

Challenges and Opportunities on the Jewish Day School Landscape

A Thought and Action Paper
for Jewish Federations

Prepared by Rosov Consulting
for the Jewish Education and
Engagement Office of The Jewish
Federations of North America



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Introduction..... 2

The Context 4

The Issues 6

Financial Sustainability 8

Student Recruitment..... 11

Leadership Retention 14

Educational Quality 17

Making the Case..... 20

Action Steps.....22

A Role for Schools28

Appendix A30

Focus Group and Interview Participants

Appendix B32

Literature Review



This report was commissioned by The Jewish Federations of North America in partnership with Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools. It was prepared by Alex Pomson, Ph.D., and Avigail Muller Waknine, M.A., of Rosov Consulting.

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Jewish day schools have been part of the landscape of North American Jewry for more than a hundred years. In the wake of the 1990 National Jewish Population Study and the subsequent Jewish continuity movement, they saw rapid expansion and attracted unprecedented philanthropic support. Almost 10 years on from the great recession of 2008, and a year after the launch of Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools, the first ever network serving Reform, Community, Conservative and Orthodox day schools, what does the day school landscape look like? In what ways might local Federations, central agencies and JFNA contribute to the well-being of this field?

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This report presents a picture of the most prominent features of the day school landscape. It draws on data from 13 interviews and one focus group with informants identified as being deeply familiar with different aspects of day school activity.¹ It is also based on extensive review of writings (peer-reviewed papers, newspaper and magazine articles, blogs) published since 2010 about the day school field.²

¹ A list of the interviews is provided in Appendix A.

² A selection of relevant readings is provided in Appendix B.

This report does not presume to exhaustively document every important aspect of day school education. It draws attention instead to issues perceived to be of the greatest consequence; the issues that repeatedly surfaced in interviews as possessing most urgency and moment for day school stakeholders, particularly as related to the capacity and overall health of the field. The report takes up these issues with the goal of identifying how the Federation movement can contribute to the ongoing vitality of these institutions, nationally and in local communities.



The best of times and the worst of times

Jewish day schools are run more professionally today than they have ever been: They're more financially efficient; they're introducing new learning technologies at a faster pace; they're more alert to the social and emotional needs of their students; they're much more connected to sources of professional development, and in some regions they're fully competitive with other independent schools. **And yet a great many, even when well run, are finding it harder than ever to sustain their numbers and stay in business.** It is truly the best of times and the worst. While the number of children attending day schools continues to rise, this increase is almost entirely due to the growth of the Haredi community. The number of liberal day schools and the number of children attending those schools has been in decline since 2003-04. Enrollment trends in Modern Orthodox schools vary widely by region.³

The day school field is far from uniform. Geography, denomination, and community-size all make a difference to the sociological microclimate in which schools operate. And yet, all schools are whiplashed by socio-cultural forces that course through the Jewish community and through society as a whole. Among the non-Orthodox, delayed family formation, intermarriage, and declining birthrates have resulted in a shallower pool from which to recruit. The non-Orthodox marketplace includes fewer and fewer families who intuitively perceive the value of what day schools have to offer. Among the ultra-Orthodox there has been an expansion in family numbers that is not financially sustainable. Across the Orthodox sector, there are more and more families who simply cannot afford to keep all of their children in schools even when they want to.

In all of these respects, **day schools are a barometer of the general health of Jewish communities in North America.** Their challenges are the challenges of the broader community. Enrollment is down in legacy-institutions like synagogues and JCCs, not just in day schools. Particularism is a hard sell

³ Schick, M. (2014). *A census of Jewish day schools in the United States: 2013-2014*. New York: AVI CHAI Foundation.

in a society where ethnic pride is increasingly condemned as tribalism or even racism. And in an economy where there has been a polarization in wealth, and there is uncertainty about the financial future, the high cost of Jewish life is squeezing those who can pay full fee for Jewish services, including all-day Jewish day school.

