

PEJE

*Partnership for
Excellence in
Jewish
Education*

Noteworthy Practices in Jewish Day School Education

*Volume III:
Trends in Growing Enrollment*

תורים אלו מלמדי
תינקות באמונה
חרוזים אלו התינקות

*Teachers and school children —
precious jewels of our community*
MIDRASH RABBAH, SONG OF SONGS

Noteworthy Practices in Jewish Day School Education

Volume III: Trends in Growing Enrollment

Compiled and edited by
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December 2005



Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We wish to acknowledge the following individuals for providing leads to noteworthy practices and resources and/or for sharing their general advice and insights.

Naava Frank
Felice Friedman
Tania Lowenthal
Nina Rogoff
Pam Smith
Susan Yellin
Rheua Stakely
The PEJE Staff



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INTRODUCTION: THE *NOTEWORTHY PRACTICES* SERIES

We are pleased to publish the third volume of *Noteworthy Practices in Jewish Day School Education*. This series was created to celebrate the work of day school educators and to serve as an idea exchange. Each volume features practices in a particular content area, ranging from discrete projects to pervasive components of the school environment. Elementary, middle, and high school practices are included, representing a diversity of denominational affiliations and geographic regions in North America.

The "Noteworthy Practices" Concept

It is important to distinguish this series from a "best practices" collection. Although we do have ideas about day school excellence, published elsewhere,* this particular series is not meant to weigh practices against one another, publicizing only a handful of "winners." In our work with Jewish day schools, we have heard time and again about the value of sharing existing practices. Jewish day school leaders are hungry for ideas. Our goal with this series is to disseminate ideas, as many ideas as possible—all of them appropriate for some settings if not all, but none of them designated as "best." The "noteworthy" label simply means that an idea got our attention, for one reason or another, and we believe that others might find it useful. Each write-up articulates the reasons why we consider that practice to be noteworthy.

The Research and Publication Process

Practices were solicited in two ways. At the beginning of the publication cycle, nominations for noteworthy practices were solicited from heads of Jewish day schools and admission directors. In addition, we pursued leads from other contacts who have a broad view of the field. While we attempted to be thorough, we realize that we may have missed some truly noteworthy practices.

The submissions were reviewed by a team of practicing admission directors and experts in the area of day school admission and recruitment. All submitters had an opportunity to review our descriptions of their practices. In many cases, these descriptions are based on documents prepared by the submitters themselves. While the submitters were responsible for pointing out inaccuracies in our drafts, we take full responsibility for our stylistic choices and editorial decisions.

Guide to the Descriptions

Each description begins with some basic information about the practice: a title (usually chosen by the submitter) and the name, position, and school affiliation of the submitter. There is no distinction made between submitters who actively nominated their practices and those from whom PEJE solicited information.

The "Description" section summarizes the information provided by the submitter. Recognizing that our audience consists mainly of busy practitioners, we have chosen a concise, "just the facts" style. This style necessarily leaves out some of the unique flavor of each practice, and we encourage readers to contact the submitters for more details.

* See our *Suggested Guiding Principles for Jewish Day Schools* and our *Portrait of Educational Excellence*, both available on the PEJE web site (www.peje.org) or from the PEJE office as free printed booklets.

The “Major Accomplishments” section lists the tangible results of the practice. In the area of enrollment, many of these accomplishments are indicated with statistics.

The “Noteworthy Because” section articulates the reasons our team of reviewers and the submitters chose to include the practice. While these reasons may include features pointed out by the submitter, PEJE takes full responsibility for this section of each write-up.

The “Advice” section explains the pitfalls to avoid, what schools wish they knew before they started, and unexpected challenges they faced in instituting the practice.

The descriptions vary in length, depending on the level of detail provided by the submitter and the amount of information needed to understand the practice. The length of a description should not be understood to reflect PEJE’s opinion of the importance or quality of the practice.

GROWING ENROLLMENT IN JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS: ADVICE AND OVERVIEW OF TRENDS

During the process of soliciting and reviewing noteworthy practices in how schools are growing their enrollments, some key points about enrollment growth emerged. We summarize these ideas below. For more detailed information on many of these topics, please review **Toward a Proactive, Comprehensive Admission Program** by Rheua Stakely, available for free download at www.peje.org.

The Vital Role of the Admission Director

The admission director is one of the first contacts a parent has with a school. As a result, the tone of and first impression with the admission director has a huge impact on the parent's interest in continuing to get to know more about the school.

Admission directors must be warm, welcoming, positive, and professional. They must spend time getting a good handle on the school culture and climate so that when they speak to prospective families, they have a thorough understanding of what they are representing and what that school has to offer, and can speak with honor and integrity. They need to articulate what differentiates their school; what are the values, philosophy, educational approach, and culture of their school. They have to help parents perceive the “flavor” of the school in order to determine if the school is a good fit for their children and their family.

When parents contact a school, they are looking for a general feel for the school, as well as information about the quality of education and where students go after graduation. The admission director has to ensure that the tone throughout the school is welcoming and that the information is accurate and consistent among other school staff. Periodic meetings to share information and perspectives with other staff should focus on creating this consistency. Constant communication is key.

Reaching Appropriate Target Audiences

A crucial step in growing enrollment is diversification of a school's portfolio. In order to grow enrollment, admission directors must be creative and develop innovative techniques which reach out to different segments of the community who may or may not presently consider Jewish day school education. The challenge is to ‘think outside the box’—and outside the realm of “predictable” targets for Jewish education.

