

## INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

Naava Frank shares her observations, insight, and analysis of the issues facing the burgeoning Jewish day school world in this glimpse into the thinking of Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE). Filled with concrete recommendations and helpful references to websites and other resources, Frank's article will be of great interest to consumers and leaders of day school education, as well as to community leaders seeking greater clarity about the integration of day schools into communal priorities. This overview is followed by a brief update on the status of a new national initiative, the Continental Council for Jewish Day School Education. Lynda Giles and Rabbi Joshua Elkin describe the mission and current foci of the Continental Council, reminding the field that communal leaders are crucial partners in the effort to enhance the Jewish day school movement in North America.

## Day Schools: Challenges, Trends, and Strategies

NAAVA FRANK

In recent decades, Jewish communal leaders have become aware of growth within the Jewish day school movement. They are currently looking for ways to respond to that trend. Of interest (and perhaps lesser known) is the fact that Canada and Great Britain, countries with different government and social policies, are experiencing similar growth. The forces behind this renaissance and renewal are profound and far reaching and merit the attention and investment of Jewish communal leadership.

In the 1990s, the U.S. experienced a 25% growth in the number of students in non-orthodox day schools and high schools. In the U.K. the percentage of Jewish students attending day schools has soared from 20% in 1975 to its current 55%. Finally, in Toronto, ON, the number of day high school students increased nearly 50% from 1,368 in 1992 to 2,565 in 2001. Government funded schools are in decline in all three countries. One can theorize that the public search for values and community, as well as economic forces are factors in the growth of Jewish day schools.

PEJE (Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education) was founded six years ago to strengthen Jewish day schools throughout North America. PEJE founders and major funders are working through PEJE to grow the number of students attending day schools along with the dollars available to the field.

PEJE promotes excellence within the day school arena and aims to raise the bar in all aspects of day school life.

Raising the bar requires *all* members of the school community to improve their performance by ongoing learning. Adults as well as students need to *learn* in order to strengthen their practice – from the kindergarten teacher to the board chair, from the admissions director to the principal. The role of expertise in raising the bar for Jewish day schools is critical. PEJE provides grants and expertise to individual schools, and advocates for the day school movement in the broader community. This article, aimed at Jewish communal leadership in North America, culls the learning from PEJE's work with over one hundred day schools to date.

PEJE's work with schools continues to validate the importance of three key components to school health: the **vision**, the **board**, and the **professional leader**. Called "the tripod," these elements are the foundation upon which a school builds its programs. Just as a tripod derives its strength and balance from three strong legs, a school remains well-balanced and strong by attending to its vision, board, and professional leadership. Roland Barth is "convinced that the relationship among adults who inhabit a school has more to do with the school's quality and character, and with the accomplishments of its pupils than any other factor." The partnership of the board and professional leadership working toward shared goals dictated by the vision leads toward success.

This article distills five priority areas for day schools with implications for communal leadership: governance, financial management, school identity and vision, professional educators and leaders, and community integration. For each area

the article will address: a) challenges b) promising trends and success factors and c) strategies and current thinking.<sup>1</sup>

## Governance

### Challenge:

- Lay leaders are responsible for ensuring the financial viability of the school and for holding the head of school accountable. The challenge is to recruit and train lay leaders who utilize the vast realm of expertise available about non-profit boards, and school boards in particular. The ultimate goal is to run high functioning Jewish day school boards.

### Promising Trends:

- In some cities, federations and central agencies are sponsoring board training for groups of Jewish day school lay leaders. Miami and Houston are pilot sites for community-wide Jewish day school board development projects in collaborative efforts with the local federation, BJE's and PEJE. Collaborative lay leadership training can lead to increasing community wide sophistication and support for day schools.
- Various leadership development programs are having a positive impact on day school leadership. Graduates of the Wexner Heritage Foundation Program are commonly found among day school lay leadership.
- PEJE has begun work with denominational day school movements (AMODS, SSDS) to provide a lay leadership component at their annual conferences.
- Through PEJE, networks of lay leaders from diverse day schools have been meeting through email and telephone on a monthly or bi-monthly basis.

