

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

Imagine 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

agendas. These data-gathering efforts include gathering current descriptions and evaluations of alternative funding sources for day schools; conducting market research about the best messages needed to advocate for day schools; identifying effective compensation philosophies and plans currently used by day schools; studying communities in which day schools work closely and effectively with the larger Jewish and secular communities to share human and capital resources; and updating descriptions and evaluations of educator/recruitment and professional development programs.

At the core of the Council’s work is the belief that the day school must learn to work more closely with all the institutions and organizations within its local community. Conversely, the organized Jewish community in each

locale (in particular, federations and central agencies) must be more attentive to and supportive of the value and needs of its own day school(s). Furthermore, the Council believes that there are evolving models of best practice which are to be found across the country. The Council seeks to actively ensure that these best practices are disseminated and replicated (with appropriate local adaptation) across the continent.

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Lynda Giles, a co-chair of the Continental Council, is the vice president of the Detroit Jewish Federation, sits on the Board and is on the Executive Committee of JESNA and the Renaissance and Renewal Pillar.

Rabbi Joshua Elkin is the Executive Director of PEJE and a co-chair of the Continental Council.

**Editor’s Suggested Discussion Guide:**

- Frank challenges all professionals and volunteers involved in day schools “to improve their performance by ongoing learning.” What is the implication of this challenge for the day schools with which you are familiar?
- This article lists challenges in each of five key areas. To what extent do you agree that these are challenges for the day schools with which you are involved? What other challenges would you add in each category?
- Looking through the “promising trends” in each category, are your schools tuned into these trends? Would you agree that they are promising – or do some present problems or challenges of their own?
- Frank recommends numerous strategies in each priority area.
  - Which of the proposed strategies might work in your community?
  - Which important stakeholders would have to be on board to implement them?
  - What resistance to these strategies could you foresee, and how could it be overcome?
- Frank notes recruitment of top quality personnel as a priority challenge.

- In what ways might shortcomings in the areas of financial management, governance, community integration, and school identity and vision be contributing factors to the difficulty in maintaining top-flight teachers and leaders?
- In what ways might the shortcomings of day school professionals contribute to the difficulties in the other areas?
- To what extent are you convinced of the “tripod” notion, or do you believe that excellence in one area could carry day schools despite shortcomings in the other two?
- This article places high premium on articulating school vision and mission statements.
  - Why do you believe many schools do not pay much attention to these?
  - Are you convinced by Frank that they should?
  - If so, how would you make that case to a day school lay or professional leader who resists spending time on this?
- In what ways are day schools sources of unity and cooperative spirit in your community? To what extent do they constitute a divisive force in your community? What could be done to address tensions and unleash the potential for collaboration?