Admission experts emphasize the importance of clarifying whom you serve well and for whom you are not a good match. While parents want and expect schools to provide everything for everyone, we know that this is not a realistic expectation. Schools get into trouble when they start believing that they can be perfect for everyone. It is therefore important for schools to identify and clearly articulate whom they serve well. Acceptance criteria must be adhered to and utilized by schools to sustain enrollment and reduce attrition. Only when parents understand the school's mission can they properly decide whether or not it is compatible with their child.

Parent, Student, and Alumni Ambassadors

An important resource for admission directors is the involvement of current school students, alumni, and parents to serve as advocates, or “ambassadors,” for the school. Admission directors should identify, select and train current school students, alumni, and parents to help in a variety of recruitment and admissions activities. The benefits include spreading positive word-of-mouth information about the school, expanding the school's network of prospective families, and encouraging others to consider Jewish education.

Everyone—from the administration and the teachers to the parents—must feel that s/he is an ambassador every single day—whether in the halls of the school or in the grocery store.

School Visits

Admission directors need to focus on attracting more families to visit their school earlier in the fall. Once a prospective family visits a school and has a one-on-one chat and tour, they are more likely to complete an application, so the challenge is to bring parents into the school.

“Feeder” School and Community Relationships

While schools should continue to nurture their relationship with the schools from which they draw the most students, it is important not to neglect other schools that may have potential students. Diversify the schools with which you build relationships to include both public and non-Jewish private schools in addition to Jewish schools.

In order to improve the relationship with so-called “feeder” schools, both parties need to recognize that the relationship is reciprocal, and that each has something valuable to contribute. Day schools can express their gratitude and appreciation to these schools (for encouraging their students to apply to your school, for writing recommendations etc.) in the form of thank-you letters, lunches, or other forms of recognition.

Additionally, admission directors should not underestimate the value of having a close working relationship with the rabbis in the community; they need to have their fingers on the pulse of the needs of the community.

Tracking Your Progress and Measuring Your Success

Keeping and analyzing statistics and tracking patterns is a valuable tool in knowing where a school stands and where it is headed in the future. Admission directors need to track the number of inquiries month by month, year after year; the number of visits by month and year; the number of completed applications; the number of admitted students; as well as those who chose to enroll. Do not forget to also track attrition and its reasons.

I. Maximizing Enrollment, School Visits, Feeder School Relationships, and Reaching Target Audiences

“First Tuesday” Open Houses

Submitted By: Vivian Young, Director of Admissions
Akiba Hebrew Academy

Contact Information: 223 N. Highland Avenue, Merion, PA 19066
(610) 667-4070, ext. 144
vyoung@akibaweb.org

School Information: Grades: 6-12
Size: 338
Denomination or other affiliation: Community

Description of the Practice: Having prospective parents see our school “in action” is a key recruitment tool. We used to host Open Houses on Sundays. We then moved to weekday Open Houses twice a year. Several years ago, we came up with the idea of monthly Open Houses always held on the first Tuesday of the month. Through advertisements, flyers, posters, website and e-mail, we circulate the dates at the beginning of the school year. In this way, all parents--especially working parents--have plenty of lead time to schedule a visit. It is vital for prospective parents to observe classes in session in order to get a real sense of the school.

Major Accomplishments: Since Open Houses are held during a school day, student leaders serve as tour guides. This gives parents an opportunity to interact and speak with students informally about their education and experiences, making our Open Houses successful in recruiting new students sense of the school.

Noteworthy Because: Since our Open Houses occur monthly, we are looked upon as user-friendly and accessible. Parents visit more than once. Our faculty is very comfortable with this program as it occurs on a normal day.

Advice You Would Give to a School that Wants to Adopt the Practice: This is so easy to initiate and put into practice. Some months we have more parents visiting than others. If it is a small turnout, be prepared to explain why. Since Open Houses occur often, some are better attended than others.

Weekly Chavrusa Mentoring Program

Submitted By: Avraham Kanarek, Menahel/Principal
Yeshiva Ohr Yisrael

Contact Information: 1810 Briarcliff Road, Atlanta, GA 30329
404-633-8516
Rabbi Kanarek@juno.com

School Information: Grades: 9-11
Size: 29
Denomination or other affiliation: Orthodox

Description of the Practice: Every Thursday evening, our Bais Midrash is buzzing with even more excitement than usual. Students from the local elementary school (Torah Day School of Atlanta) join with our high school boys for “pair learning.” We offer this program to students in the 5th and 6th grade. The boys come at 7 pm and study until 7:30 pm, and we then have a raffle for the younger students. The studying can be homework help, review or enrichment.

Major Accomplishments: This is a great way for the younger boys to have a positive experience and exposure to Yeshiva. It has been a wonderful experience for the high school students to serve as mentors and teachers.

Noteworthy Because: This practice is noteworthy because it is a positive community service and an educational practice. It takes organization and volunteerism, but with little outside expenses.

Advice You Would Give to a School that Wants to Adopt the Practice: We opened the program to all interested students, and tried to pair up the groups as best as possible. We found that not every 9th grader is ready to be a mentor and some lost steam after a few months. For next year, we will limit the members to 10th grade and above.

Chaverim (Nashville’s Parent Day Out Program)

Submitted By: Christina Evans, Director of Admissions
Akiva School

Contact Information: 809 Percy Warner Blvd, Nashville, TN 37205
615-356-1880
cevens@akivanashville.net

School Information: Grades: K-6
Size: 90
Denomination or other affiliation: Community

Description of the Practice: This is the first Jewish “parents day out” in Nashville, and is co-sponsored with our Jewish Community Center. Based on the preschool pre-kindergarten format, it meets two days a week for five hours. During this time, children and parents visit the school and participate in various classroom activities, ranging from art, music, and computers to dramatic play and work on gross and fine motor skills. Teachers work constantly with the children, both individually and in small groups.