Overlaying these parochial challenges, day schools, like other independent schools, have learned that “helicopter parents” are no longer the exception. Parents are more anxious than ever about college acceptance for their children, even in the elementary grades. Their anxieties make schools a more fraught environment for teachers, principals and students. And like their independent school competitors, day schools must keep raising their fees if they are to offer quality staff competitive salaries. At the same time, with every rise in tuition to cover such costs, schools prompt middle-income families to question whether they can afford to keep their children in the system. Like all independent schools, day schools are trapped between the competing pressures of affordability and quality.



THE ISSUES

- ① **FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**
- ② **STUDENT RECRUITMENT**
- ③ **LEADERSHIP RETENTION**
- ④ **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY**
- ⑤ **MAKING THE CASE**



1

FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The most pressing issue for the great majority of day schools is how to make ends meet. In 2001, it was estimated that Conservative and Reform day schools covered 90% of their operating budgets with tuition, Community day schools covered 68% of theirs, and Orthodox schools covered somewhere between 33% and 66%.⁴ The situation is more challenging today given a 50% increase, since 2008, in the number of day school students receiving financial aid.⁵

Raising fees each year, if only to keep up with inflation, schools are becoming a less affordable proposition, with no simple measures for solving “the affordability problem.”⁶ Some stakeholders — especially in the centrist and ultra-Orthodox sectors — are convinced that government funding is a silver bullet; they see the current federal administration as an unprecedented opportunity to advance this agenda. They cite recent state voucher programs in Ohio and Arizona, equivalent to a \$50,000–\$60,000 bump in salary, that are drawing tens if not hundreds of Jewish families to Cleveland and to Phoenix. They note that in some parts of the country, and in New York in particular, tens of millions of dollars in public funding already underwrite school security, special education, transportation, and the educational needs of families below the poverty line. Others, generally on the liberal wing of the day school community, fear the strings attached to public funds. They strongly resist the hint of church/state entanglements, and are concerned about the implicit threat to public education in government funding of religious schools. They don’t expect financial salvation to come from this source, or at least not in any reliable way.

There is an increasing appreciation of the critical role played by endowments: to be ready for emergencies, to fund new

⁴ Wertheimer, J. (2001). *Talking dollars and sense about Jewish education*. New York: AVI CHAI Foundation.

⁵ Chasky, R. N., Goldschmidt, E., & Perla, D. (2013). *Different faiths, common challenge: Maintaining the affordability of faith-based education*. New York: Changing Our World, Inc. (Chapter 2).

⁶ See D. Held (2014). *Jewish day school financial sustainability and affordability. Greenbook Volume 1*. New York: Jewish Funders Network for a comprehensive survey of possible measures, including tuition incentive initiatives, middle income affordability strategies, cost-cutting programs, endowment building campaigns and much more.

initiatives, to alleviate pressure on the annual campaign and to facilitate affordability initiatives, but not to enable schoolwide tuition reductions. In the Jewish community, by contrast to the non-Jewish Independent sector where some schools have been building endowments for decades if not centuries, individual schools have not yet built up sufficient capital to make such a dent in their finances. The most muscular endowment-building initiatives have therefore been launched on communal platforms: for example, in Chicago (where the Jewish United Fund was a pioneer), in Greater MetroWest, New Jersey, and in Los Angeles. Building financial endowments calls for specialized expertise which few day school professionals possess. Two more recent initiatives have therefore included a prominent school-level capacity-building strand through coaching and consultancy.⁷ By building capacity at the school level, these grants are starting to change endowment-raising norms within individual schools and communities and stabilizing school finances.

Donor development is the least sophisticated dimension of the day school enterprise.

In most cases, **donor development is the least sophisticated dimension of the day school enterprise.** A study commissioned by PEJE found that day school development teams are frequently staffed by people in their first position or by well-meaning volunteers. It concluded that schools need extensive help with this aspect of their activity.⁸ Nevertheless, a small minority of schools have secured multimillion dollar gifts from local families. In an interesting twist, these gifts

⁷ The Jim Joseph Foundation High School Affordability Initiative in partnership with the Los Angeles BJE and the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles; and the formerly PEJE, now Prizmah led, Generations Program in Los Angeles, Baltimore, New York and Boston, supported by the AVI CHAI Foundation.