### Strategies and Current Thinking:

- Federation expertise in lay leadership development is critical for day school boards but must be adapted to some of the unique nuances of day school boards. ([www.nais.org](http://www.nais.org), [www.isacs.org](http://www.isacs.org) include useful resources for independent school governance).
- The most powerful leverage point for a strong board is the Committee on Trustees. Their responsibilities include the nine tasks of board building described succinctly in *The Board Building Cycle: Nine Steps to Finding, Recruiting, and Engaging Nonprofit Board Members*. (This must-read

is available from [www.BoardSource.org](http://www.BoardSource.org), a top quality provider of expertise on operating high quality boards.)

## Financial Management

### Challenges:

- The financial resources needed to meet the future building and capital needs of day schools are estimated to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars. The community must find a way to gather these resources while maintaining existing communal priorities.
- Day schools must also tackle the issue of affordability for middle class families.
- The impact of the economy and September 11th is affecting schools. There is an overall feeling that money is tight, thus making fundraising more difficult. Also, more parents in certain sectors are dealing with unemployment. The economic boom of the late 1990s fed the growth of Jewish day schools with large donors. Schools and leadership must now work strategically and plan carefully to compensate for changes in the economy that could lead to a partial reversal of this trend.

### Promising Trends:

- The past four years have brought seven major gifts between \$10 to 30 million each to individual day schools.
- PEJE Donor Assemblies have begun the work of creating a national movement of donors to day schools. More high-end donors may now resonate with the day school agenda. Regional donor groups have begun forming in the Bay area, Boston, Phoenix, San Diego, Seattle and Hartford/Springfield.
- PEJE is working with the JESNA-UJC Continental Council for Jewish Education (see page 29) on efforts to move toward institutionalizing day school advocacy. This initiative will place day schools higher on the community's philanthropic agenda as anchors of the Jewish community and as gateways into Jewish life.
- PEJE's Joint Purchasing Initiative is meeting with early success in saving schools money on the purchasing of office and school supplies, computers and furniture. (For more information, contact [Toni@peje.org](mailto:Toni@peje.org).)

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<sup>1</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of this particular article, there are also promising trends in the area of curricular development that should not go unnoticed. A multitude of major curriculum projects are being made possible by grants from major foundations such as the Jim Joseph Foundation and AVI CHAI.

- PEJE's financial managements and fundraising seminars are ongoing and are being convened regionally in Cleveland; Rockville, MD; New York, Boca Raton, FL; and Dallas. For more information, contact [www.peje.org](http://www.peje.org).

#### Strategies and Current Thinking:

- Since tuition is the major source of revenue, maximizing vision-appropriate student enrollment and minimizing attrition is critical. Centralized delivery of recruitment expertise and joint advocacy campaigns for Jewish day schools should be on the communal agenda. PEJE will be active in these areas in the coming years.
- Federations have financial planning and fundraising expertise that can help develop the capacity of area day schools. Federations in Toronto, ON and Palo Alto, CA have helped schools with financial planning. Increasing the financial sophistication of day school professionals and lay leaders is a priority that will help schools run more efficiently while raising more money.
- Rather than competing for a shrinking allocation pool, schools should seek new strategies that will enable existing and new donors to increase the money flowing into federations as well as day schools.
- Attempts to recruit more students into day schools via tuition subvention programs are being piloted in a few areas across the country. Currently the data is inconclusive.
- Regional independent school associations ([www.nais.org](http://www.nais.org), [www.isacs.org](http://www.isacs.org)) have developed financial benchmarks that may be of interest to well-established day schools and their federations.
- In this vulnerable economic period, schools should all be operating with multi-year budgets and cash flow projections, as well as an open line of credit. This is critical for young schools.

