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## Portrait of Educational Excellence

Building an excellent school is an art that requires not only expertise but also tremendous imagination and creativity. This portrait is intended to be a guide for a process that continues to evolve over the school's life.

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### Compelling, Coherent Educational Vision

A vision is a picture of the future -- of the school, the graduates, and the greater community. The Jewish Day Schools should attend to such topics as: the ideal graduate, the role of Jewish text learning, the place of theology and Jewish practice, the place of Hebrew language, a philosophy of learning, the role of parents, connections to synagogue and community, a relationship to America and Israel, and a view of the future of Jewish life.

A vision should be compelling, bold, and exciting -- something people want to be a part of and to achieve. A powerful Jewish vision is important for maximizing the school's impact on the Jewish future of students. All members of the school community should be brought into sharing the vision so that they can work toward realizing it.

The vision should guide and inform all the details of the school. It should shape everything from curriculum to staff hiring, from scheduling to school displays, from food to how people interact with one another.

The lack of a powerful vision limits the school's ability to reach for lofty goals, achieve high standards, and provide meaning. The lack of its implementation leaves the school without unity and integrity.

The vision does not dictate behaviors but establishes values that guide the school. In order to foster the growth of powerful visions there is a need for think tanks -- intellectuals, theologians, and leaders -- to come together about bold new visions for Jewish day schools and thereby about new visions for the Jewish future.

#### Indicators of the Presence of Vision

- There is a clear process by which to articulate the vision.
- The vision is written.
- The vision is published.
- The vision is being tested.
- The vision is reflected in the daily life of the school.

- There is ongoing implementation of and reflection upon the vision.
- All stakeholders—parents, teachers, and lay leaders—promote ownership of the vision.
- The vision is progressively tuned in response to the views of the stakeholders and to changing circumstances.

#### Defined Role for Jewish Values, Text Study, and Practice

The Jewish character of the school should flow from its vision and should imbue all activities, events, facilities, and school practices. The school's Jewish values should be clearly articulated and modeled. Jewish texts and learning should find a prominent place throughout the life of the school: in the classroom, the boardroom, and the lunchroom.

#### *Indicators/Characteristics of Success*

- The school incorporates text study into the curriculum, staff meetings, parent gatherings, Board and key committee meetings.
- The school sees text as the foundation of Jewish life.
- The school's ongoing text study leads to action.
- The school exhibits a strong presence of Judaic culture in multiple forms (literature, language, visual arts, music, and dance).
- The school has articulated a clear statement of its Jewish observance pattern.
- The school's culture and daily routines clearly express Jewish values.
- The Head, the Jewish Studies staff, and all other staff members actively promote Jewish text study, and practice.
- The school has a strong commitment to Jewish family education.

#### School Climate

School climate reflects how people treat each other in the school and what values are reflected in interpersonal interactions in the school, such as respect and having high expectations from all. A positive school climate is an outcome of a school that has given a great deal of thought to its vision and implementation of that vision.

#### *Indicators/Characteristics of Success*

- The school reinforces being a mensch as a regular activity.
- The school bases regular behaviors on derech eretz, tzedakah, gemulit hasdim and tikkun (applies to students, teachers, parents, and administrators alike).
- The school has high expectations for students and teachers.
- The school provides opportunities in all realms for display of student work, and the school pays attention to student accomplishments.
- The school uses Hebrew in its public life.

#### Effective Board Composition and Function

The Board guides the school and supports the Head. An effective board does not micro-manage; it sets board policies, does long-term planning, raises funds, and performs financial oversight. A strong working relationship between Board and Head is a critical indicator of success.

Guiding a school requires a great deal of expertise; therefore, a board must acquire knowledge, proficiency, and expertise to function effectively. Members must represent a diversity of expertise including, but not limited to, law, financial management, education, public relations, fund raising, and human resources management. The Board also needs to function effectively as a group; therefore, a strong board has members who have extensive experience serving on other boards and know the effective board process. The ongoing growth of the skills of the Board via board training is critical as the school evolves.

*Indicators/Characteristics of Success*

- The Board supports the broad vision and the specific mission of the school.
- The Board's profile meets the needs of the school with a diversity of expertise and appropriate representation.
- The Board has the optimal range of committees with appropriate committee structures.
- The Board commits to develop the skills of its members.
- The Board operates according to an adopted set of by-laws that are periodically reviewed.
- The Board maintains an active year-round nominating committee.
- The Board maintains an active human resource development effort focused on cultivating lay leadership.
- The Board reflects on its own process.
- The Board plans occasional retreats as needed.
- The Board evaluates itself and the Head annually.

Sound Planning, Decision-Making and Financial Management by the Lay and Professional Leadership

Individuals who are establishing a new school should not engage in minimalist thinking, but rather recognize what it will take to run a quality school. They must possess the capacity to set bold, yet realistic financial goals and make well researched and carefully considered decisions. Board training and planning are key to careful planning and decision-making.