Parents have an option of enrolling their child for one or two days; children ranging from three months to five years may apply. Taking place on Akiva’s campus, it brings parents into our school much sooner than when they begin looking for schools a year before kindergarten.

Major Accomplishments: We opened the program in August and have maximum enrollment and a waiting list. The program is fun, nurturing, and has low teacher/child ratios. Parents, who possibly would have never considered our school, are instead very impressed with it. It is a great feeder program for a JCC and, in return, it feeds back into us when children are ready to enter kindergarten.

Noteworthy Because: It is a way of strengthening our ties with the community and the JCC. It fills a gap that is much needed in our community, and the response has been very overwhelming. The program is a great way to begin recruiting earlier. Additionally, our JCC is so full that this allows preschoolers to get off the JCC’s waitlist. It does not cost the school anything, since we have classroom space—we actually make money off the program.

Preschool Story Time at the Day School

Submitted By: Lauren Perlman, Director of Advancement
N. E. Miles Jewish Day School

Contact Information: 4000 Montclair Road, Birmingham, AL 35213
205-879-1068
lauren@nemjds.org

School Information: Grades: K-8
Size: 109 students
Denomination or other affiliation: Community

Description of the Practice: This year we have instituted a monthly story time for preschoolers age two, three, and four including stories, crafts, and snack for preschoolers and their parents/caretakers. Each month has a different theme or topic with an associated story, generally read by the director; craft activity, facilitated by the staff; and snack time, provided by the school. A volunteer who is a parent with a child already registered for kindergarten for the year 2006-07 promotes the program. She solicits participation through emails, invitations sent through the area Jewish preschools, and word of mouth.

Major Accomplishments: The program has accomplished its main goal of increasing preschool family traffic into the school. Previously our preschool family traffic was limited to tours provided to prospective families and once a year exposure at a Sunday afternoon Chanukah program, Maccabee Jamboree. Each month the number of participants in story time has fluctuated from as few as five children to as many as 17 children. They are provided with a free, fun, positive experience; are exposed to the staff and director of the school; and have seen much of the facility in the process. The program has taken place largely in the kindergarten classroom; however, we have paraded throughout the school in Purim costumes, had story time in the library, had free play in the gym and on the playground, and eaten snack in the Commons area. The program takes place during the school day, on Mondays at 10 a.m., so that parents can see the school filled with children learning and having fun.

The program has also allowed the Executive Director and Director of Advancement to build a relationship with preschool families. Most participants have attended more than one month. This repetition allows the staff to learn about the children and parents and their educational needs and desires. It also provides a face for names for both the prospective families and the staff. When called to come to a recruitment program, the existing relationship should positively influence the likelihood of attendance.

We hope that a long-term result of this program is an increase in enrollment by families who may not have otherwise considered the school. We believe that we will not see this increase until the second or third year of the program. In addition, we hope that we will show an increase in donations from participating families. We will be assessing this aspect in our 2005-06 Annual Campaign.

Noteworthy Because: This practice is easy, fun, relatively low cost and provides a relationship with the school for the preschool families.

It requires little time commitment. The program takes only two to three hours per month. Planning and preparation takes around one hour and the program itself lasts one to two hours. The Director of Advancement, who also participates as a preschool parent, and one volunteer do the planning. The Director or other staff member chosen to participate implements the program.

The only costs incurred from the program are for snacks and craft supplies and some copying for invitations distributed by the preschools. Much of this we take from our existing supply and little monies have been taken from our recruitment budget.

The large majority of our prospective parents have an excellent public school system for their children to attend. We must go above and beyond to prove the advantages of our secular and Judaic curriculum. Without any commitment to registering their children, parents can come on a regular basis and be exposed to our excellent facility, program, teachers, and other staff. The program provides the parent and child with an opportunity to come together in a Jewish setting around a Jewish subject. It provides the added benefit of social time with other Jewish parents of preschoolers as well. Over time, we expect that some of the families who may not have previously considered the school, will do so.

Advice You Would Give to a School that Wants to Adopt the Practice: Each story time needs a theme, for example a Jewish holiday. The program needs to have a balance between focused time and free time in order to maintain the children's attention and interest. In the beginning we did not do this and while it was fun for the children to have free time in the kindergarten classroom, it got boring for the parents after two months of the same. We added the crafts project, which encourages parent participation with their child and gives them something to go home with after the program ends.

Choose a volunteer or volunteers who are well connected in the community. Our volunteer worked hard to get a large list of preschool family email addresses through networking. Families are more likely to attend because of a personal invite rather than a preschool flyer.

PALS: Preschoolers and Little Siblings

Submitted By: Arnold Zar-Kessler, Head of School
Solomon Schechter Day School of Greater Boston

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617-964-7765
Arnie.Zar-Kessler@ssdsboston.org

School Information: Grades: K-8
Size: 502
Denomination or other affiliation: Conservative

Description of the Practice: PALS is an expansion of our programming for preschoolers. Instead of just saying we had a preschool program, or soliciting names of youngsters who were potential Schechter students, we created an organization: PALS — Preschoolers And Little Siblings. Parents register their children as members of PALS. Membership is free, and each PAL receives a special SSDS stuffed animal (“Chaver” the Bear) and a card on his/her birthday. We hold monthly PALS programs, which range from storytelling and crafts to tzedakah activities and holiday parties. Some programs are geared for three- and four-year-olds, others are open to the entire family. Some are on weekdays and others on Sundays. In addition, we offer PALS Science Explorations, three-week sessions which cost \$30/session. We maintain a connection with PALS parents by sending them copies of school newsletters as well as PALS fliers.

