



United Jewish Federation

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Consulting Report:  
*Jewish Day School Education in San Diego County*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Date Submitted for Client Approval

*December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2003*

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's of  
Business Administration Degree  
Graduate School of Business Administration  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

A Jewish day school education is one of the primary ways to ensure Jewish continuity. The data presented in this report illustrate the numerous variables that contribute to parental choice for their children's education. The San Diego Jewish day school community, which is comprised of five different schools with various grade level configurations, offers parents the opportunity to provide their children with a continuous Jewish day school education. The United Jewish Federation (UJF), in conjunction with the Agency for Jewish Education (AJE) and each of the San Diego Jewish day schools, sponsored this study to determine how to reach their target market more effectively and thus increase enrollment.

### Problem Statement and Objectives

The United Jewish Federation seeks a better understanding of the various drivers that lead a Jewish family to choose, not choose, or opt-out of, a private Jewish day school education. Once these drivers are understood, recruitment tactics and enrollment campaigns can be developed that specifically address issues most crucial to the Jewish parent. Only a small percentage of Jewish students in San Diego County are attending Jewish day school. Further, the overall national trend shows an increase in attendance at Jewish day schools, but enrollment in San Diego remains flat. The goal of this marketing research project is to identify the variables that contribute to a Jewish parent's decisions concerning their child's education.

The primary project objectives are as follows:

**Objective #1:** Determine the mix of variables that contribute to a parent's selection of Jewish day schools as well as why some parents opt-out along the way.

**Objective #2:** Determine the mix of variables that contribute to a parent's non-selection of Jewish day schools.

**Objective #3:** Utilize the data from objectives #1 and #2 to suggest themes for a marketing communications program.

### Background and Market Overview

The ability to efficiently elucidate a Jewish world-view is the primary advantage of a Jewish education. Lacking a specifically Jewish-centric education, Jewish parents are challenged in their efforts to pass on a deep and coherent understanding of the Jewish faith and heritage to their children. A demographic study of the Jewish population in San Diego sponsored by the UJF determined that, of the estimated 8,900 Jewish children between the ages of 6 and 17 who are being raised Jewish, 24.7% receive(d) no form of Jewish education. The remaining 75.3% receive(d) Jewish education in one of two ways: 1) after-school educational programs provided by local synagogues or, 2) attendance at full-time Jewish day schools. Only 12.1% currently attend a Jewish day school<sup>1</sup>. Overall private school enrollment in San Diego County has increased 33.1% while enrollment in San Diego's Jewish day schools remains flat. Thus, there is a compelling potential for enrollment growth.

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<sup>1</sup> United Jewish Federation. "The Jewish Community Study of San Diego County: 2003." Powerpoint Presentation, September 7th, 2003. Slide 51.

The current state of education in California may also prove to be a key decision driver for parents to increasingly choose Jewish day school education over public education. Currently there are two significant trends impacting K-12 public education in the state of California. The first is the move towards standards and accountability. The second major external factor impacting California public schools is the state government's current fiscal crisis.

## **Methodology**

### ***Primary Research – Quantitative***

Quantitative primary data collection was conducted via an internet survey. A link to the comprehensive on-line survey was sent to the United Jewish Federation email list, as well as to the Jewish day schools and pre-schools who distribute email newsletters. The survey was emailed to approximately 4,000 Jewish San Diegans.

### ***Primary Research – Qualitative***

Qualitative primary data collection was conducted via a three-person focus group composed of current and past (parents that had opted out) users of the Jewish day school educational system. In-depth interviews with non-users of Jewish day schools provided additional data.

### ***Secondary Research***

Jewish day school enrollment data was collected and analyzed. A comprehensive review of the literature was conducted to understand the general features of day schools both locally and nationally. Exploratory research provided insight into the social and political trends that are affecting or could affect enrollment.

