

Making the Case for Jewish Day School

A Discussion of RAVSAK's *Ha Yidion* Magazine

(Spring 2008 Issue)

Admission COP

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Agenda

- Looking Forward to the Assembly
- Setting the Context
- Making the Case
- Resources
- Next Steps

The PEJE Assembly is just 10 days away!

- Over **1350** people attending from **265** schools and **140** non-school organizations in **38** states/provinces!
- **2 out of 7** pre-conference workshops on Sunday morning are about marketing/recruitment
- **22 out of 115** content sessions are on marketing/communication, recruitment, admissions or early childhood/pipeline relationships
- Dedicated meeting time for Admission COP members (or those who might wish to join) on Monday afternoon at 4 pm during the Session 3 block
- Presentation of the PEJE Marketing Awards

Setting the Context

- What does it mean to “make the case” for Jewish Day Schools?
- To whom do we need to make the case?
- Why is this so important?

A Word from the Editor, Barbara Davis **(p. 2)**

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

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

A Word from the Editor, Barbara Davis
(p. 2)

“How do we “sell” what we have to offer? How can we develop an “image” that makes us attractive and appealing to the public we seek to engage? What do we do about the fact that using terms like “product,” “customers,” “sell” “image” and “marketing” makes us, as educators, somewhat uncomfortable?”

Making The Case – Ideas and Arguments

The Courage to be Countercultural ***by Rabbi Lee Buckman (p. 4)***

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

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

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

Securing the Jewish Present ***by Shaul Kerner (p. 6-7)***

“In making the case for Jewish day schools, we often highlight their potential for transmitting the inheritance of our past to the bearers of our future. How are Jewish day schools strengthening Jewish life not twenty years down the road but at this very moment? The answer is found by looking at the impacts that schools have, not necessarily on individual students, but on communities as a whole.

Here are five ways in which the ... day school contributes vitally to the overall health of the Jewish community of which it is a part.”

- 1) Strengthening Local Federations**
- 2) Bridging Synagogue Communities**
- 3) Recruiting and Retaining Jewish Communal Professionals**
- 4) Retaining Jewish Professional Couples**
- 5) Attracting Committed Lay Leaders**

Does it Fit? Unconventional Thoughts About Day School Choice, by Alex Pomson (p. 8-9)

Conventional School-Choice Research

- (1) The academic reputation and quality of the school
- (2) The school's record on discipline and safety
- (3) The religion and social values to which the school is committed
- (4) Its convenience—that is, how easy it is to reach from home

Missing from this list: \$\$\$ is not a factor

Recent Research About Choice Factors of Jewish Parents

- (A) Quality education, attractive educational product
- (B) They're concerned for their child's Jewish future
- (C) (negative) Their children might be disadvantaged by attending a JDS
- (D) They're searching for an institution that can satisfy some of their own personal and social needs as Jewish adults.

Missing from this list: \$\$\$ is not a factor

Does it Fit? Unconventional Thoughts About Day School Choice, by Alex Pomson (p. 8-9)

- “Parents are looking for a school that speaks to them.”
- “Parents want to readily understand what a school stands for and whether they can see themselves standing with it.”
- “It is critical...to help parents see whether they, as parents, fit the school.”
- “To put it crudely, selling a school to parents isn’t like selling a car. It’s not just about the “specs,” the quality of the product and its price. It’s about helping parents—new parents especially—make a decision fraught with existential significance. *This decision says as much about what parents want for their child, as about how they think of themselves as Americans and as Jews.* When it comes to choosing schools, education is just the start of it.”

Does it Fit? Unconventional Thoughts About Day School Choice, by Alex Pomson (p. 8-9)

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

- (1) They should create opportunities for prospective parents to meet current parents and not just to visit with the school’s professionals. Parents want to see if members of the parent body are “their kind of folks.”
- (2) Schools’ promotional literature should include plenty of quotes from parents, and not just of the conventional kind where parents offer a paean to the quality education their children receive. These quotes should be about what parents do in the school and what they get out of the school.
- (3) The school must promote itself in language that goes beyond generic promises of educational excellence. Parents...seek clear and authentic alternatives, not cookie-cutter institutions whose mission statements are barely distinguishable from one another.”