Major Accomplishments: In just one year, we amassed a data base of some 200 PALS – all potential future Schechter students. The program is a good community building initiative and it validates parents’ decisions to apply to Schechter. We not only connected with prospective families, but we strengthened the school’s relationship with preschools and preschool directors in the course of spreading the word about PALS.

Noteworthy Because: The advantage of PALS is that it allows preschoolers and their families to be “junior” members of the Schechter community. It has wonderful potential as a feeder program for the school. Prospective families get acquainted with the school and its staff, and sample some of our programming and curriculum. Programs are led by SSDS staff, after-school staff, and science and library specialists. It also gives current Schechter parents who have preschool-age children the opportunity to meet and talk to prospective families and serve as “ambassadors” for the school.

Advice You Would Give to a School that Wants to Adopt the Practice: The program does require an investment of staff/administrative time for planning and implementation. We began the year by putting out a PALS brochure, but we realized that one brochure was not enough. You need to send out monthly fliers/reminders. We learned that we can’t get locked into a schedule. Sometimes dates/programs need to be changed. However, you then run the risk of people referring to the original brochure and coming on the wrong date. Don’t be afraid to charge for programs. We lost money on the Science Explorations and would charge more for them in the future. Data management is crucial. Keep track of families to see

how many transitioned from being PALS to being Schechter students. Conversely, note how many families applied to the school and then enrolled their younger children as PALS. Make sure you do not fill the program with siblings of current students. Keep a good balance between young siblings and children from new families. Since other schools have preschool programs, make sure to keep yours fresh and innovative.

Cultivating Relationships with Synagogues and Middle Schools

Submitted By: Dana Goldberg, Director of Admissions
The Jewish Community High School of the Bay

Contact Information: 1835 Ellis Street, San Francisco, CA 94115
415-345-9777 ext. 104
dgoldberg@jchsofthebay.org

School Information: Grades: 9-12
Size: 156
Denomination or other affiliation: Community

Description of the Practice: The Jewish Community High School serves the entire Bay area so we are always strategizing about ways to reach out to all geographic regions within the Jewish community. Furthermore, the school attracts students from local Jewish day schools, public schools, and independent schools. As a result, an important Admissions Office responsibility is to cultivate relationships with local synagogues and middle schools.

This is an ongoing process. In the fall of each year, the JCHS Director of Admissions calls rabbis, other synagogue educators, middle school counselors and teachers to inquire about prospective students. JCHS staff visits schools and synagogues throughout the fall and winter. In addition, our staff attends local high school fairs and hosts regional information meetings in private homes. In past years, the Admissions Office has hosted brunch programs for local educators and Succot “lunch and learn” programs for local 8th graders.

Major Accomplishments: In only our 4th year of existence, JCHS is now seen as a competitor to other local independent high schools. Prospective students who have heard about our academic and co-curricular programs want to attend JCHS rather than other, local popular high schools. Each year, I invite educational consultants and middle school teachers to campus for an individual tour.

Noteworthy Because: Local 8th graders have many options for high school in the Bay Area. During JCHS’s first and second years of existence, students were choosing to enroll at other schools. In the past two years however, our outreach efforts have provided prospective students with more information about JCHS as well as the opportunity to visit classes on campus. Students are now looking to attend JCHS before they learn if they have been accepted.

Advice You Would Give to a School that Wants to Adopt the Practice:

- Brainstorm every potential “ally” in the community. Send information materials and invite these contacts to visit. Follow up on the invitation.
- Contact Middle School counselors and teachers a few months prior to making decisions to talk about student files
- Be persistent in keeping in touch with contacts
- Network with other local Admissions Offices to talk about how similar procedures are implemented at their schools.

Nurture Your Preschooler — A Recruitment Approach

Submitted By: Marsha Grazman, Head of School
The Saul Mirowitz Day School

Contact Information: 11411 North Forty Drive, St. Louis, MO 63131
314-569-2692
rjagrazman@aol.com

School Information: Grades: K-4
Size: 70
Denomination or other affiliation: Reform

Description of the Practice: Our Reform day school is only five years old and we are always looking for the best way to spend our limited financial resources. This past year, we had about \$6,000 to do recruiting and public relations and we wanted to spend it effectively. As opposed to targeting a general audience through newspaper ads, we decided to target our preschool audience directly by presenting gifts to potential families.

Since approximately 77% of our students attended Jewish preschool, we aimed our efforts at the Jewish students in three Reform preschools and at the JCC. We carefully worked with the school lists to create a list of almost 200 families. At the same time, one of the committee members brought in a gift idea, a see-through root growing system with fast germinating seeds. The idea was to use the gift as a tool to market the school and recruit new students. We all agreed it was a unique gift and one that could relate to our school, help your “seedlings” grow.

Someone got in touch with the manufacturer and 210 Root-Vues were ordered, at the cost of about \$17 per item. With a \$3,570 investment, we were ready to move forward. The Root-Vues arrived, ready for packaging. A parent in the fulfillment business created suitable boxes for each Root-Vue and a large label was put on top of each box.

Major Accomplishments:

- potential families paid attention to our outreach to them
- good will
- more people toured our school
- “brand” recognition
- fully enrolled kindergarten class
- value of ‘targeted’ recruitment

Noteworthy Because: For us, it stimulated us to realize the potential of a creative, interactive, recruitment effort. We followed up the next year with a Chanukah book as our gift to potential families. People in the community were talking about our reach-out and our school received much needed exposure. We definitely feel that it has helped in our recruiting effort.