⁸ Giving Tree Associates (2014), *The development conference impact study*, PEJE.

seem to have inspired others to also give generously to the same institutions, rather than free them of the responsibility to do so. By landing a lead gift, schools have established credibility for other benefactors.

Of course, a different way to secure financial sustainability is to cut costs. In the first decade of this century, there was a lot of activity focused on collective purchasing initiatives and shared services. With 70%-80% of the average day school budget devoted to payroll, the savings achieved thereby were limited, even if valuable. In recent years, there have been more radical attempts to reduce costs by cutting back on schools' wage bills through the provision of blended learning (programs in which students learn, in part, through the delivery of adaptive online content), outsourcing general studies to the publicly funded system (thanks again to online technologies), and through offering a no-frills schooling model (with few specialty educational supports or services being provided). These experiments aspire to cut costs by 25-50% and are being closely watched to see if they can establish proof of concept. In the meantime, critics argue that by cutting at the core of the day school's offerings they undermine the perceived value of day school education (about more of which below).



2

STUDENT RECRUITMENT

An example of how much more professionalized the contemporary day school has become is in their approach to admissions. Today, most liberal day schools employ a recruitment specialist; they no longer rely on well-intentioned volunteers. In general, day schools are smarter, too, about the use of tuition discounting, freezes, and rollbacks for special populations such as middle-income families, the first child in a family, or younger-age students. They also offer tracks and niche programs (gifted, Yeshiva, arts-focused) that can appeal to other sub-groups. These are effective “technical solutions” to induce wavering families to get on board.⁹

What, though, should liberal day schools do when confronted by the “adaptive challenge” of diminished numbers of families who see the value of a parochial Jewish education? Historically, this challenge was evidenced by the large numbers of students who left liberal day schools after fifth grade or eighth grade (when about 15% and then 50% exited respectively). Today, the challenge is of a different order; it is to recruit families into elementary school. Over the last 20 years, there has been an overall decline of more than 25% in the number of students in 1st to 5th grade in non-Orthodox schools. Paradoxically, over the same period, aggregate numbers have held up in the middle school and high school grades, in large part due to increased school capacity.¹⁰

Some argue that schools would be more attractive to non-Orthodox families **if they recruited non-Jewish students**, offering children the opportunity to engage with diversity and values more in sync with the universalist ethos of contemporary Western society. For others, **this would sacrifice one of the day school’s historic assets: the experience of intimate community and the promise of intense engagement with the particulars of Jewish text and Jewish life**. Hard numbers are difficult to establish, but it seems that currently about two dozen schools enroll more than a handful of non-Jewish students. In some cases, this is about pragmatics (recruiting enough paying customers to

⁹ These options are well reviewed in D. Held (2014) *op cit*.

¹⁰ Schick (2014) *op cit*.

stay in business); in a few it is about principle (exposing more people to the beauty of Judaism, and creating more diverse school communities). Whatever the reasons, the challenge for schools is how to maintain a Jewish ethos if and when the proportion of non-Jewish students is closer to 50% than 5%, a challenge familiar from many communities in Europe experiencing demographic decline.

The debate about how “Jewish” Jewish day schools will be if they recruit non-Jewish students may be the first iteration of a broader discussion about how schools can be attractive to millennial and/or interfaith parents while continuing to nurture the kinds of outcomes that might justify extensive community investment. In many ways, the questions here are profound:

In what ways should the day school for the twenty-first century assume a different, less particularistic orientation to reflect the changing composition of contemporary Jewish communities?

To what extent would day school recruitment be bolstered if schools were oriented to (and marketed) towards a universalistic ethos? Or to put it in more fundamental terms, **in what ways, if at all, should the day school for the twenty-first century assume a different, less particularistic orientation to reflect the changing composition of contemporary Jewish communities** and their most compelling values?