***Using Systematic Data from College Age Alumni to
Address Parent Concerns,
by Leonard Saxe and Fern Chertok (p. 10 & 38)***

*Concerns that keep non-Orthodox parents from choosing
a day school education for their children:*

- *Parents want to know whether day schools will prepare their children to succeed academically in college.*
- *Parents are concerned that the lack of diversity in day schools will leave their children unable to function in a pluralistic society.*
- *Parents want to know if their children will continue to be engaged in Jewish life once they leave day school.*

***THEIR RESEARCH HAS NOT PROVEN ANY OF
THESE CONCERNS TO BE VALID!***

***Using Systematic Data from College Age Alumni to
Address Parent Concerns,
by Leonard Saxe and Fern Chertok (p. 10 & 38)***

“...Sprinkled among every walk of life...are a handful of people with a truly extraordinary knack of making friends and acquaintances... the Connectors.”

Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*

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

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

Why Jewish Day Schools? by Rory Paul (p. 12-13)

- A summary of recent research on assimilation and intermarriage trends
- “If Jewish education is both the deterrent and the remedy to the declining trends in Jewish identity, are Jewish day schools the answer?”

“We Will Understand and We Will Do”

by David Lyon (p. 14-15)

- *Na’aseh ve-nishmah* (Exodus 24:7) has meant that historically Jewish learning has involved first doing, and only sometimes understanding as well. Rote learning and memorization has too often been the mode in *cheder* and supplemental religious schools.
- Lyon discusses the challenge this presents to our generation to make meaning and relevancy in Jewish learning.

A Parent's Perspective

by Linda Kamras (p. 16-17)

- This is an amazing personal testimonial from a parent about the day school choices and experiences of her family and her children. Besides sharing wonderful examples of the difference day school made to them, it offers a viewpoint that would be so valuable to another parent considering day school for the first time, addressing common fears and concerns as well as their solutions.
- Who in your school's community has a story worth telling? Can you facilitate their getting it down on paper for your use?

The Cases That Convinced Us

(p. 18-21)

- RAVSAK collected lots of parent testimonials. You can do the same!
- Consider using a product like Audio Acrobat (www.audioacrobat.com) which lets you record anything you want using your telephone or a microphone on your computer – you can ask parents to call in to tell their story and then the recording is yours. Or have parents come in to your office to tell their story while you record it, then have it transcribed.
- Use these stories in your school tours. Add audio and written clips to your website. Add written clips to your publications, newsletters, and school communications. The stories sell the school for you!

The Boards' Role in Making the Case

by Alisa Doctoroff (p. 22-23)

“A board’s role in raising the profile, broadcasting the success, and gaining adherents for Jewish day schools falls into three categories:

- 1) building schools that are known for excellence
- 2) developing schools that are seen as “on the move,” growing and vibrant
- 3) advocating for day schools”

Consider sharing this article with your board members and facilitating a discussion at the next board meeting about how to maximize their role as school ambassadors.

Leveraging Funds and Passions

by Idana Goldberg (p. 24-25)

What motivates a donor to support Jewish day school education?

Goldberg explains the MATCH initiative and its success and impact on bringing new dollars into the day school community.

- Leverage
- Value
- Engagement
- Vision and Leadership
- Mission Above All
- Know Your Donors

***The Significance of Israel in Jewish Day School,
by Reuven Greenwald (p. 26 & 38)***

- This article shares some of the reasons that Israel matters in day school education, and describes the benefits of a strong connection to Israel.

***Making the Case for Day School Education
in the Reform Movement,***

by Josh Elkin and Suzanne Kling (p. 28-29)

- “For day schools in the Reform movement, the outlook is promising. Day school advocates are finding themselves more and more aligned with some of the leadership of the Reform movement, and more Reform families are beginning to consider Reform and/or community day school options.”
- “Growth in enrollment of Reform families in Jewish day schools is likely to be “slow and steady,” with incremental increases of exponential value for the movement.”

