our sons have become very happy, engaged students who are nurtured and encouraged along the way. They’ve made lifelong friends and are taught by dedicated and caring teachers. When the time came to make a decision for middle school, we knew we wanted our son to remain in a smaller setting, giving him two additional years to mature and blossom as a young adult in a Jewish setting, to support him during his bar mitzvah training and encourage his participation as a Jewish adult, and to be in small classes with teachers who would provide individual attention and challenge him intellectually. No less important, middle school created the environment for

Orlee and Jeffrey Kahn

Orlee Kahn is donor relationship manager at the Minneapolis Jewish Federation and an active volunteer in the Minneapolis Jewish community. Jeffrey Kahn is the Director of the Center for Bioethics at the University of Minnesota and a member of the Board of Trustees of MJDS.

spending time with friends who shared our family values. In his eyes, those two years proved to be the best two years of his life—a rare claim for a young

teen—and set the stage for what has been a successful, seamless, and easy transition to public high school. Ours is not a unique story among his cohorts, and our son and his MJDS classmates are among the best prepared of their peers.

Due to his strong Jewish identity and self-esteem that was only strengthened during the middle school years, our son chose to attend a local public high school that had a reputation for diversity, strong academics, and opportunities for extracurricular involvement. He and his peers are clearly well prepared for what comes next for them. They are making good decisions socially; they are thriving academically; they are unafraid to ask questions and participate in class. They are maintaining old friendships while making new ones. They are indeed growing into lifelong learners and *mentschen*, cultivated and nurtured by MJDS. We feel truly blessed; may we go forward from strength to strength. ז

Torture-Free Jewish Education

In deciding where to send our children to school, we considered several factors. While there were many choices, both public and private, we ultimately chose to have them attend Hannah Senesh Community Day School. Although neither my wife nor I attended Jewish day school, the benefits of a day school environment were an important part of our decision. Clearly, providing them with the highest quality education was critical, and we believe that HSCDS

would meet that requirement. But in the final analysis, the ability to put that learning within a moral and philosophical context via the school’s Jewish educational mission carried the day. Given the complexities of growing up in the 21st Century, we felt strongly that learning how to live a good life was as important as how to read and write.

As an aside, when we were children, both my wife and I hated having to go to Hebrew school; we both found the experience shallow and uninspiring (and we didn’t learn all that much). The idea of having our own children skip this particular torture was also a motivating factor. ז

David and Aliana Spungeon

are the parents of Ella, a first grader at Hannah Senesh Community Day School in Brooklyn.

Giving a Better Jewish Foundation

Why would a woman who married a man named Christian send her children to a Jewish day school? Well, the answer is complex.



Sara Jo Grethlein, MD is Clinical Associate Professor of Medicine and Associate Dean for Graduate Medical Education at SUNY Upstate Medical University.

In part, it has to do with my muddled sense of Jewish identity, and my longing for my children to have the knowledge to make an informed choice about their religious practices. I am not certain that it is possible for children who are uninformed to find a path to their own comfortable religious identity.

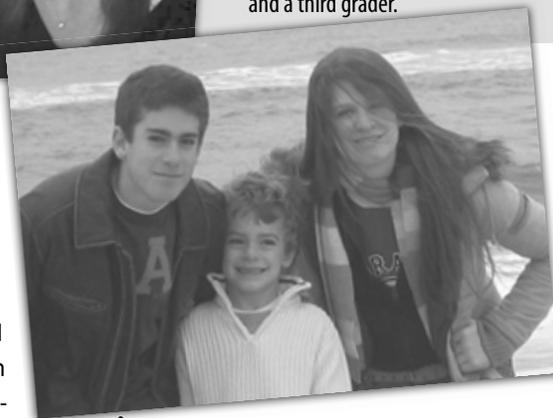
I grew up not knowing Hebrew, not understanding the prayer service and feeling awkward and gangly in shul. I knew I was Jewish, but I wasn't really sure what that meant. I had some difficult times during my medical training, and I was lucky enough to turn to a rabbi who was warm, accepting of my ignorance and "cool." In part, because of the help she gave me, I realized what a tremendous source of strength a connection with the religious community could be.

I wanted my children to have that. My husband proposed by offering to convert. I turned down the conversion but accepted the terrific man. Together we chose to have a Jewish home and raise our children in this tradition. He has been an engaged partner who has felt welcomed by the day school as a fully respected participant in his children's education. Both of our children have taken and passed the New York State Hebrew Regents, become *bnai mitzvah*, and stayed connected to their friends from the Syracuse Hebrew Day School. We are both proud supporters of the school. ז



Dr. Susan Berman

For the past 25 years Dr. Susan Berman, COO of The Help Group, has created educational, therapeutic, and residential programs for children with special needs. She is the proud mother of a college junior, a high school junior, and a third grader.



Academics with Values

With high school acceptance letters in hand from Milken Community High School, a Jewish day school, and another "prestigious" non-sectarian college prep school, we were faced with a decision. Culturally strong, but not strictly observant, we weren't sure if a Jewish day school was the right fit for our son. Would he have the opportunity to explore other interests if he was studying Hebrew and Jewish law? Would he be exposed to a heterogeneous group of friends? Would he have the benefit of a challenging curriculum given that he came from a school for the highly gifted? Would he be able to participate in competitive athletics given his love of sports? And most importantly, would we be "depriving" him of the opportunity to attend a first-rate university if he didn't attend one of the "prestigious" non-sectarian college prep schools? These were the questions that we asked and re-asked ourselves and that friends and family posed.

As we reviewed the websites for each of the schools, the taglines told their story "Into the future," "They can because they think they can," and "Excellence in Education." When we opened up Milken's website which unabashedly proclaims "Torah, Avodah, and Gemilut Hasadim" as their mission, we knew in our hearts, if not yet in our minds, that Milken was the community we wanted our son to join. With a value-driven curriculum integrated throughout each subject area, we knew that our son would learn what was most important in life.