Research has found that, in previous decades, day school education to some degree “inoculated” students against intermarriage.¹¹ Today, that isn’t a concept that speaks to a majority of non-Orthodox Jews, and, besides, may no longer even be true. Recent qualitative research indicates that, today, students are emerging from liberal day schools strongly committed to identifying as Jews, more Jewishly literate than their parents, and also less committed to endogamy than their parents.¹² In these changed circumstances, a new day school narrative is needed to appeal to liberal Jewish families.

What should Orthodox day schools do when faced by increasing numbers of families who can’t keep pace with rising tuition? It is commonly agreed that the central task with respect to this population is not how to make schools more attractive; it is either to make them less expensive or to provide more extensive financial assistance to parents. If the former route is chosen – for example by replacing classroom teachers with online courses (mainly at the high school level), by cutting back on facilities, or by including more than one grade in the same classroom – there is a danger of degrading the experience to the extent that those who are able and willing to pay lose faith in the product. If the latter route is chosen, schools lock themselves into uncertain dependence on the largesse of third parties. **For the moment, it seems that the first path has greater appeal for Orthodox families; they’re willing to cut back on the frills to enable continued access to day school education.**¹³

¹¹ Cohen, S. (2007). The differential impact of Jewish education on adult Jewish identity. In J. Wertheimer (ed.) *Family matters: Jewish education in an age of choice*. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press.

¹² Pomson, A & Schnoor, R.F. (in press). *Jewish family: Jewish identity and self-formation at home*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

¹³ <http://www.bolddayschools.org/>

3

LEADERSHIP RETENTION

Recruiting and retaining capable professional leadership is an acute challenge for day schools of all denominations. In a recent study of Heads and Principals from 304 day schools, just under half of the 437 study participants had been in their current positions for three years or less.¹⁴ This degree of turnover is especially problematic when research has unambiguously demonstrated the contribution of effective school leadership to teachers' professional practice and to students' academic progress.¹⁵

School leadership is hard to learn. School leaders need training in technical skills, such as budget review and management, fundraising, strategy development and implementation, and problem-solving, as well as “softer skills” such as establishing and developing a leadership team, capacity building, fostering school culture, designing a success plan, and managing stakeholder expectations. Even with the emergence of distributed concepts of leadership, the job of leading a school seems harder than ever.

Ironically, there are today many programmatic opportunities for emerging day school leaders to develop the capacities and dispositions needed to run schools well. And, in a new development, these opportunities serve personnel from across denominations, often within the same programmatic framework. These programs support educators along a career trajectory from teacher-leader to seasoned school head, and they are designed to cater to a great variety of logistical and local needs. A recent study reveals that the four most extensively utilized cohort-based programs for day school leaders provide opportunities to learn core capacities of day school leadership: vision, the skills of personnel development,

¹⁴ Kidron, Y., Greenberg, A. & Schneider, M. (2016). *Leadership in context: The conditions for success of Jewish day school leaders*. American Institutes for Research.

¹⁵ Seashore Louis, K., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning: Final report of research findings*. New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation.

organizational management, and instructional leadership.¹⁶ The programs give less attention to cultivating the skills of community-building whether within or beyond schools. This is a weakness that Federations could be well-placed to address.

Despite the extensive professional scaffolding available today, **it continues to be difficult to find enough able individuals to fill senior positions.** It is estimated that each year, up to 20 principal-level positions or headships need to be filled. The reasons for this leadership deficit are both general and local. More generally, there are cultural prejudices against working in Jewish education and/or as school leaders. There is an absence of organizational norms in many schools, making it challenging for new leaders, especially, to build stable and predictable relationships. The work of day school leadership is hard and high-stakes. The financial pressures of recent years have made some boards such toxic places that capable educators don't want to take on the work whatever the financial compensation. **Good people just don't want to sacrifice their family lives or risk public failure. They're willing to occupy second-tier positions on the career ladder or to leave schools altogether.**¹⁷

Research has shown that new school leaders need time to learn the job.¹⁸ If they can get through their first few years, they are likely to be stronger long-term bets. Thus, schools with sufficient resources are seeing the benefits in “internships” or year-long leadership transitions. Yet in many places there is growing impatience with school change, and ever higher expectations from parents who want instant

¹⁶ Rosov Consulting. (2017). The learning leadership landscape: Experiences and opportunities for Jewish day school personnel. Prizmah: Center for Jewish Day Schools.

