

Money Money Money Money

ROSLYN B. STEIN

AIN KEMACH, AIN TORAH

The public schools may have their problems, but generally, at the beginning of each year, they have a guaranteed, reliable source of funds – taxpayer dollars paid by those who have children in school and those who do not. Long ago Americans, as a community, decided that it was in their common interest to have a well-educated populace with the costs spread over the tax paying population.

This is not a pitch for public funding of private schools. Rather, it is an observation that attending a Jewish school is a voluntary choice, as is supporting that school through tuition, subsidies, grants and contributions. The responsibility of a Jewish day school's board and the executive is enormous. While most lay leaders would prefer to concentrate on policy making, marketing, and recruitment, increasingly, the imperative of funding and resource development rules their days – and nights.

The “case” for the importance of Jewish education and its role in continuity and leadership, has been made often. In particular, Dr. Jonathan Woocher, president of JESNA, has been a remarkable, motivational cheer leader through his articles and speeches. Other high profile visionaries have made individual and collective contributions through funding vehicles including PEJE, Avi Chai, and the Gruss Foundation. There are board members and involved individuals who have contributed generously; federations, in varying degrees, provide subsidies to qualified schools in their areas.

But what is missing are continuous reliable sources of ongoing operating funds at levels sufficient to enable

the schools to focus on academic excellence and community service in an atmosphere of permanence and financial stability.

Chicagoland Jewish High School (CJHS), which will open with its first freshman and sophomore classes in September 2001, has been the beneficiary of support, both monetary and technical, from several sources and organizations. We are particularly fortunate to have a Board composed of people who are community leaders, active in the area's Solomon Schechter lower schools, the Midwest Region of United Synagogue, their synagogues and the Chicago Federation. The entire Conservative community has come together to welcome CJHS, helping to emphasize the commitment of CJHS to educating students with a wide range of Jewish backgrounds and preparation.

To date, our package of funding and resources includes:

- A PEJE *Madrikh* who has been an invaluable resource to the Board of Directors and to me personally. In addition, PEJE has offered support in the areas of development and networking with start up schools;
- Avi Chai subsidies for the Principals Center programs at the Harvard University School of Education;
- An Avi Chai grant for marketing along with sample ads (once we open, we hope to qualify for other funding, including a preparatory track for several of our students, subsidies for immigrant students and a loan for a building project);
- The Solomon Schechter Day School Association,

which provides technical assistance and the imprimatur of a national standard-setting organization;

- JESNA, which connects us with resources, networking, strategic advice and information;
- Start up donations from Board members; and,
- A \$1 million gift earmarked for tuition subsidies from a Board member, which will drop the tuition from \$11,000 to \$6,500 for the first 50 students for each of four years.

Particularly helpful for a start-up school, Avi Chai and PEJE offer a package of targeted funding, networking and technical services. CJHS could not have started without all these kinds of support in addition to its own Board donations. It is a “known fact” that private Jewish day schools cannot operate on tuition alone. Even if every student were to pay full tuition (approximately \$18,000 to \$20,000 per student per year for a high school education), this would not provide sufficient dollars to cover operating expenses.

Launching a high school such as CJHS requires many different types of funds: start-up, annual operating, special project, capital/building and endowment. However, just as in politics where the demands and dangers of 24/7 fundraising are now being realized, Jewish day school executives and board members must spend a disproportionate amount of time thinking about, cultivating and raising money. However, *ain kemach, ain Torah*.

As a principal of a new high school that has been blessed with devoted board members and community organizations, I know that we have to overly rely on their generosity because there is currently no way to spread the responsibility for ongoing, reliable funding to a broad based group of Jews who will consistently invest in all kinds of formal and informal Jewish education. As a community with common issues and concerns for our future, we have to develop a strategic plan to routinely raise, year after year, the funds necessary to provide a quality day school education to those currently enrolled and ensure the education of generations to come.

Should we consider voluntary contributions to Jewish education as Jewish taxation? That would be akin to taxes by localities for public education. Shouldn't we be talking about purchasing a stake in the future of the community? With the growing interest in Jewish education, the Jewish community must face the reality of the cost of a quality Jewish education.

Rather than debate the value of a voucher system, we must deal with the necessity of increasing the number of shareholders, or taxpayers, in high quality, widely available Jewish education. This will require a discipline we have not seen, outside of crisis campaigns.

How could this happen? Perhaps Federation is no longer the organization to tackle this responsibility, over and above what it currently provides on a formula basis. Perhaps the movements/denominations are the most appropriate vehicles because donors would be more likely to feel an ideological match or comfort level. As a complementary process, whereby a group within the movement, in the Conservative movement it could be the Solomon Schechter Day School Association, would review standards and issue annual reports to investors to inform donors about the accomplishments and the problems faced by the Jewish school system. Such a process would ease fears that reliable ongoing funding would make the schools complacent rather than freeing them up to deliver a better “product.” One thing is sure: We must find some solutions before the Jewish education system is no longer able to sustain the quality that the community demands and deserves

We know that the number of people who fund Jewish education is disproportionate to the size of our Jewish community. These funders feel over-committed and stressed by community needs, often juggling good against good. There are many others who have the potential to do so, but have not been motivated to support Jewish education on an on-going basis.

We have had many commissions and committees exploring all kinds of issues. As just one example, the Mandel Commission stated very important principles for Jewish education. But little has been done specifically

about mobilizing the community for financial commitment. We know the issues, but we still need a well-respected group to meet within a designated period of time (months, not years) to structure a strategic plan with practical next steps, designating who will do what with specific timeframes for accomplishments. Once that happens we will secure Jewish education in this country.

How can we engage and inspire additional funders to plight their troth with those who are already providing financial sustenance for Jewish education? We must decide if we have the collective will to increase the communal pot of money for education or if we will stumble along because our voluntary system cannot produce a reliable, adequate source of ongoing funds.

Let us fashion a plan to provide *kemach* for *Torah*.

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