When others assume that I am sending my eight year old, who is also an accelerated learner, to one of the prestigious non-sectarian private prep high schools in Los Angeles, I immediately correct them and let them know there is only one place we would consider...and that is the prestigious college prep school, Milken, where he will not only learn about physics and history, play on championship sports teams, take electives in art and debating, and matriculate to a top university, but most importantly be part of a community that will stir his soul. ז

The Board's Role in Making the Case

by Alisa Doctoroff

How should the board of a day school be engaged in making the case for Jewish day school? As I pondered the question, I wondered if the school board that I chair had failed on this front. Were we sufficiently focused on making the case to the community outside our doors? Going forward, we would need to focus on this challenge to a greater extent. Yet how could I add another task to the list of so many that I currently ask of the members of our board? How could I possibly ask them to do one other thing, beyond stewardship of and commitment to our mission, wrestling with the ever-increasing costs of running a school and the desire to maintain a diverse socio-economic population, crafting a policy statement on prayer, overseeing and supporting the growth of annual fundraising, investing endowment monies, planning strategically and carefully for a future that includes expansion of the student

2) developing schools that are seen as "on the move," growing and vibrant; 3) advocating for day schools. I will elaborate on each area in turn.

Excellence. The best case for Jewish day school is the existence of excellent day schools that graduate happy, productive, accomplished, and Jewishly engaged students. Schools where students are intellectually stimulated in their learning subjects from math to Torah, and where their social, emotional, and spiritual needs are met as they grow from toddlers to adolescents. Schools where parents feel that their children are growing and thriving, with their Jewish selves integrated into the whole. Schools that provide community. The board's leadership is critical to creating such successful, richly Jewish, educational environments, through its

development of new programs, or the style of fundraising events. It is the board's responsibility to ensure the highest quality professional educational and administrative leadership for the school, as well as the freedom—separation of personal interests and commu-



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nal interests is key here—and resources to do its job. Also essential is establishing and maintaining financial stability, through serious financial oversight and commitment to fundraising. Fostering the development of new leadership for the future is another important goal. Finally, board members fill an important function by acting as communicators and educators within the school community, cultivating excitement and buy in from all constituencies about the important issues that the school faces.

Growth and vitality. Beyond the effort that is required by the board to support the regular program of the school, there is the work necessary to encourage advancement, improvement, and growth. A board's ability to plan strategically for the future of the school is essential both to the school's long term health and to the perception in the broader world that it is a successful institution and worthy of support. Whether it is improvement in physical plant to support the program in areas from academic to extracurricular, providing trips to Israel, increasing endowment funds, or expanding the capacity of the school so more students can receive a Jewish day school education, the board's ability to identify and prepare

“The best case for Jewish day school is the existence of excellent day schools that graduate happy, productive, accomplished, and Jewishly engaged students.”

population and an attendant multimillion-dollar capital campaign, among other things? Stepping back, however, I realized that these very board endeavors are, in fact, at the heart of making the case. Thankfully, then, we're already doing the lion's share of the work.

Looking more carefully, it seems to me that a board's role in raising the profile, broadcasting the success, and gaining adherents for Jewish day schools falls into three categories: 1) building schools that are known for excellence;

regular activities, both inside the boardroom and in the school community at large.

I would argue that by focusing on good board governance and acting as responsible trustees, board members are promoting both school excellence and the Jewish day school agenda. This starts from the establishment of a clear mission that is reflected in the language of board discussion and that is the foundation for all policies and decisions, whether related to education, finances,

for these core challenges also provides the opportunity for board members to make the school's achievements known to those beyond the school community. Conversations about growth plans enables board members to educate individuals less familiar with the Jewish day school about its benefits, drawing attention to its programs, sharing anecdotes about its transformative power in student and family lives, and presenting data about graduates, teachers, and others.

Public advocacy. While the arena of public advocacy for day schools was the first thing that occurred to me in thinking about making the case, it is the last on my list here. This is not to say that board members should not be active in national or local networks of day schools. To the contrary, involvement in organizations such as PEJE and RAVSAK with a day school agenda—designed to raise the bar for Jewish day schools and provide important information and resources to them—is not only important for growing the day school world and attracting support to the movement, but also useful for the individual day school. Numbers can attract the attention and undertake projects (research, for example) that a lone school cannot.

The strength of the day school movement can also be advanced through the participation of board members in other Jewish communal institutions, whether Federations, synagogues, JCCs, Hillels, and other well established or developing organizations that are addressing the needs of the Jewish community. Board members who have credible voices in the community by virtue of such involvement are in the best position to spread the word about day schools to others in leadership positions, making them more familiar with their program and challenges and the accomplishments of their graduates. To the extent that the case for day school needs to be made to potential day school families, it can also be useful for board members to talk about their involvement in any setting where Jewish parents are to be found.

Good day schools provide an invaluable means for fostering a lifelong engagement with a living, breathing, meaningful Judaism in our young people, our most precious resource. The growth of Jewish day schools can only happen by bringing more parents and funders into the fold as believers. And day schools will have a much better shot at being "good" when boards do their jobs. ז



**Mazel tov to
Robin Feldman, Director
of Member Services, and
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Leveraging Funds and Passions

ׁ Dr. Idana Goldberg

In recent years Jewish newspapers have reported a series of multimillion dollar grants for Jewish day schools, including gifts from a group of anonymous donors in Boston, The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation in Baltimore, and most recently the Koschitzky Family in Toronto. These significant gifts have helped publicize Jewish day schools as a philanthropic priority, but they are but the tip of the iceberg of growing support for day schools across the Jewish community. Since 2005, MATCH: The Jewish Day School Matching Grant Initiative has generated an astounding \$42 million in new money for Jewish day school education, awarding \$12.8 million dollars to match more than 500 donors who made gifts totaling nearly \$30 million to Jewish day schools across North America. Although some day school professionals continue to lament the dearth of financial support among parents and community members, financial support has been forthcoming as Jewish education has achieved greater prominence in the national Jewish community and professionals have become more sophisticated at making the case for Jewish day school education.

What motivates a donor to support Jewish day school education? As director of matching grants at the Jewish Funders Network, I have been privileged to interact with the cohort of MATCH donors and with hundreds of other Jewish philanthropists who approach their giving

in addition, donors today increasingly view not-for-profits as vehicles for achieving their own goals. Central to establishing long-lasting relationships with philanthropists is the day school professional's ability to speak this language and help donors achieve their desired impact with their gift to the day school.