Advice You Would Give to a School that Wants to Adopt the Practice:

- Give adequate time to work with the lists from targeted schools.
- Send the gift to each school targeted.
- Send the gift to entering kindergarteners whose families are part of school.
- One family called and criticized us for “spending money on them because they were not interested.” Be prepared with a response.
- Have fun with this concept!

Early Enrollment Incentive

Submitted By: Reena Seltzer, Vice President
Ezra Academy

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203-389-5500
rseltzer@ezraacademy.net

School Information: Grades: K-8
Size: 226
Denomination or other affiliation: Conservative

Description of the Practice: The Finance Committee and the Board of Directors of Ezra Academy have been proactive in anticipating staffing needs for each subsequent school year based on the real number of students expected, not a projected number.

In order to staff and plan appropriately for the subsequent year so that academic excellence is maintained, parents are asked to respond promptly to re-enrollment contracts. As an incentive, we offer a significant Early Enrollment Incentive of a \$600 reduction in tuition to those families who return all of their enrollment materials, including a nonrefundable deposit by, for example, March 3, 2005. Our goal is

to have every family receive the discount and re-enroll early. The deadline for this incentive is adhered to strictly. Enrollment stations are set up at school events, drop-off in the morning, and during dismissal.

Noteworthy Because: Last year, 93% of students re-enrolled by the deadline and rather than have enrollment information lag behind budget calculations, it has made it easier to make appropriate, sound financial choices and to staff appropriately.

MJDS Taste Of Kindergarten

Submitted By: Abbe Payton, Admissions & Outreach Director
Minneapolis Jewish Day School

Contact Information: Barry Family Campus, 4330 Cedar Lake Road, Minneapolis, MN 55416
952-381-3566
apayton@mjds.net

School Information: Grades: K-6
Size: 291
Denomination or other affiliation: Community Day School

Description of the Practice: In 2003, Minneapolis Jewish Day School (MJDS) initiated a "Taste of Kindergarten" field trip program for key feeder pre-schools to visit the campus. Designed to increase enrollment, "Taste of Kindergarten" creatively and effectively reaches three key audiences:

- Pre-School Students – who experience a fun, age-appropriate sampling of Jewish and kindergarten-like activities.
- Pre-School Teachers – who witness MJDS's nurturing and professional faculty and staff having meaningful and educational interactions with young children.
- Pre-School Parents – who see a written summary of the impressive field trip activities in which their children engaged.

Noteworthy Because: MJDS feeder pre-school enrollment has increased as a direct result of "Taste of Kindergarten." Many parents have contacted the school to learn more about kindergarten specifically because of this program. In fact, because "Taste of Kindergarten" has been so successful over the last two years, and because we see an increasing number of parents considering MJDS *before* their child's pre-K year, MJDS decided in spring 2005 to invite three-year-olds from the same pre-schools for a similar "Pesah Experience" field trip.

Major Accomplishments: "Taste of Kindergarten:"

- 1) Provides another opportunity for MJDS to collaborate with synagogue pre-school directors and clergy – further strengthening our community partnering relationship.
- 2) Provides the MJDS Admissions Team with a bonus opportunity to observe applicants in a group setting.

- 3) Reinforces MJDS's professional reputation with pre-school teachers whom pre-K parents rely on to help recommend kindergarten programs.
- 4) With its wide variety of reading, creative movement, music, art, large motor, and listening activities – the program demonstrates MJDS's high quality academic program designed to appeal to a variety of learning styles.

Advice You Would Give to a School that Wants to Adopt the Practice: Initially MJDS invited pre-school parents to attend the field trip with their children. We quickly learned that most pre-K parents in this market didn't necessarily want to attend because they were working or appreciating the "alone time" for errands, etc. Most prospective parents preferred to schedule a private, parent-only meeting and tour and/or attend an MJDS Open House. I would *highly* recommend MJDS's "Taste of Kindergarten" program to other schools. We have seen a *direct* link between this program and increased enrollment.

II. Reducing Student Attrition

Transitioning from Elementary to Middle School

Submitted By: Rabbi Ellen Greenspan, Assistant Director of Admissions
Solomon Schechter Day School of Essex and Union

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School Information: Grades: PK-12
Size: 830
Denomination or other affiliation: Conservative

Description of the Practice: Our PK-12th grade school includes two Lower School campuses, (PK-5), which feed a single Middle School on a 3rd campus. Our “practice” is not just a single idea, but rather an overall approach to ensuring that our 5th graders continue their Schechter educations into Middle School.

The time to begin to retain our 5th graders is during the spring of their 4th grade year. We don’t believe we can (or should) take our current population for granted. We do a variety of things, beginning in the spring of 4th grade and continuing through the spring of 5th grade to retain these students:

Sunday morning brunch for 4th graders and their parents:

- Give them a tour of the Middle School building; distribute Middle School curriculum guides; have the Middle School administration and faculty answer questions and discuss 6th grade expectations.
- Getting them into the building is important. It helps parents visualize their children in the Middle School.
- Impress upon parents the fact that their students will experience continuity in their education and will find the same excellent academics, Jewish values, and a comfortable social setting in our Middle School.
- Send them home with Schechter goodies: pens, magnets, choir CD’s.

Bring 4th and 5th graders to Middle School for a program with the current 6th grade. (For example, this spring, we had an IDF music ensemble give a concert in the Middle School, and we brought our 4th and 5th graders to hear the performance).

Invite 4th and 5th graders and their families to the Middle School campus in the spring to watch a Middle School softball game against another school. We give them pizza and other snacks and invite them into the school building for a tour.

Invite 5th graders to join the 6th graders in the Middle School Sukkah for lunch (in the fall).