*Indicators/Characteristics of Success*

- The Board works off an updated strategic plan.
- The Board decisions are based on solid demographic research that is accepted by all stakeholders.
- The Board oversees accurate and comprehensive minute-taking of all meetings, and they are distributed for correction and formal adoption so that important decisions are carefully documented.
- The Board designates a central location for records to simplify sharing of information.
- The Board has a clear understanding of the role of resource development and is active in the area.
- The Board manages resources soundly.
- The institution is financially viable with adequate cash flow, reserves, appropriate internal Board oversight, long term financial planning tied to strategic plan, and annual budgets emerge from the long-term financial plan.
- A budget committee meets regularly.
- A clearly articulated budget development process allows for input from faculty and parent. Head's collaboration with Board committees, and final approval resting with the Board.
- The policies and structures for tuition and financial aid are both clearly articulated.

Lay and Professional Collaboration

Effective school functioning is tied to the quality of the collaboration between lay and professional leadership. The relationship should be supportive and mutually enriching. Lay and professional should reflect upon, refine, and evaluate the way they are working together in order to maximize collaborative potential.

*Indicators/Characteristics of Success*

- Effective collaboration between the lay and professional leadership is based on a common vision and shared commitment.
- Communication is open and ongoing.
- Roles are clarified so that it is clear who makes which decisions.

- There are clear lines of authority between lay and professional leadership, and there are procedures for discussing and resolving issues of jurisdiction as they inevitably arise.
- The Board understands its role as overseers, not as managers.
- The Board supports and nurtures the Head.
- Policy and operations are clearly demarcated.

### Skilled Professional Staff: Administrative and Instructional

The human resources of the school are a critical key to its achieving excellence. The school Head should be a strong visionary leader with expertise and experience in the complex tasks of running a school. The teachers need to be experienced and trained. All of the staff needs to be exposed to ongoing development of their skills in order for the school to grow. There should be a collegial relationship among teachers and opportunities for them to discuss and reflect on their educational practice.

#### *Indicators/Characteristics of Success*

- The strong visionary leadership of the Head permeates the entire school.
- Professional staff discuss the key issues within their practice in a collegial environment; participate meaningfully in educational decision making.
- An appropriate compensation scale draws excellent teachers into the school.
- Teachers are actively involved in curriculum planning, implementation, review, and refinement.
- The school clearly structures and delineates responsibilities for educational and administrative staff.
- Professionals and lay people collaborate.
- The school appropriately supervises and supports its teachers.

### Professional Development

A school's growth and excellence is tied to the growth of its professional staff-80% of schools' budgets are composed of salary costs. Professional development can be done in-house, city-wide (at the regional, nationally, or internationally).

#### *Indicators/Characteristics of Success*

- Professional development supplements the skills of the Head and teachers.
- Professional development programs are tied to the vision/mission of the school, to its culture, and to the supervision and support structure for teachers.
- Professional development is ongoing for administrators and teachers alike.
- Programs take place both onsite, for just the school faculty, and off-site in collegial settings: other faculty-citywide, nationwide, and internationally.
- Programs provide ongoing intellectual development for faculty both in general education and through exposure to in-depth study of Jewish texts.
- The school facilitates the professional staff's sharing among themselves their professional development experiences.
- The Head and teachers help determine their own professional development.
- Professional development uses a broad range of reflective techniques including journaling, videotaping, and other reflective methods.
- The program balances individual, small-group, and faculty-wide experiences.

### Ongoing Reflection and Self-Evaluation

Institutions that can adopt a reflective posture can continue to learn, evolve, and improve themselves.

#### *Indicators/Characteristics of Success*

- The Board effectively uses consultants, includes process time at each morning meeting, reviews the Head, and holds retreats.
- The Board and the Head collaborate to check goals at regular intervals.
- Continuous discussion and reflection by the teachers on teaching and learning fosters the development of staff culture and the cultivation of self-critical attitudes.
- All key staff participate in an ongoing curricular review.
- Parents have channels for communicating their concerns to the Head and the Board.
- The school periodically surveys parents about its operations.
- A consultant serves as a "critical friend" to help the school develop a habit of reflection.

### Effective Schooling Practices

A school of excellence will be knowledgeable about the research, techniques, and programs in general education. Findings in cognitive research, curricula for moral education, new techniques, technology implementation, and new materials for the teaching of math are just some examples of types of information that schools need to keep up with and to learn from the general educational community. (See list below for more details.)

#### *Indicators/Characteristics of Success*

- The school recognizes the importance of addressing the presence of individual differences among students (e.g., learning disabilities, use of the multiple intelligence framework; use of left-handed students, enrichment needs, and training of staff).
- The school develops cross-disciplinary units of study and uses attention to the arts as an integrator.
- Learning is constructivist and hands-on where students make their own discoveries and meaning from authentic experiences.
- The school uses new strategies that enable students to be more active in the assessment process.
- The school has high expectations of all students at all levels of ability.
- The school recognizes team teaching as an important technique.
- The school maintains programs that deal with social and emotional development (how to be a mensch) or those that explicitly incorporate an emphasis on moral, social, and emotional development in the school culture.
- The school has a sophisticated understanding of the appropriate place of technological resources both in the service of the curriculum and mission of the school and in the integration of technological resources into the curriculum.
- The school has high rates of student and faculty retention.