Leverage

Who doesn't want to get more value for their dollar? Donors also appreciate seeing their gift go further. The MATCH initiative offers matching funds of fifty cents to the dollar to donors making their first ever (or five-times increased) gift of \$25,000-\$100,000 to a Jewish day school. The success of the MATCH program relies on the national scale of the matching funds pool and the element of donor choice to generate money that is genuinely new. Donors understand that their gift triggers the matching funds; the philanthropic partners who provide the matching grant dollars would not be making a gift to the donor's chosen school except for the MATCH donor's gift, so their gift truly is increased by 50%. At the same time, the MATCH partners also benefit from the leverage of their million dollar contribution to the funding pool combining with the other partners to generate \$10 million more.

Even in the absence of a national program like MATCH, a day school can cre-

ate a cohort and encouraged an additional set of new donors through their own matching grant program modeled on MATCH. The four original donors offered the capital to encourage other donors to make their first ever significant gifts to the school. For an internal program like this to succeed, the first-time donors must be reassured that the matching funds are truly "new" money, above and beyond the funding partners' usual annual commitments to the school and



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entirely contingent upon the gift of the new donor, while the funding partners must be confident that their capital is inspiring the new gifts.

Leverage is most successful regarding gift amount and timing. By setting high thresholds for matching funds and creating timeframes for eligibility, successful leverage programs help convince donors to make larger gifts earlier than they might have intended. But financial leverage alone is usually not going to convince a reluctant or skeptical donor to suddenly make a five-figure gift to a day school.

Value

Among donors and philanthropy professionals there has been much debate about the relative merits of program support versus undesignated operational support. Of course, for organizations—day schools included—to flourish, there must be a healthy balance of each, and donors must feel that their gift has value. For those donors inclined to provide general operational support,

“ If there is one word that sums up today's philanthropists, it's impact.

strategically and thoughtfully. If there is one word that sums up today's philanthropists, it's impact. Donors want to see that their gifts matter, and gifts to Jewish day schools are no different. In

ate their own matching grant program to leverage new donors. After experiencing success with four new donors through MATCH 2005-6, one New York area day school maximized this original

it is crucial to be transparent about the financial workings of the institution and to be able to explain how the budget is determined and allocated and how their gift fits into the overall financial strategy for the institution. By contrast, donors who support specific programs want to feel confident that their gift is providing incremental value to the school and not simply reducing budget pressure by allowing the school to replace previously allocated funds in a fungible financial arrangement. Professionals should be prepared to demonstrate to the donor that their gift really will create an additional number of scholarships or hire a new reading specialist or allow for a new Hebrew Language curriculum—things that otherwise might not have been possible.

Engagement

Donors today, and especially younger donors, are often less content than previous generations to write a check to an organization and move on, preferring to involve themselves in the causes they support. As successful professionals, donors offer talents and expertise that many are eager to use to benefit the day school. Harness this energy in your donors and engage them in the workings of the school. Where appropriate, ask donors to join the finance or investment committee, contribute their expertise to evaluating new curricula, or use their knowledge of real estate if the school is planning an expansion or capital campaign. Involved donors are more committed donors who are more likely to keep the day school among their top philanthropic priorities.

Vision and Leadership

A common refrain I've heard recently is that there is no scarcity of money in the Jewish community but there is a scarcity of vision. While the day to day realities of running a school often seem to take precedence, day school leadership should not lose track of the importance of vision. Again and again in speaking with day school donors, I heard donors explain that they decided to make their

gift because they were inspired and they wanted to provide the financial support necessary to help the school move to the next step and achieve its vision. Day school leaders who are able to articulate an expansive vision for the future of their school and for the children they educate will likely inspire donors to be a part of that effort.

Mission Above All

All of the above approaches are depen-

“ There is no scarcity of money in the Jewish community but there is a scarcity of vision.

dent on the ability of day schools to communicate the importance of their mission to create Jewishly knowledgeable, Jewishly committed, and Jewishly engaged children and adults. Many day schools have a natural constituency of donors: current parents and alumni of the school who have experienced the day school education and do not have to be convinced of its value. When asked what they would support if they could only make one significant gift a year, MATCH participants overwhelmingly indicated that it would be to their day school. The majority of current donors to day schools have this kind of previous relationship to a day school. The challenge for professionals here is not persuading donors of the overall value, but explaining why a school needs support in addition to the tens of thousand of dollars many are paying in tuition and demonstrating how a specific gift will then add value to the school's mission.

Day schools, though, must also expand their donor base to include grandparents and reach out to local community members and family foundations who, absent a pre-existing relationships with a day school, may be reluctant to support the school. Here the recent spate of publications showing why day school matters sponsored by organizations like PEJE or The AVI CHAI Founda-

tion provide useful material to “make the case.” Schools also reach potential donors when they engage their larger communities in school activities, giving them a chance to experience the mission first-hand. One elderly MATCH donor who purchased her weekly challah from a local day school was so impressed with the school that she made a \$50,000 gift, while another donor was inspired to make \$150,000 gifts to two day schools after attending a showing of

a Jewish documentary hosted by one of the schools.

Know Your Donors

Philanthropy is about relationships. Donors support those organizations and institutions they feel good about, and day schools are no exception. The best way to make the case for day schools with potential donors is to establish relationships and get to know the donors and what is important to them. What are they looking to achieve? What is their approach to their giving? What concerns do they have? What are their passions? With answers to these questions, professionals can then develop a robust menu of giving options and approach the donor with the kind of request to which they feel confident the donor will respond. For one donor it might be an opportunity to receive matching funds, while for another it will be the opportunity to encourage new gifts by providing matching funds. A donor passionate about Israel will respond more favorably to a proposed curriculum about the Middle East, and an alumna who received tuition assistance decades earlier may be prepared to provide money for scholarships. By forming these relationships, day school professionals and donors can together accomplish their shared goal: educating the next generation of Jews.