Middle School principal visits Lower School to speak with students and parents in the fall.

In late fall, invite 4th and 5th graders and their parents to visit the Middle School to see classrooms and meet teachers.

School-wide Hannukah candle lighting, held at the Middle/Upper School, highlighting the 5th grade choir and having them perform with the Middle School choir.

Major Accomplishments: The various events and visits to the Middle School have created a buzz among students and parents. As a result some of them are thinking about remaining in the school when they might not have thought about it before. Historically, our school has experienced fairly significant attrition between 5th and 6th grade. Our goal is to retain 80% of our students from 5th to 6th grade. As of this writing, we are at 75% for next year.

Noteworthy Because: In the world of enrollment management, admissions and active recruitment, we know that it is much more cost effective to keep students than to recruit even one new student. So, it is in our best interest to keep the successful students we have.

Advice You Would Give to a School that Wants to Adopt the Practice: The Admissions Office must put forth a friendly face without imposing pressure. It is also imperative that the Administration of the school, the faculty, and the committed parents work together to foster the goals of the Admission and Retention Department.

Measuring and Understanding Parent Satisfaction

Submitted By: Dr. Steven Lorch, Head of School
Solomon Schechter School of Manhattan

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School Information: Grades: K-8
Size: 145
Denomination: Conservative

Description of the Practice: Eight years ago, in the school's first year, we initiated the practice of inviting all parents in the spring for an interview with the head of school to assess their satisfaction with various aspects of the school's program and their children's studies. What was easy to fit in when there were only 14 students in the school was still possible (barely) in Year Three, when there were 60 students; beginning the following year, we continued to survey all parents, but by questionnaire rather than interview. For the past six years, the written survey and its results have served the school in good stead.

Reply rates have varied from year to year, with a high of 57%. The survey consists of two sections that request numerical ratings: one on parents' satisfaction with 15 aspects of the school, ranging from curriculum to finance, from communication to religious observance; and another on parents' satisfaction with their child(ren)'s progress in 18 areas, ranging from the three R's to *t'filah* to social development. In addition, a third section consists of open-ended questions about what parents are most satisfied with, least satisfied with, and any suggestions or comments they wish to make.

The school reports to parents on the results of the survey on two occasions: First, in the spring, within weeks of the due date for submitting the completed surveys, the statistical breakdowns are reported, together with an in-depth analysis of the results. Second, in August, as part of the end-of-summer, welcome-back-to-school letter, changes in the program for the coming year are detailed, and when they owe their genesis, at least in part, to the parent surveys, this connection is made explicit.

Major Accomplishments: The average rating by parents has risen consistently over the years. Many positive suggestions have surfaced in surveys that have subsequently been discussed and adopted.

Noteworthy Because: The annual parent survey is one of the tools of program evaluation that we use regularly. Others include:

- accreditation by our regional independent schools association;
- the translation of our six-year strategic plan into annual objectives and agenda items which are monitored for successful completion throughout the year;
- an active education committee, chaired by Dr. Jane Davidson and comprised of critical friends of the school, including some parents with expertise in educational policy and practice, which meets monthly to continuously review issues of curriculum and teaching in the school;
- the use of our students' performance standards test results to shed light on strengths and weaknesses, not only of individual student performance, but also of trends across classes and the school as a whole;
- the hiring of consultants to audit our program; and
- a periodic internal review of teaching and curriculum that the faculty undertake (one of the ways in which we periodically make use of weekly staff meetings and other professional development time).

Taken together, these means of self-assessment provide some measure of assurance to our board, our staff, our families, and our friends that we are not resting on our laurels, but instead working systematically to be the best we can be.

Advice You Would Give to a School that Wants to Adopt the Practice:

1. Professional and lay leaders need to be convinced that they are better off having this information than not. If the benefits of bringing concerns to the surface are kept in mind, the school leadership is less likely to feel disappointed or distressed by the results (and there will inevitably be some disappointing or distressing responses!).
2. The foundation underlying the introduction of a parent satisfaction survey is better- than-moderate trust between parents and the school administration. Parents must be able to assume that their response will be taken seriously and used for the purposes stated, not ignored or used improperly.

AJA Magical Middle School Mystery Tour

Submitted By: Neena Husid, Director of Admissions & Outreach
Austin Jewish Academy

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School Information: Grades: K-8
Denomination or other affiliation: Community

Description of the Practice: In late January we surprised our current 4th and 5th grade students, and their parents, with an invitation to make a reservation on our newly conceived Magical Middle School Mystery Tour. Basically, this was a back-to-school event geared to introduce our younger students to our middle school program. The presentation for the parents boasted teacher talks, classroom tours, demonstrations, displays of student work, a 'know the teachers and coursework' slide presentation and a brag session about our three years worth of successful graduate classes.

The evening began with brief socializing and introductions. Once the AJA middle school student council was introduced, they paraded the 4th and 5th graders down the hall to a separate classroom for a student presentation featuring crazy science experiments, a school-grown award-winning video production, talks about a renewed sports program and even a helping of Ben & Jerry's ice cream that related to a Mitzvah project from one of our middle school students. At the conclusion of the Magical Middle School Mystery Tour night all groups once again joined together for a question and answer period. Several of our alumni were featured at this time and beautifully answered a wide range of questions from students and parents which included such concerns as academics, socializing, and preparedness in both of these arenas.

Other than using the Beatles' Magical Mystery tour as an inspiration for our ideas, we created all our own resources for this promotion. These pieces included: a retro t-shirt for all the students who assisted and attended; (the front of the t-shirt boasted our created logo, "Magical Middle School Mystery Tour," and the back stated, in a similar font and color, "AJA Everything You Need Satisfaction Guaranteed"); a CD invitation; and a tour itinerary given to each student and parent upon arrival at the event.