¹⁷ Two decades ago, following a review of the educational leadership field more generally, Richardson summed up the situation as follows: “Plenty have credentials for the job. Many don't want it.” Cited by Davis, S. Darling-Hammond, L., Lapointe, L. 7 Meyerson, D. (2005). *School leadership study: Developing successful principals (Review of research)*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford Educational Leadership Institute. The challenges are likely even more acute today in both public and private sectors.

¹⁸ Early, P. & Weindling (2004). *Understanding school leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. Interestingly, the research in this study also suggests that Heads perceive themselves to peak in effectiveness after between seven and ten years in the same job. This is a problem rarely experienced in Jewish day schools because of high levels of leadership turnover.

gratification and response. The digital generation demands constant accessibility through email and text. If there used to be a sense of loyalty between school leadership and the parent/board community, that now seems quite rare. There is today an expectation of perfection from the school that many observers believe was not there before.

Those who coach school heads argue that while there have been great strides in diversifying and deepening the opportunities for professionals to learn leadership, school boards have been left behind. Their development is a critical missing piece on the leadership landscape. A change in this situation would make a great deal of difference to the longevity of school heads, and this is a change that lends itself to community-level initiatives.



4

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

We have a good idea of what contributes to quality day school education: leaders of vision; investment in the continuous development of staff and of volunteers; blended, personalized or differentiated learning that enables each child to grow at his or her own pace; access to current learning technologies; positively engaged families; careful attention and assessment of children's progress; and strong supports for children with special needs, making it possible to be both inclusive and to expect high educational standards.

Recruiting, retaining and developing capable classroom educators is a key to unlocking many of these features. Nevertheless, those interviewed for this study (informants especially alert to the real-time pressures schools face) did not identify the recruitment of quality teachers as an existential challenge to day school vitality and viability of the order of the three challenges just discussed: financial sustainability, student recruitment, and leadership retention. Perhaps with the liberal day school system shrinking in size, it is a buyers' market when it comes to recruiting teachers. Perhaps this challenge has simply been overshadowed by others. Or perhaps the need to hire and hold onto strong teachers is so obvious it goes without saying.

A quality day school education begins with the child's experience in the classroom, and there are ways in which schools can do much better. A starting point is through teacher mentoring, supervision and evaluation. The need to mentor and evaluate *novice* teachers is widely appreciated today. Prominent initiatives, such as the Jewish New Teachers Project, DeLeT (Day School Leadership through Teaching), and the Pardes Educators Program have helped establish widely respected models of good practice in this respect. And yet most schools do not formally mentor, supervise or evaluate teachers who are beyond their probationary years; if even during those first years.¹⁹ As a result, most teachers don't know what's expected of them besides their immediate classroom assignment. Under these circumstances, it is hard to establish norms of educational quality and accountability.

¹⁹ Tamir, E., Pearlmutter, N. & Feiman-Nemser, S. (2017). How day school teachers perceive their working conditions: A national study. *Journal of Jewish Education* 83(2): 92-108.

As with creating norms for endowment building or fundraising (described above), it would be strategic to develop such practices at a community level rather than school by school. If Federations were to promote and even incentivize strong supervisory practices across their communities — through coordinated professional development initiatives, for example — they would help contribute to a rising tide of quality across multiple settings.

The fact that some schools still thrive in these challenging circumstances can become a source of hope and wisdom for others.