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The Significance of Israel in Jewish Day School

by Reuven Greenvald

It almost seems fitting for a visitor to many a Jewish day school to receive El Al frequent flyer points. Israeli posters, flags, and maps cover the walls. Hebrew can be heard in hallway conversations, and in classrooms students demand to learn a Hebrew rap song or to watch the latest Israeli program on satellite TV. Israelis lead classrooms and in many communities are a significant segment of the student body.

School announcements air current events, provide information about peers in a Partnership community, and give updates from students on the annual Israel trip if it's that time of the year. If one happens into a day school on Yom Ha'atzma'ut, the spatial disorientation will be staggering and moving. Phrases about fostering "love of Israel" and "commitment to the State of Israel" abound in day school missions across the spectrum. Although there is a lot of work to be done to bring Israel education into the twenty-first century, there is no doubt that Israel is part of the DNA of Jewish day schools today.

For a small percentage of day school-seeking parents and students, the connection to Israel and the formal learning of Hebrew language is what attracts them to day school education. Family connections in Israel, prior Israel experiences on the part of the parents or the potential student, and deep awareness of Israel's effect on modern Jewish life are sometimes heard by admissions directors as primary reasons for enrollment in day schools. These folks explicitly seek an Israel-engaged and Hebrew speaking graduate when s/he emerges from the day school experience.

Most, however, do not cite Israel among the top reasons for attending day school

despite the rootedness of Israel in the educational experience. Yet when Israel is inculcated profoundly and effectively into the curriculum and culture of the school, it is reported to have positive effects on retention. Stakeholders come to view:

- Proficiency in modern Hebrew and comfort with Israeli life as a desired skill that will enhance a student's Jewish life, which will likely include an Israel experience.
- Intimate social, historical, and political knowledge of Israel as necessary preparation for a day school student's entry into the global discourse. (Studies show that day school graduates feel more secure in facing this challenging role—see *What Difference Does Day School Make?* from Brandeis's Cohen Center for Jewish Studies.)
- Day school trips to Israel, particularly 8th grade in K-8 schools and 11th or 12th grade trips in high schools, as a culminating experience that confirms, validates, and honors the investment. (Tuition-paying parents and hard-working teachers delight when returning students remark, "It now all makes sense!")

Day school leaders, responding to their mission statements and this growing awareness of their parents and students, are pursuing curricular and programmatic improvements that will strengthen these outcomes.

Hebrew language curriculum is being enhanced through new programs and training. It is now easier than ever before to bring Israel into the classroom through

up-to-the-minute contact with living Hebrew. Israel is alive in today's Hebrew classes and it seems that even the accents are improving.

Leadership forums are developing a critical understanding of Israel engagement for today's Jewish world. As young Jews



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overall are seeing Israel as less and less significant to their lives (Steven M. Cohen & Ari Y. Kelman, *Beyond Distancing: Young Adult American Jews and Their Alienation from Israel*), day schools are in the strongest position to counter this trend. From day schools, especially community day schools which provide an integrated Jewish experience, there will emerge young Jews who can engage in a nuanced conversation about the dynamic Jewish world here and in Israel and who will be invested in bringing about a vibrant Jewish future.

Trips to Israel are becoming essential components of the day school curriculum due to their power to provide transformative experiences. Call any school with an Israel trip and you will hear these moving testimonies. In the past, the transformative was often centered on contact with the mythic and historical Israel. Today's educators are deeply aware that the transformative must also be extended to engagement with the living Israel. People-to-people connections in the formation of peer relationships are creating lasting bonds that are carrying

[continued on page 38]

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Making the Case for Day School Education in the Reform Movement

by Rabbi Joshua Elkin, Ed.D. and Suzanne Kling

In terms of synagogue affiliation, the Reform movement is the bright demographic star in a universe that may be becoming disturbingly dark and cloudy. Yet for a number of reasons, even with the increasing numbers of North American Jews who identify as Reform, only a very small percentage are either considering day school education for their children or working to support the growth of Reform day schools. In communities where there is no Reform day school, relatively few Reform families find their way to a community school. Many of the reasons are familiar: traditional embrace of the “democratizing spirit” of public school education, concern about weakening synagogue-based education for children (and the financial stability a religious school can provide for the congregation), misconceptions about the “cloistered” nature of day schools, and more of the objections we all know too well.

However, when one looks more closely over the achievements of the past thirty years, and especially in light of the leading role of PARDeS (the Progressive Association for Reform Day Schools) in de-

veloping a comprehensive strategic plan in the works for day schools in the Reform movement, the outlook is promising. Day school advocates are finding themselves more and more aligned with some of the leadership of the Reform movement, and more Reform families are beginning to consider Reform and/or community day school options.

brew Congregations, today known as the Union for Reform Judaism, spoke at the founding meeting of the Council of Reform Jewish Day Schools (the precursor to PARDeS). He called those gathered the “avant-garde of Jewish life” and made a bold statement: “Part-time Jewish education simply does not suffice for the need. It will not create that cadre of Jewishly informed and motivated young leaders we require to remain a vital, vibrant movement within Judaism.” Schindler went on to delineate Reform day school education as consistent with the hallmarks of Reform Judaism: full participation of women in religious life, openness to intermarried families, social activism, and Judaism as a living faith. He called for integrated curricula, with Jewish history “a thread in the study of world history,” and he advocated for the creation of new educational materials to meet the needs of educators in Reform schools. While today these ideas seem familiar and not especially innovative, at that time these comments from

the head of the Reform movement were a clarion call in the face of the accepted wisdom that day school education was simply not for Reform Jews.



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text of other late twentieth century evolutions in the movement, such as changes in ritual and observance: “The emergence of a day school movement and a Reform day school association must be seen as the most unexpected and the most dramatic change of all.” Those who created and supported Reform day schools “withstood hostility” and “challenged conventional wisdom,” said Yoffie. Yoffie’s comments focused particularly on the role day schools can play—much as Reform Jewish camps had at that time—in providing the movement with a cadre of educated leaders, a critical priority. “The only real threat Reform Judaism faces is a shortage of leaders,” Yoffie said.