Major Accomplishments: The AJA Magical Middle School Mystery Tour accomplished the following:

- Current AJA elementary school students began to perceive their own middle school as "cool." Immediately they became boosters for the school and stopped pestering their folks about the larger public school possibilities. Their concerns and fears were successfully put to rest and all but two of our current 5th graders have re-enrolled to begin next year at AJA as middle school students.

- New middle school students were picked up in the process. CD invitations were also hand delivered to primary market potentials for the MMSM Tour. Only a few actually came to the event but the t-shirts (our kids love them and wear them constantly) and invitations created a wonderful buzz that has resulted in new middle school students. Our own middle school students really enjoyed the event and it gave them a sense of pride in their middle school which was an unpredicted positive piece of this promotion. Students sell the school. Already, our 2005-2006 middle school numbers have increased by over ten students. Our retention for middle school is at about 95%.
- Parents were visibly moved by this event and had their minds changed by our teachers, the student work displayed, and, most pointedly, by their discussions with our alumni. The success of these now high school students is our best asset. With these students, parents can see the proof of what we say over and over – “our academics are competitive and top notch, and our graduates are prepared.”

What we set out to accomplish and why: Last December, after conferring with the parents of currently enrolled 4th and 5th graders in a parlor meeting, it became apparent that our existing families needed to “be sold” on our sixth through eighth grade middle school program. The need to re-sell these parents was surprising because our middle school academics are highly competitive, in fact excellent. Close to 100% of our graduates have entered and excelled in honors program at our public high schools. And, many of the parents requesting this “pitch” belonged to family groups with longevity at our eight-year-old school. Furthermore, we’d always assumed, given the difficulties of the middle school years both socially and academically, that retaining our elementary school students on through eighth grade graduation should not be a struggle.

True, over the past year recent developments in our school community and in Austin at large made retaining students an uphill battle. Board tinkering, staff changes and specific classroom dynamics created this situation along with the addition of sixth grade in a highly regarded area magnet middle school. Combined, these factors siphoned off a sizeable number of our in-house middle school potential student body for the 2004-2005 academic year. When we conceived of the Magical Middle School Mystery Tour event, it was to mitigate these perceptions and problems.

Noteworthy Because: We consider this practice noteworthy because it worked. It worked because we listened to our students and heard our parents. Also, we allowed ourselves to be self-critical and even quirky in our approach. Our administration and faculty galvanized and succeeded in sharing a goal. This, more than any other factor, created the positive outcome of this promotion.

Advice You Would Give to a School that Wants to Adopt the Practice: Plan ahead. Survey your student body and run focus groups with your potential markets. Create an excitement about the event as early in the school year as possible. And, get a jump on area middle schools running their own similar events. Next year, there will be some facet of the promotion that will be press-worthy. In our market, media coverage is an important ingredient in the recipe for viability. Have something new and/or improved about your school to push.

Meet the Parents

Submitted By:	Jan Goldmann, Director Jacobson Sinai Academy
Contact Information:	18801 NE 22 Ave, North Miami Beach, FL 33180 305-932-9011 jan.goldmann@jacobsonsinaiacademy.org
School Information:	Grades: K-8 Size: 500 Denomination or other affiliation: Reform

Description of the Practice: In looking for a way to entice our parents/students to stay with us through 8th grade, we came up with the “Meet the Parents Program.” A gathering of current 6th and 7th grade parents with parents of our 8th grade students and parents of graduates, it was an opportunity for new parents to learn about the different high schools in our area, both private and public, and hear how our alumni are doing. During the program, alumni students spoke about the classes they were taking, their integration into a new school, and how JSA prepared and over-prepared them. Parents also spoke about why one should keep his/her child at JSA. One parent spoke about what a mistake it was to pull her child out of JSA. It concluded with a question/answer period.

Noteworthy Because: The program was very successful and parents appreciated the information about high school and about the different programs that are available for their students once they graduate JSA.

Systems for Retention

Submitted By:	Jane Taubenfeld Cohen, Head of School South Area Solomon Schechter Day School
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School Information:	Grades: K-8 Size: 230 students Denomination or other affiliation: Conservative

Description of the Practice: In response to a conference with Rheua Stakely, we decided that it was critical to know what issues families have early enough in the school year to make a difference. We created a system that has four essential parts:

1. In the first three to five weeks of school, every family in the school is called by an Educational Leader in the school. (That could be Head of School, Middle School Principal, Curriculum Coordinator, etc). The call is a check-in to see how things are going and if there are any issues. Every phone call is logged. Any issues that come up are followed up on immediately through the correct channels, and the family receives a follow up phone call or email detailing the action taken. Trends are discussed at the Educational Leadership Team meetings and are addressed for improvement.
2. The same process occurs in January. This is actually a critical time because the honeymoon period is over. It is important to note that we do have an open communication policy with parents, but there is a great deal that we do not hear about until we ask directly.
3. In April, a written survey goes out to every family asking some of the same questions. This way, if they were uncomfortable saying it on the phone, they have a chance to write it.
4. In May, a report on trends is given to the Board of Directors of the school.

Major Accomplishments:

1. Families know that they can call the school or email any time, but that they will also be approached by a school leader. They truly appreciate this.
2. So many issues are caught while they are still small and fixed before becoming reasons for someone to leave.
3. Parents feel that the administration really cares.
4. The first year we did this, the attrition rate went down by 7%.

Noteworthy Because: This system is simple enough to institute in any size school. The numbers speak for themselves.