It stands repeating, though, that today we have a much more subtle picture of the enablers of educational quality, one that goes beyond attributing success to the twin pillars of strong leadership and committed, caring teachers. It's something of a myth that "everything depends on the teacher."²⁰ With families delegating so many responsibilities to schools, and also being less able to invest their own human or cultural capital, let alone financial capital, in schools, what it takes to succeed is much more complex than it once was. It depends on the savvy management and cultivation of structural, human, political, and cultural resources.²¹

²⁰ Britzman, D. (2003). *Practice makes practice: A critical study of learning to teach*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

²¹ Bolman, L. G. and T. E. Deal (2010). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice and leadership*. San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass. Classic ethnographic studies of so-called "good" schools substantiate these concepts. See, for example: Lightfoot, S.L. (1983). *The good high school: Portraits of character and culture*. New York: Basic Books. Peshkin, A. (2000) *Permissible Advantage? The Moral Consequences of Elite Schooling* (New York: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates).

The fact that some schools still thrive in these challenging circumstances can become a source of hope and wisdom for others. They can serve as “lighthouse schools” or lab schools for the wider community, a concept being adopted in certain public education districts.²² A key — eminently resolvable — challenge is to enable the sharing of knowledge about what it takes for schools to thrive, and to enable schools to develop some of these features, even if the full set of functions is beyond them. The problem is that knowledge-sharing via the medium of the written or digital word is usually quite weak. School leaders need opportunities to get out of their own institutions, for example through “clinical visits” to other schools or through participating in accreditation committees for their peers. They need to see other forms of leadership practice for themselves, but these are opportunities in which only a minority participate. If Prizmah can provide specialist support around these issues, through its year-round offerings and through its conference, local Federations can serve as the vehicles by which to create such opportunities in their communities.

²² See, for example, <http://lighthouse.bcps.org/>, an initiative in Baltimore County, and <https://gamiddleschoolassociation.org/lighthouse-schools-to-watch/>, an initiative among public middle schools in Georgia.



5

MAKING THE CASE

Day schools have slipped behind the philanthropic pack. Today, they are perceived as uneconomical financial propositions, appealing to too narrow a segment of the Jewish community in North America, or promising less-immediate pay-off. They are a much less attractive philanthropic proposition than they were twenty years ago in the heyday of PEJE, the Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education when a consortium of funders came together to dramatically expand Jewish day school provision. Since those heady days, other interventions — camping and Israel experiences most prominently — have been reconceived as delivering experiential Jewish *education* and not only Jewish *socialization*. Today, these experiences and other frameworks for youth engagement seem to promise greater bang for the buck or at least to be more in sync with market forces. This is unfortunate, because day schools do possess unique promise for children and their families. With the emergence of Prizmah as a shared platform for schools once thought to be competing with one another, there is hope that schools can reposition themselves as offering something unique to the broader community.

What is the case for day school besides that they are less worse than the alternatives? What is their special value proposition? **The answer is rooted in their promise of deep and ongoing learning that integrates multiple dimensions of the child's identity; their nurture of thick relationships between children, and between children and adults; and — above all — their embeddedness in the local community.** Close to home, they are places where communities of adults and children find ultimate purpose. They help families wrestle with challenging social pathologies and with the fearsome onslaught of galloping technology. They are safe places. For some, that makes them too cloistered. In smaller communities, their small size can make them feel suffocating. For others, it is these same features that make them so appealing: they serve as a bridgehead from which to connect to the world informed by timeless Jewish values and enriched by strong family-like relationships and sustained, personal attention.

Looking back over the two-and-a-half decades since the rapid expansion of day schools in the early 1990s, it is possible to observe a striking pattern. During the first 15 years of this period, a great many studies made the case for the benefits of day school education, in terms of Jewish identity development and marriage choices,²³ social and emotional wellbeing, and academic success.²⁴ Over the last ten years, however, day school advocates have shifted from making the case for day schools to focusing on how to make schools more affordable. This is understandable but regrettable. As a number of studies have shown, enrollment is not directly related to price; it is related to perceived value, and perceived value is a function of how much something costs *and* its presumed quality.²⁵ It is surely important to continue making the case for the special benefits of day school education if price reductions are to have sufficient appeal.