Rabbi David Ellenson, President of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, and Dr. Michael Zeldin, Director of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education at HUC-JIR, went public with their advocacy of day school education for Reform families on the pages of *The Jewish Week* in 2004: “Reform day school edu-

“ More Reform families are beginning to consider...day school options.

veloping a comprehensive strategic plan in the works for day schools in the Reform movement, the outlook is promising. Day school advocates are finding themselves more and more aligned with some of the leadership of the Reform movement, and more Reform families are beginning to consider Reform and/or community day school options.

In 1988, Rabbi Alexander Schindler, then president of the Union of American He-

the head of the Reform movement were a clarion call in the face of the accepted wisdom that day school education was simply not for Reform Jews.

Fourteen years later, with the number of Reform day schools growing, Schindler’s successor Rabbi Eric Yoffie, spoke for the first time to a gathering of PARDeS leaders. Offering numerous concrete suggestions for improving Reform day school education (based in part on his perspec-

A Graduate's Perspective: Jewish Identity, Ethics, and a Social Network of Steel

by Karra Greenberg

When thinking about making the case for Jewish day school education, I recall an article I read on the exact subject in a small day school newsletter. The answer, in my opinion, did not make the case for a Jewish day school education but completely undermined it. The article stated that Jewish day schools were the optimal choice for Jewish children because the overall education, and in particular the secular education, tends to be better in Jewish day schools than other schools. The fact that the school provides Jewish education and Jewish connections is merely an added benefit.

It is in light of this erroneous—even harmful—statement, I would like to offer the first crucial piece of advice: Do not compromise what the true goals and values of your Jewish day school are. What becomes compromised for the sake of appealing to non-enthusiastic prospective parents eventually becomes compromised in the school halls themselves. Compromising the values of a school for increased enrollment only hurts the school itself. Know what your institution stands for, and know why you want to make the case for your *Jewish* day school.

The truth of the matter is that *only* the Jewish components of a Jewish day school make it different than any other small private school. Most private schools offer small classes with greater teacher attention and superior education. The Jewish benefits of day school education not only make our schools stand out—they are also far wider and more valuable than is commonly acknowledged.

In my view, there are four direct benefits of day school education for children.

Jewish day schools instill Jewish identity and thus stability for individuals in an increasingly challenging world. In an age where globalization, capitalism, and multiculturalism are reaching new heights, people are facing ever increasing challenges about how to lead their lives and what sacrifices are worth making. People are better equipped to face these challenges when they are strongly grounded in their beliefs and values. Day school children are rooted in the ancient wisdom of Judaism, a wisdom that has thrived with profound thinkers, rich philosophical perspectives on life, strong families and religious leaders, and an ethical sounding board for the rest of the world. It is likewise a wisdom that has survived morally corrupt societies, persecution, and other hazards for thousands of years.

The best gift that a child can receive is knowing who he or she is, what he or she values; this informs where he or she will go and what he or she will do. There is plenty of time in one's life to venture into what he or she does not know, to explore the new and the different. But not having a sound, stable foundation for one's identity leads to insecurity, spiritual searching, and sometimes wandering. Do not worry what exactly the nature of a day school graduate's Jewish identity will become, just focus on the fact that the identity will be a Jewish one and a strong one.

Jewish day schools build a strong Jewish social network that proves an enormous lifelong asset. The benefit of being a member of a particular religious or cultural group is that bonds take root and develop purely because one is a member. By maximizing one's involve-

ment with a given group, a person's networks grow exponentially. The friendships that develop from being on the same playground each day or from countless school trips and Purim shpiels lay the foundation for deep, lifelong relationships. There is a common denominator and "knowing someone when..." that always brings peo-



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ple together. High school, college, and later adult friends come and go as time and circumstance dictate, but my day school friends and others I know still set each other up with potential spouses, dance at each other's weddings, call each other to watch kids, send condolences, and come through in multiple other ways through thick and thin.

Similarly, the more experiences one has forming friendships in a Jewish day school, the more inclined and confident one is to enter new Jewish circles: Jewish high school youth groups (which significantly impact one's future Jewish college networks and eventual professional networks), synagogue sets when one has just moved to town, Jewish social networks to date and make friends. Coming to New York City knowing just two people, I had an instant and active social network within two weeks because, in a sense, I was "hard-wired" to seek out the Jewish social and religious resources in this community. It is the same story for all my other Jewish day school friends upon their moving to London, or Paris, or Jerusalem. And sadly, not the same for every non-day school grad I happen to know. (Maybe there is just

something in us that desires to remake those great friendships from elementary school?)

Going to Jewish day school simply makes you Jewishly, socially smart and “tapped in.” As I get older in life, I now see friends’ friends’ spouses’ friends helping each other to get competitive jobs, get a break on the mortgage, even find good vacation deals. The point is, any social network one devel-

to Judaism fall into a different category?

Children with Jewish skills utilize and develop these skills based on multiple other factors in their lives. For better or for worse, a Jewish day school education alone cannot determine how religious a graduate may become. Jewish day schools provide Jewish experiences and skills. Concerned, less observant families must trust that children will continue to develop

time their education ends, but have many more layers of ethical and moral education to put into practice for the benefit of all.

Additionally, there is at least one major benefit of Jewish day school education for parents.

Enlarged social circles. Parents of children in any school find that they meet other children’s parents through activities such as chaperoning school trips, attending school plays, and participating on the fundraising committee. What is so unique about the parents of day school attendees, however, is that their social opportunities do not end at the school gates. Children who play together at school will have a Chanukah party at someone’s house and light the chanukiah together, share Shabbat meals together, eat and sleep over in their friend’s sukkah on Erev Sukkot, and attend each other’s Bar and Bat Mitzvahs.

Shabbat and Jewish holidays bring families and friends together. Parents find themselves being invited and hosting other parents for meals and activities that would almost never happen in a secular private school. Parents also find themselves forging friendships with adults that they would not have met by only going to synagogue or the JCC. To this day, a large portion of my parents’ close-to-retirement social life involves the simchas of my brother’s friends’ families and my friends’ families from day school; our friends’ parents became our parents’ friends because of our Jewish day school attendance.