Advice You Would Give to a School that Wants to Adopt the Practice:

1. Make sure that everyone who says they are going to make the calls makes the calls. Once the parents are expecting them, they have to happen.
2. Make sure that there is a system for reporting and follow-up. The calls are useless unless there is clear follow-through, and that can only happen if the results reach the appropriate people in the building.
3. Keep careful records.

III. Parent Ambassadors

Mentor Program

Submitted By:	Jan Goldmann, Director Jacobson Sinai Academy
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School Information:	Grades: K-8 Size: 500 Denomination or other affiliation: Reform

Description of the Practice: Being a new student/family in a school/synagogue community can sometimes be overwhelming. Added to this is the issue of language difficulties and cultural differences. In speaking with many of our new South American families, they had much difficulty with a new home, new and different surroundings, different ways of doing things, etc. Many of the parents expressed difficulty with something as simple as trying to purchase school supplies for their children as they didn't understand what some of the items were on the school supply list. They didn't know what Elmer's glue was! This was something we just did not imagine being a problem.

We began translating many of our documents into Spanish. We also began a mentoring program—matching/pairing veteran families with new families. We tried to match backgrounds, ages of children, languages and addresses. We had an overwhelming response from our veteran families in wanting to help out with this endeavor. They have met their families, gone out to lunch with them, and some have even joined together for Shabbat dinner. As part of the follow-up, I will be speaking to our new families as the new school year begins to find out how helpful this program was for them. They will in turn be asked to be mentors for other new families.

Noteworthy Because: It made the new parents feel more comfortable coming into a new situation; it helped them make friends and made the transition easier for the children. Additionally, the program also helped build the bridge between synagogue and school. Whereas most of our veteran parents were synagogue members, the new parents were not yet. From the veteran parents, the new parents were able to gather information about the various synagogues and find out which was the best fit for them. Many of the relationships between veteran and new families were further cultivated in synagogue and on Shabbat, through Shabbat dinners etc.

Advice You Would Give to a School that Wants to Adopt the Practice: This is not a difficult program to begin, especially with the use of e-mail, but you must find out what the needs of new parents are, as each community is different. This program was primarily built out of the needs of our South American families, but we also have Israeli and Russian families.

An Electronic Forum for Parent Ambassadors

Submitted By:	Helen Quint, JCDS, Director of Admissions and Community Outreach JCDS, Boston's Jewish Community Day School
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School Information:	Grades K-8 Size: 163 students Denomination or other affiliation: Community

Description of the Practice: JCDS, Boston's Jewish Community Day School, has begun using JCDSnet, a moderated password-protected electronic bulletin board developed by the school's Parent Association, to provide resources for Parent Ambassadors, to generate new ideas from them, and to stimulate interest and engagement among those who utilize this vehicle for parent-to-parent communication. Through JCDSnet, Parent Ambassadors can describe scenarios that arise when talking with prospective parents and ask for suggestions about how best to respond.

The Parent Ambassador Forum on JCDSnet was created in April of 2005, as a new component of the networking tool that was launched during the 2003-2004 academic year.

JCDS parents, staff, and trustees can post their ideas and respond to others' comments in the Parent Ambassador Forum on JCDSnet. They can find resource information, i.e. facts and figures to stimulate and strengthen conversations to promote the school, ideas for addressing common misperceptions about day schools in general and JCDS in particular. They can also find links to other resource material there, such as the PEJE newsletter of December 2004-January 2005 with a front page article entitled "Day School Growth and Excellence: Putting Parent Ambassadors to Work."

Use of this electronic bulletin board will work in concert with other vehicles to develop ideas and empower JCDS ambassadors.

Noteworthy Because: The electronic Parent Ambassador Forum expands the reach of important recruitment-related work that is accomplished by individuals and groups, both in and beyond the JCDS community. It welcomes the participation of adults in the JCDS community who want to be involved in school initiatives for Parent Ambassadors without necessarily being able to attend meetings.

By using up-to-date technology which many of our parents use as a regular means of communication, we can reach a large number of JCDS Parent Ambassadors effectively and in accordance with their time availability. The interactive forum provides Ambassadors of the school with a place to learn about what others have said and have done in that role; it also offers them a virtual community to respond to the kinds of issues and questions that come up as they promote the school to prospective families.

IV. Miscellaneous

Family Holiday Enrichment

- Submitted By:** Rabbi Shimon Kramer, Dean
The Jewish Academy
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- School Information:** Grades: PK-1
Size: 45
Denomination or other affiliation: Jewish

Description of the Practice:

- 1) Purim Through the Five Senses: A hands-on integrated Purim experience for the whole family to enjoy. Parents and children were able to choose from a variety of different activity centers. Each center revolved around the theme of Purim, using one of the five senses. Each child received a checklist of activities to cover, and upon completion, received a prize. The activities culminated with a costume parade and festive Purim feast.
- 2) Come Out of Egypt with Us: A hands-on Passover experience for the whole family to enjoy. Each class was joined by their parents, and they enjoyed going together to the various activity centers related to the holiday of Passover. The activities culminated with a delicious model Seder.

Major Accomplishments:

- 1) Attracted hundreds of children within and beyond the school family.
- 2) Existing families (and their relatives and friends) felt more involved in what their children were learning.

Noteworthy Because:

- 1) This practice brings many families through the school doors.
- 2) Being a new school, this practice helps get the word out to the public that our school is full of wonderful learning experiences for the whole family.
- 3) This practice brings a great community feeling to the school families.

Advice You Would Give to a School that Wants to Adopt the Practice: Delegate jobs properly so that it is not all dependent on one person. This includes setting up and cleaning up.