Absent broader efforts to make the case for day school education — whether at the national or community level — individual schools have become increasingly proactive at promoting themselves whether via social media, video or other means. These efforts have been more or less successful at selling a *product*. Few sell a *concept*. This is surely something to which Federations can contribute, not only in terms of helping develop a concept that will resonate with today's day school marketplace, both nationally and locally, but also by activating the multiple media channels Federations employ in order to communicate this concept.

²³ Barack Fishman, S. & Goldstein, A. (1993). *When they are grown they will not depart: Jewish education and the Jewish behavior of American adults*. Waltham, MA: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, Brandeis University. Cohen, S.M. & Kotler-Berkowitz, L. (2004). *The impact of childhood Jewish education on adults' Jewish identity: Schooling, Israel travel, camping and youth groups*. New York: United Jewish Communities.

²⁴ Chertok, F., Saxe, L., Kadushin, C., Wright, G, Klein, A. & Koren, A. (2007). *What difference does day school make? The impact of day school: A comparative analysis of Jewish college students*. Maurice and Marilyn Cohen Center for Jewish Studies, Brandeis University: Waltham, MA.

²⁵ <http://measuring-success.com/importance-of-orgs-perceived-value/>

A Role for Federations

As powerful local agents, often the most powerful in their communities, Federations can help come to grips with the challenges and opportunities described above, by **servicing as advocates, conveners, facilitators, and supporters of day school education.**

Financial Sustainability

Through strategic philanthropy, Federations can help schools confront existential challenges. While it is unlikely that Federations can raise sufficient funds to enable sustained tuition reduction, they can help schools address their financial challenges in different ways.

1. They can bring knowledge from outside the community to help schools become more expert in donor development and cost-saving measures.
2. They can facilitate cross-community efforts (for schools and other educational institutions) to develop endowment building capacity at the institutional level.
3. They can partner with schools to nurture day school donors.
4. They can provide financial breathing-space (for example, through interest-free loans or short-term debt relief) for school leaders to think creatively beyond short-term challenges.



Recruitment

There are communities where the local Federation is perceived to be day-school friendly. Erroneously, these communities are presumed to be home to large Orthodox communities. In fact, the common denominator in these instances is active and vocal support for day school as an educational option. As we have argued, Federations can help address the technical and adaptive aspects of the recruitment challenge.

1. They can provide strategic or targeted subsidies to bring specific populations across the day school threshold, such as middle-income families, or families not previously enrolled in day school.
2. They can work with liberal day schools, especially, to develop a new day school narrative that appeals to millennials.
3. They can (and should) support research into the consequences of recruiting non-Jewish students to schools. This would be an important first step before launching a conversation with schools about if and how to build enrollment in this way.

Leadership

Federations can play a strategic role in the recruitment, retention and development of day school leadership, as part of a broader strategy to build and sustain the Jewish community's human capital.

1. They can support schools in trying to attract professional talent to communities by helping find work opportunities for a Head's spouse or partnering with schools to provide housing options.
2. They can provide financial benefits which ensure that competitive financial packages for staff don't all have to be passed on in tuition.
3. They can facilitate opportunities for school leaders to learn through scaffolded clinical visits to other community institutions, and to develop the currently neglected leadership skills of community-building.
4. They can work with schools (and other communal institutions) to improve Board cultures in ways that are more supportive of professional leadership.



Educational Quality

In their unique role as community conveners, Federations can contribute to the educational quality and administrative efficiency of day schools in decisive ways.