In sum, long-term enrollment at a Jewish day school significantly strengthens a critical thread in a person’s tapestry of Jewish identity. A day school’s unparalleled ability to provide Jewish ethical values, social networking, and religious knowledge and skills for attendees creates the framework in which an individual can know and understand himself as a Jew, live and understand the philosophical and religious layers of Judaism, and be a dynamic member of the Jewish people, recognizing him- or herself as a unique entity and a critical part of a divine whole. ז

“ Do not compromise what the true values of your Jewish day school are.

ops as a strongly integrated Jew translates into a support system that extends into one’s professional, economic, and even biological life. (Yes, many important doctor referrals come out of this as well!)

Jewish day schools provide the tools to live and grow Jewishly. One way to view the Jewish day school experience is as a technical or trade school for children to learn Jewish practice skills and bring them into adulthood. Ideally, day school graduates have the ability to read and often speak modern Hebrew, the experience of learning Jewish sources, the knowledge of Jewish prayers, and a comfort with the Jewish holidays and customs. Day school alumni have the ability to walk into a synagogue anywhere in the world and participate.

Most importantly, they are equipped to keep learning and growing. The foundation of being familiar with Judaism and having the tools to navigate the liturgy, the sources, and the language empower day school attendees to take their exploration of Judaism as deep as they would like. Many less religious parents have the concern that their children will have more knowledge than they, or become more observant than they. The truth is, parents do not feel this way about sending their children to a better college than they had the opportunity to attend, or introducing them to new experiences around the world or on a liberal college campus. Why should stronger education and greater exposure

as members of their respective families and will not become unrecognizable entities because their Hebrew skills are sharper or because they want to light Shabbat candles. Day school children explore and grow in their knowledge of Judaism at a younger age, an age at which their parents can still be a critical part of their healthy development.

Day school children learn Jewish ethical principles to make the world a better, Jewish place. It should be expected, especially of children in small, private schools, that they have a strong ethical code regarding cheating, lying, and fairness. However, it cannot be denied that additional layers of sensitivity and ethical consciousness are implanted in the Jewish day school education. They include the specifically Jewish values of visiting the sick and the old, providing for the needy, the prohibition of gossiping / slandering or even telling the truth if it hurts someone’s feeling, responsibility towards animals and nature, inclusion of less popular students in all activities lest they feel hurt or left out—the list goes on and on.

A strong day school also succeeds in instilling the Jewish value of respect and deference to elders, parents, and teachers. These heightened sensitivities are all basic Jewish values that may not be addressed in other educational settings. Jewish day school graduates not only have what we hope is standard ethical conduct by the

Reasons Parents Say No to Jewish Day School and What You Can Do About It

by Jeffrey Lasday

Despite the significant growth in Jewish day schools over the past twenty years, most Jewish children today still do not receive a Jewish day school education. Despite our best efforts, the far majority of parents still don't buy the case for Jewish day school. To tell the truth, there are many reasons why parents don't send their children to day school. Some of these reasons are based upon very valid parental concerns. Other reasons stem from a basic lack of knowledge.

When speaking to parents about these concerns, it is important to understand that each concern is based upon a value proposition. What will the child or family gain versus what may be lost? Parent's concerns will focus upon what might be lost. It is our job to focus upon what will be gained. When making the case for Jewish day schools to parents it is important for us to be able to understand and validate real concerns, acknowledge

the tuition for their first child, additional tuition for siblings becomes overwhelming. The value of Jewish education may be there, but not at the cost of what the family would have to give up in the rest of their lives. In some cases, we can overcome this challenge with tuition subventions and scholarships. In many cases, the cost alone prevents families from walking in our doors.

Fewer social opportunities

Most Jewish day schools have small student populations with many schools only providing one class per grade. Fewer children does translate into fewer social opportunities.

Fewer electives class choices

Small class size and limited resources means fewer elective classes in the languages, arts, and sciences.

Limited extracurricular activities

With the limited resources of a Jewish day school, it is tough to compete with larger and greater resourced public schools. Smaller student bodies can't sustain a large variety of extracurricular activities. Generally day schools can't provide the same variety of competitive sports teams, music, drama, and clubs as a public school.

Too Jewish

Today, Jewish families come in all shapes and sizes, representing mixed faiths, cultures, races, and sexual orientations.

Jewish identity is moving further and further away from being a primary identity



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tity to an identity equal with and complementary to other identities. The desire to "do Jewish" isn't necessarily only with other Jews. It can be doing Jewish things with friends and family who aren't Jewish. In addition, some parents express the concern that they want their children to be exposed to all types of religions, ethnicities, cultures, and races, and that the Jewish day school is too segregated, too monolithic. It's too Jewish. These parents feel that Jewish day school won't teach their children how to function in the "real world."

Too intimidating

A corollary of too Jewish, some parents find Jewish day school to be intimidating. These parents are concerned that their children will surpass the parents in their Jewish knowledge or feel threatened that the school through student and parent bodies will pressure the parents to change their Jewish beliefs and family practices. These parents are concerned that the school will want to make their family "more Jewish."

Dual curriculum is too demanding for their child

Not all children are capable of succeeding in a dual curriculum school setting. Unless we are able to provide for the special needs of certain children, then the Jewish day school may not be the best place for them to learn. How committed is your school to

“Despite our best efforts, the far majority of parents still don't buy the case for Jewish day school.”

when day school just might not be the right choice, provide information when information is lacking, and most importantly, to present passionately our own beliefs, our own case for why Jewish day school is the right choice.

Below is a list of reasons and perceptions why parents don't send their children to Jewish day schools.

High tuition cost

Cost alone is a significant reason why parents don't choose day school. For many families, even if they could afford

meeting the wide spectrum of all students' needs? Where do you draw the line?

Belief in public school/public education

Some parents place a firm belief in the basic principle of public education. For these parents, public education is a core pillar of American society and it is our responsibility as good citizens to support this pillar of democracy.

Other reasons parents may not choose Jewish day school have to do with a basic lack of information or inaccurate information.

Will limit college opportunities

Unfortunately, even when their children are very young, parents are concerned about them making it into the best of colleges and universities. Parents may feel that a Jewish day school will limit their children's collegiate prospects. It is important to present these parents with the data that show just how well Jewish day school graduates do with college acceptances.