### Professional Educators and Leaders

#### Challenge:

- Recruitment of top quality personnel is a major challenge confronting the field. Recruiting and retaining quality educational leaders is difficult, as is recruiting and training qualified Judaic teachers appropriate to the vision and mission of modern orthodox and non-orthodox schools.

#### Promising Trends:

- Heads of school coming from public or independent

schools into Jewish day schools are raising management and curriculum standards. Their expertise may be lacking, however, in the areas of student recruitment, working with a board, and Judaic life and learning. Creating effective leadership teams that include Judaic professionals is critical to the success of these schools.

- New initiatives in recruitment and development of professional educators at the national level have blossomed in the past few years and more are welcomed. Leadership development programs funded by AVI CHAI are running at the Harvard Principals Center and the Jewish Theological Seminary while George Hanus has founded the Jewish Educational Leadership Initiative JELI in Chicago. New teacher initiatives include DeLeT, the Soleveitchik Institute and Edah's Teacher Corps. The Covenant Foundation has recently announced its Jewish Educator Recruitment and Retention Initiative (JERRI). CAJE just held its first ever day school teachers' conference in June 2003.
- Many local communities are funding small teacher recruitment programs. For example, the federation in Pittsburgh developed a degree/ certification program that has involved several local colleges in working to bring new teachers into Jewish day schools.
- Salaries are on the rise for key school leadership positions. New programs at Gruss Foundation and Hebrew Free Loan are increasing benefits for teachers. PEJE, through its "Joint Purchasing" project, hopes to help schools purchase benefits collectively.
- Jewish day school positions are highly fulfilling for professionals seeking a way to connect their professional and Jewish lives. High-quality, experienced personnel are coming into the field as part of a mid-career shift and are finding meaning and satisfaction.

#### Strategies and Current Thinking:

- Research demonstrates that the quality of the educational program is a top factor in attracting and retaining parents.
- Professionalization of business managers, admissions professionals and development directors will have a strong impact on the field. Independent School Management ([www.isminc.org](http://www.isminc.org)), the premier independent school consulting organization, provides such training. National Business Officers Association, [www.nboa.net](http://www.nboa.net) is also an important resource.

- Communities should document and share model teacher recruitment programs while looking to replicate them or to find ways to collaborate with the emerging new national initiatives.
- Collaborative local professional development projects for educators raise the bar, increase professionalism, and create powerful day school synergies that go well beyond the capacity of an individual school.
- Processes that encourage vision, reflection, and alignment are: a strategic planning process, a school self-study accreditation, an ISM institutional assessment, and a focused Judaic assessment.
- Schools need to engage in vision and program alignment on a periodic basis, at least every three to five years. A values audit can be used to explore what are the core “lived values” in the school. The portrait of an ideal graduate is an effective format for building curriculum that is aligned with mission and vision.

## School Identity and Vision

### Challenges:

- PEJE’s work with day schools has demonstrated that schools with compelling missions and visions attract funds, teachers and students with ease. Yet, in the crush of everyday work, schools often do not put sufficient energy into bringing all members of the school into the work of living the mission and vision.
- In response to growing post-denominational sentiments, the largest number of new schools opening are multi-denominational, community or pluralistic day schools. The challenge of pluralistic models is creating Judaic life that is deep and engaging, authentic and spiritually powerful, while meeting the complex needs of a diverse parent body and governing board.

### Promising Trends:

- “Jewish Day Schools for the 21st Century,” (JDS21) a project of the Rhea Hirsch School of Education of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, has received funding from AVI CHAI. JDS21 has been established to help Reform and community Jewish day schools engage all school constituents in Jewish learning that grounds and revitalizes the vision and Judaic life of schools.

### Strategies and Current Thinking:

- Federations and BJE’s should work to provide opportunities for schools to focus on mission and vision.
- A new publication, *Visions of Jewish Education*, edited by Seymour Fox, Israel Scheffler and Daniel Marom (Cambridge University Press, 2003) breaks new ground in presenting a variety of philosophically grounded visions of Jewish education. It represents a welcome new resource for visioning.
- Engaging adults in Jewish text learning on an ongoing basis creates deeper conversations about mission and vision.