### Cultivating and Maintaining Key Community Linkages

A school is only a part of children's lives as Jews. To grow and enrich the total lives of Jews, there must be linkages to other institutions and approaches to Jewish living through synagogues, youth groups, and camps.

#### *Indicators/Characteristics of Success*

- The school makes efforts to create links with home, synagogue and broader community (Jewish Federation, JCC, Israel, FSU), higher education, business, and industry.
- The school maintains effective communication with parents and the broader community.
- The school develops and maintains an effective parent-school partnership.
- Formal educational programs are coordinated with informal programs (e.g., camping, Israeli Shabbaton, youth groups).
- The school seeks the partnership with and involvement of key rabbis within the nearby communities.
- Community service is built into the educational program.

### Marketing/Public Relations/Recruitment

Adequate enrollment is one of the most difficult and most important factors in establishing the success and thus the future success, of a new school. Convincing parents to send their children to an unopened yet existing school is exceedingly difficult. Therefore the marketing program for the school must be very carefully considered and of the highest caliber. It needs to be supported by all stakeholders in order for the school to maximize its credibility in the eyes of prospective parents. It should be ongoing and well funded.

#### *Indicators/Characteristics of Success*

- An appropriate budget allocation ensures a full marketing program.
- A quality consultant leads the effort (either from the Board or from the outside).
- A well-designed and produced packet of information presents the school in a credible and attractive manner.
- The Board, the Head, and the staff are all involved in contacts with prospective parents.
- Networking with community leaders and other institutions promotes the school.
- Multiple methods of delivery include parlor meetings, ad campaigns, media use, and public relations.
- A continual stream of inquiries and information requests are coming in.
- A substantial deposit amount (often \$500) is requested of prospective parents.
- As the opening date draws near there are a reasonable number of deposits from committed parents.
- Already committed parents help draw in prospective parents.
- Ongoing contact establishes credibility with prospective parents, from the time they express interest until the school opens and they send their child.
- Once the school opens, efforts to maximize student retention are focused on already enrolled students.

### Fundraising: Annual and Long Term

Schools need to develop sophisticated fundraising plans in order to build and maintain schools of excellence.

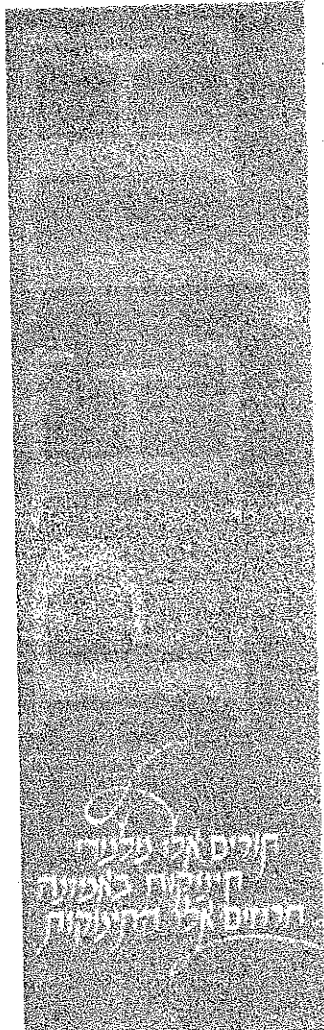
#### *Indicators/Characteristics of Success*

- The fundraising plan supports both the school's vision and its current initiatives.
- The Board provides appropriate leadership for and involvement in fundraising.
- The Annual campaign, including broad-based giving opportunities aimed at maximizing participation, is a permanent feature of the school's operation.
- There is ongoing cultivation of new donors along with stewardship of existing donors.
- The roles that lay people and professionals play in fundraising are clear.
- The fundraising plan establishes links into the broader community.

### Special Middle School Features: Meeting Adolescent Needs

#### *Indicators/Characteristics of Success*

- The middle school community (faculty, students, parents, Board, and administration) shares a common vision.
- Teachers are committed to young adolescents and are knowledgeable about their needs.
- Every student has an adult advocate and regular time for interaction.
- Adequate planning time is provided for teams of teachers.
- Flexible/block scheduling allows for variety as well as for some elective slots.
- The curriculum is challenging, integrative and exploratory.
- Varied teaching and learning approaches, along with assessment and evaluation, promote learning.



and support success for all students.

- Students have guidance and support services that promote of health and safety.
- Extracurricular activities are of the highest quality.
- Families are engaged in a partnership with the school around the educational program and learning process through communication and meaningful, defined roles.
- The connection between school and community is positive and is expressed in service and business partnerships, and the use of community resources.
- Students have opportunities to take responsibility and to make meaningful decisions.

Teachers and school children —  
precious jewels of our commitment.  
מורים וילדים —

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