Day school is not even on the radar

I believe that the number one reason Jewish day school isn't a choice for many parents is that they simply have never thought about it. As Mary Lou Allen, Director of CAJE's Early Childhood Department, says, "It is not so much that parents say no, it's that it just doesn't come up on their radar screen as an option. Parents do not put their child's 'JQ' on the same level

Which of these reasons do you believe to be valid? Which are invalid?

Some of the concerns raised above by non-day school people are expressed by day school parents as well. Tuition is high. There may be fewer social opportunities. There may be fewer electives and extra-curricular activities. A dual curriculum is demanding. However, day school parents

“ A corollary of too Jewish, some parents find Jewish day school to be intimidating.

beam with pride when their children surpass them in Hebrew and Jewish knowledge. Most day school parents have decided that their children's JQ is as important as their IQ. For these parents, despite the above concerns, the value gained from Jewish day school far outweighs any loss.

Why say yes to Jewish day school? On the PEJE web site is a document called "Why Jewish Day School? Making the Case Using Propositions to Suit Specific Rationales" that outlines reasons why parents support Jewish day schools. Reasons listed include:

- Though small in size, Jewish day schools are big on community. Being part of a Jewish day school means being part of an extended caring family

yes; however, it is through exposure to both a general studies and Judaic program that young minds are challenged, stretched, and prepared for college studies and life beyond.

- Day schools provide an ongoing living laboratory where Jewish values are taught and students become ethical moral individuals.

- Day schools foster Jewish leadership skills within their students.

- Day schools inculcate deep Jewish literacy.

Making the decision to say yes to Jewish day school touches people's core values. Family values, Jewish identity, social concerns, peer pressures, the individual child's social and intellectual aptitudes, family dynamics, finances, personal beliefs and philosophies all are involved in the decision-making recipe. In helping parents wrestle with this decision, our job is to:

- Ensure that potential families can learn about Jewish day school through high quality and readily available marketing efforts so that families are at least aware that there is a choice to be made.

- Carefully listen to and validate potential parental concerns.

- Provide accurate and up-to-date information that corrects misconceptions.

- Assist parents to sort through conflicting values.

- Make our own passionate case for the high value of a Jewish day school education. Why do you believe that a Jewish day school education is in the best interest of their child?

“ Not all children are capable of succeeding in a dual curriculum school setting.

of importance as their 'IQ.'" What can we do to better market the Jewish day school story and showcase its accomplishments?

In reviewing the above reasons and perceptions, which have you heard before from perspective parents? Which of these reasons hold true for your school? Which of these reasons are misperceptions?

made up of both children and parents. What is lost in social masses is made up by depth of relationships.

- Small means intimate classrooms where teachers can provide greater individualized instruction.

- A dual curriculum is challenging,

RAVSAK Roundup: A Shabbaton to Remember

by Dr. Elliott Rabin

What can motivate sixteen day school heads and administrators to spend four days together in a hotel in Houston, in advance of the three-day RAVSAK conference? What can pry them away from their beloved schools and students in the middle of the school year, allowing phone calls and emails to pile up like mounds of fresh-plowed snow while delegating responsibility for putting out fires to trusted colleagues? Answer: Project SuLaM!

The hugs and warm greetings between arriving participants afforded ample proof that the intensive two-week learning session last summer had forged close bonds of affection and camaraderie. Above and beyond their hectic and demanding jobs, their dedication to SuLaM's regimen of learning and action has given them a strong sense of common purpose. During the fall they studied a comprehensive curriculum on trends in modern Jewish history, entitled "Pluralism and Denominationalism." They each devised an Individual Action Plan, requiring them to pursue their own program of study and specific initiatives for strengthening the Jewish character of their schools. At monthly conference calls with their mentors, participants delivered *divrei Torah* and shared the remarkable transformations that SuLaM has propelled them to achieve at their schools.

This Shabbaton was simultaneously intimate and rigorous. The focus of the learn-

ing was *kedushah*, Judaism's approach to the sacred; there were units on sacred time, sacred space, the sacredness of the human being, and even the sacredness of music as we studied songs of Shabbat. Comfortable among themselves, confident in their ability to engage Jewish texts and deeply respectful of their mentors as master teachers, participants opened themselves up deeply to the words of tradition, allowing those sacred insights to speak to them at different levels. Some had prepared remarkably thoughtful reflections upon the Torah portion that inspired the group with their wisdom and humor. The impact of SuLaM emerged through personal testimony as well as the eager anticipation for the two-week session this coming summer.

Benefits from SuLaM were evident at the conference itself. SuLaM participants—or as they call themselves, SuLaMites—took leadership roles in saying blessings before and after meals. The SuLaM mentors took turns guiding attendees of the Learner's Minyan, including people of all levels of background and observance. Dr. Deborah Starr, a current SuLaMite, did a magnificent job of weaving the meaning of Martin Luther King Jr.'s life and legacy with profound insights from the Torah and prophets in her *dvar Torah*. It was abundantly clear that SuLaM has the potential not only to transform lives and to reinvig-

orate schools, it also makes a substantial contribution to the entire community of RAVSAK.

The SuLaM experience culminated Monday evening in a Tu B'Shevat seder that



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brought together members of cohort one and cohort two for the first time. They demonstrated the kind of immediate familiarity found, say, at a birthright Israel reunion, of people who have shared the same life-altering process. In typical Jewish fashion, enlightenment came through the stomach: SuLaMites partook of the fruits and grains of Israel while tasting some of the mystical perceptions from the kabbalistic circle of 16th century Tzfat. They were joined by Rabbi Dr. Michael Berger, the program officer from AVI CHAI, who flew from Atlanta specially for the occasion.

Thanks to AVI CHAI, the program's funder, SuLaM has already exerted a profound influence on so many RAVSAK schools. May the program and its participants continue to grow *me-chayil el-chayil*—from strength to strength!

Ya'ar RAVSAK: 6000 Trees for Israel's 60th

RAVSAK is proud to partner with Jewish National Fund by planting the RAVSAK Forest in celebration of Israel's 60th Anniversary. The RAVSAK Forest will be planted in the Negev and will expand the Lahav and Yatir forests.