## Community Integration

### Challenges:

- Most Jewish pre-schools do not have relationships with or advocate for Jewish day schools as an option for their graduates. This is a major missed communal opportunity.
- Many day schools operate in relative isolation. They are not sufficiently connected to other Jewish institutions or independent schools and do not realize their own potential for Jewish community leadership.

### Promising Trends:

- An increasing number of day schools are located on Jewish community campuses, where opportunities for synergy do exist.
- Day schools are becoming a gateway institution into the rest of the Jewish community in many of the Jewish frontier communities of the southwest and west.

### Strategies and Current Thinking:

- Federations and central agencies can foster institution-to-institution collaboration and facilitation of conversations among leadership of various organizations that will break down resistance and maximize collaboration. This is particularly true when a new day school is in the planning stage.
- BJE’s and Federations can facilitate links between Jewish day schools and their pre-schools or middle school feeders.
- Opportunities for communal adult Jewish learning strengthen Jewish day school parents and community. The Florence Melton Adult Mini-School is a successful example.
- Parent and family education need to be a core part of the agenda for day schools and the Jewish community in which they are embedded. Many day school parents are

not themselves day school graduates and are seeking to give their children something they did not have. Day schools are instrumental in helping to fill a community void for parents.

### Conclusion

PEJE is devoted to helping schools build their internal capacities for excellence in all aspects of school operation. The habits of reflection, self-assessment, self-improvement and ongoing learning are key to improving institutions. Federations and other foundations can help provide capacity building grants and expertise for lay leadership development, financial management, strategic planning, and collaborative curricular work. Similar support should go to adult Jewish learning for teachers, parents, and board members.

The most important message that PEJE can offer to com-

munal leaders is that renaissance and renewal are fostered by collaboration among day schools, federations, BJE's, JCC's, synagogues, and pre-schools. The fruit of such collaborations can yield the depth of learning that stimulates excellence, excitement and Jewish growth.

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## The Continental Council for Jewish Day School Education

LYNDA GILES AND RABBI JOSHUA ELKIN

**I**magine a North American Jewish community fully knowledgeable about Jewish day school education, aware of its size, scope, value, benefit and potential impact on Jewish life. Imagine ever-increasing numbers of families choosing a day school education for their children because day schools are academically excellent and financially affordable. Imagine local and national communal leaders prioritizing the day school agenda and embracing every opportunity to advocate for the importance of strong day school educational options for as many families as possible. Imagine that day school teachers are better compensated with more attention to their professional development so that they remain in the field for a longer time and function at a higher professional level.

Making these images a reality is at the core of the **Continental Council for Jewish Day School Education**, whose inaugural meeting took place November 29, 2001. This UJC-JESNA venture grew out of the recommendations of their Task Force on Jewish Day School Viability and Vitality.

Its mission reads as follows:

**The Continental Council for Jewish Day School Education is dedicated to the growth and enhancement of the quality of Jewish day school education.**

**Through the engagement of volunteer and professional leaders from all sectors of the community, the Council will serve as a forum for addressing key issues affecting day schools, a focal point for advocacy on behalf of day school education, and a vehicle for promoting collaborative action around shared concerns. The Council will promote and establish positive and mutually supportive relationships between day schools, federations, other Jewish religious, educational, communal organizations, and the community at large.**

The Council consists of 120 lay and professional leaders, from 49 North American communities, who are dedicated to this ambitious mission. Its five current areas of focus are:

- Affordability
- Community Relations
- Compensation Systems
- Marketing and Advocacy
- Professional Recruitment, Development and Retention

Each focal area has the attention of a working group, jointly led by one lay and one professional member. These groups are engaged in gathering relevant, targeted information to inform both their short-term and long-term