***Making the Case for Day School Education
in the Reform Movement,***

by Josh Elkin and Suzanne Kling (p. 28-29)

- “Signs of this are already becoming clear: more and more rabbinical students at HUC-JIR are day school graduates themselves; more Reform rabbis are advocating for day school education from their pulpits and in personal conversations; more families from Reform backgrounds are considering Reform and community schools for their children.”
- “The impact of bold messages like these has begun to reach the individual communal level, where it can make a real difference. [In a bulletin message] the rabbi eloquently shared his pride in the local Reform day school and summarized the cultural “landslide” in the changing attitude toward day school education in the Reform movement. “Jewish day school education is not for everyone,” the rabbi wrote, “but it is for more of us than we might have expected.”

***Making the Case for Day School Education
in the Reform Movement,
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- In another synagogue’s newsletter, the director of the early childhood center wrote passionately about how she wished more parents considered continuing Jewish education after preschool: “Why would parents send their children to a Jewish preschool and not want to continue with Jewish day school or religious school?” She concluded, “I don’t mean to preach here...Just letting you know that your children are thriving in this environment and I would love to see it continue.”
- “Messages like these will surely lead more families to consider Reform and community day school options.”

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

by Karra Greenberg (p. 30-31)

- “In my view, there are four direct benefits of day school education for children.
 1. Jewish day schools instill Jewish identity and thus stability for individuals in an increasingly challenging world.
 2. Jewish day schools build a strong Jewish social network that proves an enormous lifelong asset.
 3. Jewish day schools provide the tools to live and grow Jewishly.
 4. Day school children learn Jewish ethical principles to make the world a better, Jewish place.”
- “Additionally, there is at least one major benefit of Jewish day school education for parents. Enlarged social circles.”

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

by Jeffrey Lasday (p. 32-33)

- “Parent’s concerns will focus on what *might* be lost. It is our job to focus on what *will* be gained.
- When making the case for Jewish day schools to parents it is important for us to be able to understand and validate real concerns, acknowledge when day school just might not be the right choice, provide information when information is lacking, and *most importantly, to present passionately our own beliefs, our own case for why Jewish day school is the right choice.*”

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

by Jeffrey Lasday (p. 32-33)

“Reasons and perceptions why parents don’t send their children to Jewish day schools:

- High tuition cost
- Fewer social opportunities
- Fewer elective class choices
- Limited extracurricular activities
- Too Jewish
- Too intimidating
- Dual curriculum is too demanding for their child
- Belief in public school/public education
- Will limit college opportunities
- Day school is not even on their radar”

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

by Jeffrey Lasday (p. 32-33)

“In helping parents wrestle with this decision, *our job* is to:

- Ensure that potential families can learn about Jewish day school through high quality and readily available marketing efforts so that families are at least aware that there is a choice to be made.
- Carefully listen to and validate potential parental concerns.
- Provide accurate and up-to-date information that corrects misconceptions.
- Assist parents to sort through conflicting values.
- Make our own passionate case for the high value of a Jewish day school education. Why do you believe that a Jewish day school education is in the best interest of their child?”

Resources

- *Back to School: Jewish Day School in the Lives of Adult Jews*, by Alex Pomson, Wayne State University Press, March 2008. Now available!
- *What Difference Does Day School Make? The Impact of Day School: A Comparative Analysis of Jewish College Students*, by Fern Chertok and Len Saxe, http://www.peje.org/knowledge/research/alumni_study.php
- Why Jewish Day School? Making the Case Using Propositions to Suit Specific Rationales, <http://www.peje.org/docs/WhyJewishDaySchool.pdf>
- Creating a Case Statement for a Jewish Day School, <http://www.peje.org/docs/Guidebook.pdf>
- Many other PEJE resources on Making the Case may be found at http://www.peje.org/advocacy/making_the_case/

Next Steps

- With whom will you share the articles and ideas found in this magazine?
- With whom can you start a dialogue about ways to improve your school's ability to make the case?
 - Parent ambassadors?
 - Faculty and staff?
 - Board members?
 - Community members?
 - Rabbis or synagogue educators?
 - Early childhood educators or preschool directors?
- What ideas or topics particularly stand out as most applicable to your school and situation? How can you adapt them and use them immediately?

Next Steps

- Continue the conversation on the Admission CoP Google Group! Post your ideas, questions, and suggestions for the group to share.
- If you need information about how to join the Google Group, contact rebecca@peje.org