Help your school plant one tree in honor

of each of Israel's birthdays by donating to the RAVSAK Forest today. Each school that plants 60 trees or more will receive a beautiful, framed certificate of recognition designed especially for the RAVSAK Forest.

Your small contribution can have enor-

mous global impact. RAVSAK is taking the lead in greening the Negev by planting trees in the Lahav and Yatir Forests in the Negev.

Please contact Elliott Rabin, Director of Educational Programs, at erabin@ravsak.org.

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Jewish Genetic Disease Consortium

www.jewishgeneticdiseases.org

A carrier screening day for Jewish genetic diseases will take place on April 13 at the Mid-Westchester JCC in Scarsdale, NY. Please check the programs and events calendar section of the Jewish Genetic Disease Consortium's website for registration and details.

National Gaucher Foundation

www.gaucherdisease.org

The National Gaucher Foundation (NGF) was established in 1984 as a non-profit, tax exempt organization dedicated to supporting and promoting research towards the cause, treatments and a cure for Gaucher Disease. Our mission has expanded to promote education and awareness, fund financial programs vital to the Gaucher community and to meet the ever-increasing needs of individuals with Gaucher disease and their families.

Oranim Educational Initiatives

www.jewishadventures.com

Oranim is deeply involved in a project to bring Jewish Educators to Israel on a free program, especially those who have not been to Israel before.

PEJE/Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education

www.peje.org

Over 1200 day school and community leaders attended the PEJE Assembly for Jewish Day School Education in Boston this Spring. As they became "Linked for Learning," participants accessed expertise, networked with colleagues, and together learned strategies for their schools to become "Positioned for Growth." PEJE thanks all those who attended the Assembly along with a team from their school, and expresses special appreciation to the many school leaders and experts who shared their experiences as presenters in sessions.

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www.yadvashem.org.il

The Summer Seminar for Jewish Educators will be July 28 -August 14, 2008. The seminars is designed to give teachers and academics an intense learning experience focusing first and foremost on the history of the Shoah, while including a wide range of lectures and activities focusing upon a range of topics in the areas of art, theology, literature, antisemitism, and Holocaust denial.

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www.youngjudea.org

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The Significance of Israel in Jewish Day School

[continued from page 26]

Americans and Israelis through college, the army and into adulthood. Meetings with Israeli social, political, and spiritual change agents of all different types introduce students to Israel's challenges and to the persistence of the vision upon which Israel was founded. Through these *mifgashim* (encounters), Americans and Israelis will come to know each other and recognize that the Jewish future is jointly within their hands. Of course, this cooperative spirit is even greater when Israeli

students learn about and appreciate the vibrancy of North American Jewish life through the growing number of successful twinning programs.

The "Jewish" in Jewish day school education cannot exist without Israel; as Arnold Eisen and Michael Rosenak write in "Teaching Israel: Basic Issues and Philosophical Guidelines" (*Israel in Our Lives*):

There is a mystery about Jewish life. At the center of it is the living people of

Israel and its G-d, and the gifts and demands called Torah. The Land of Israel is also somewhere near the center of the mystery, and the mystery cannot be truly understood without being "on the inside" of what the state of Israel is about. For those who learn about it and experience it, the mystery is thickly felt, like its summer sun pouring out of a cloudless blue sky. But as they become familiar with the land, knowing its people, its problems and hopes, they come to realize that this mystery is not a fairy tale. ז

Using Systematic Data from College Age Alumni to Address Parental Concerns

[continued from page 10]

day school students express a stronger sense of responsibility towards addressing the needs of the larger society and a greater desire to influence social values, help those in need, volunteer their time, and find careers that allow them to be of service to the larger community.

Day schools clearly have much to recommend them to non-Orthodox parents. Our research on the near-term impacts of day school education provides clear evidence that day schools are successful in launching all students, including those from non-Orthodox backgrounds, into trajectories of secular academic success

and Jewish communal engagement. But information alone may not be enough to bring non-Orthodox parents to the "tipping point" of selecting a day school education for their children. The question becomes how best to reach this audience, and how best to "market" to them a new and unfamiliar "product."

Describing the dissemination of new trends or ideas through social networks, Malcolm Gladwell (in his book *The Tipping Point*) suggests that "sprinkled among every walk of life...are a handful of people with a truly extraordinary knack of making friends and acquaintances...the Connectors." These individu-

als are critical to the pollination of new ideas spreading them beyond just a few early adopters to the broader and more risk adverse members of their social network.

For most non-Orthodox parents, day schools are, perhaps, unfamiliar settings. They may not know any parents from similar Jewish backgrounds and affiliations who have made this choice for the education of their children. What they may need are "connectors," parents like them who can speak to their concerns while at the same time putting a very personal and recognizable face on the day school choice. ז



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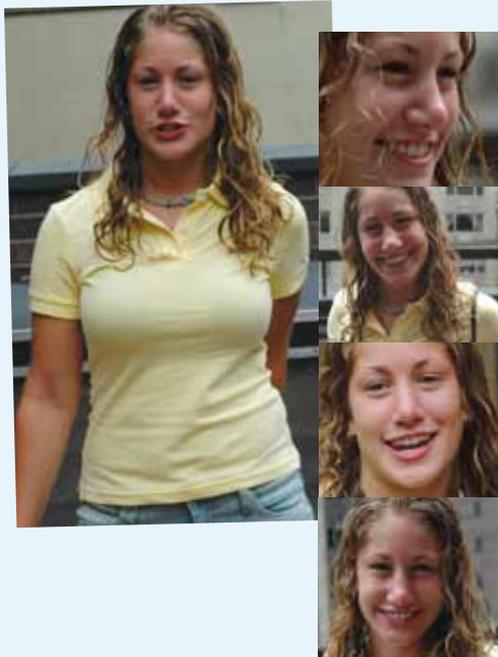
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"Being in Israel and seeing it hits you in such an incredible way."

—Ari Stern



"I think about the places I saw and the Israelis I met and how inspiring they were. I was in the most beautiful place on earth. My experience has given me the drive to make a difference in the world."

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