1. They can bring quality providers of educational and social services to the community to work with local schools or local agencies.
2. They can support locally-based professional development initiatives designed to improve specific facets of the day school experience and functioning.
3. They can assist school heads, board leadership and educators with participating in national conferences and training programs.
4. They can incentivize strong supervisory practices across their communities — raising the bar for a high leverage practice.
5. Through collaboration with Prizmah, they can serve as channels of knowledge from beyond the community about good practices and useful strategies.
6. They can join with Prizmah in exploring the concept of regionally located “lighthouse schools” to serve as sites for leadership learning.

Making the Case

Federations can serve as a strong voice in communicating to parents, donors, and government how this institution is critically important to the Jewish community.

1. They should first devote resources to developing a locally resonant concept of why day schools are such an important resource for individual families and for the community as a whole. In this spirit, they should also help identify and produce local data that can support these claims.
2. They can employ their own communication channels — marketing pieces, website, newsletters, and other publications — to make a robust case for the day school concept.
3. They can connect more community members to schools, and can enhance the value of schools to the community, by partnering more actively to utilize the physical plant that schools possess (for example, in evenings and on weekends).
4. They can create programming opportunities by which to expose community members more broadly to outstanding faculty from day schools.

Ultimately, Federations can provide venues for difficult conversations about demographics, about family needs, and, if necessary, about merging schools or closing them, even facilitating such mergers where appropriate. They can help schools gather data and tackle questions they may have neither the courage nor bandwidth to consider. These are functions that — in most communities — only Federations have the capacity and authority to perform.

A ROLE FOR SCHOOLS

The relationship between day schools and local Federations is not a one-way street. In smaller communities especially, but in larger ones too, day schools can make a decisive contribution to the quality and intensity of Jewish community life.

Much as strong local public schools have served as drivers of neighborhood renewal, **the existence of a healthy day school that runs at least to the end of the elementary grades can support communal sustainability and renewal** by encouraging more Jewishly engaged families to stay in or move to a community.²⁶

Meeting a different demographic need, day schools can facilitate the cultivation of relationships among families uncomfortable with synagogue membership or with other religious forms of Jewish community. In this instance, rather than acting as a competitor to shuls, schools can serve as alternative sites for community connection and as gateways to Jewish life, especially for the increasing proportion of Jewish millennials not ready to define themselves as Jews by religion.

Schools can also serve, as we have already noted, as incubators of community leadership. Parents socialized to leadership by volunteering in support of their child's school might, in time, take on different communal responsibilities in other institutions. It is often said that many Federation leaders started a career of volunteering in their child's Jewish school.

Finally, day schools model for the community as a whole, and not only for their paying customers, the richness and complexity of Jewish culture and Jewish language; the rhythms of an institution shaped by the Jewish calendar; and the meaningfulness of communal and interpersonal life informed by Jewish values. There is symbolic value in these experiences being available to members of the community even if all do not seek to avail themselves of them.

²⁶ Pomson, A. (2007). Schools for parents? What parents want and what they get from their children's Jewish day schools. In J. Wertheimer (ed) *Family matters: Jewish education in an age of choice*. Hanover, MA: University Press of New England. 101-142.

These are challenging times for many of North America's Jewish day schools. The challenges are a consequence of socio-cultural changes in the community as a whole, whether in the form of generally declining Jewish birthrates, the rising financial cost of Jewish engagement, the diminished appeal of religious expressions of Jewish life, and the increased proportion of interfaith families in the Jewish community. And yet in some communities, there is a perception that thanks to strong relationships between local Federations and their day schools, it is possible to create virtuous circles of relationship by which both Federations and day schools can help one another face the future with hope.



Focus Group Participants

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Literature Review

Title of Article	Author	Source
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Jewish day schools and their future place in American Jewish life	Susan Kardos	<i>Journal of Jewish Communal Service</i> 85 (1)
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Beyond parallel play: systemic collaboration across disciplines	Laurie Hahn Tapper & Zvi Weiss	<i>HaYidion</i> Fall 2016
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<i>Jewish day schools, Jewish communities: A reconsideration</i>	Alex Pomson & Howard Deitcher	Littman Library of Jewish Civilization

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