## **Findings**

### ***Primary Research – Quantitative***

Of the 940 survey participants, the typical respondent was inmarried (both people Jewish) and 66% of total responses (parents could select more than one response) had a child or children in the age range of interest. Most respondents indicated that being Jewish is very important to them and had received supplemental Jewish education during childhood.

Several parents indicated that they had received information from a Jewish day school at some point. The most common materials received were brochures, followed by parents actively calling the school themselves. Parents indicated that brochures, detailed web sites, and open houses would be the most useful media when researching Jewish day schools.

Over half of the parents indicated their children do or will attend a Jewish day school. Of those parents who indicated that they do not send their children to Jewish day school, half said they would consider doing so and the other half stated they would not consider Jewish day schools an option. Users of Jewish day school education were surveyed about their satisfaction levels as well as whether they intend to keep their children in the Jewish day school educational system for the tenure of their education.

In general, parents were very satisfied. Parents who indicated they would remove their child after Jewish pre-school cited tuition cost, the quality of public schools in their area, and the preference for children to be integrated with many students as the primary motivating factors. Parents who indicated they would remove their child after Jewish primary school cited integration and the quality of public schools as primary motivating factors, but NOT tuition. Parents who indicated that they would remove their child after Jewish middle school cited child's choice as the primary factor followed by the quality of public schools as primary motivating factors, but NOT tuition. Suggestions for improvement were offered such as improved focus on Hebrew, better academic standards, and better discipline of unruly children.

The 50% who indicated they WOULD CONSIDER a Jewish day school education cited class size, quality of education, declining quality of public education, Judaic studies, school performance on standardized tests, awards of the student body, morals and values of the faculty, faculty credentials, track record for college acceptances, and financial aid as very important factors that would influence their decision-making process. They cited tuition cost and the quality of public schools in their neighborhood as the factors PREVENTING enrollment. Those who responded that tuition was prohibitive indicated that \$4-6,000 per year per child is fair for a Jewish day school education. Average tuition for the five day schools in San Diego is \$9,900.

The 50% who indicated they would NOT consider a Jewish day school education cited preference for supplemental Jewish education, preference for child integration, and the sufficient quality of public school education in their areas as very important factors that would influence their decision-making process.

### ***Primary Research – Qualitative (Focus Group with past and current users)***

Each of the three participants indicated they initially chose the day school experience because they wanted their children in an environment that was supportive of being Jewish. Each of the participants indicated they were very satisfied with the teaching of Jewish customs, culture, and traditions. Negatives cited were a lack of academic rigor, compared to the level and quality of work required in public school, as well as a lack of discipline.

### ***Primary Research – Qualitative (In-depth Interviews with non-users)***

All eight interviewees are raising their children Jewish. Each indicated they observed Jewish holidays and that their child was or would be bar/bat mitzvahed. However, there was a consensus among the group that diversity and exposure to a variety of children was important to them. Parents felt that the combination of supplemental Jewish education and the observance of Jewish traditions at home provided their children the necessary foundation in Jewish culture and faith.

The major factor keeping interviewees from considering Jewish day school education was the superior quality of secular education found at other schools both public and private. When parents were asked if there was anything that could be done to convince them to enroll their children in a Jewish day school the majority flatly stated 'no'. For those that said 'yes,' affordable tuition and a better quality education than secular offerings would cause them to reconsider.

## Summary and Conclusions

Fifty percent of Jewish day school parents surveyed indicated they plan on keeping their children enrolled for the tenure of the child's education. These parents were very satisfied with the Jewish day school education their children received. For parents who indicated that they would remove their child from the Jewish educational system after pre-school, tuition is the primary motivator; after primary school, the desire for integration is the primary driver; and after middle school, child's choice is the primary driver. Suggested areas for improvement, cited by survey respondents and focus group participants, were to improve discipline of disrespectful and disruptive students and to upgrade the quality of both Hebrew and secular educational standards.

Approximately 50% of "non-users" who responded to the on-line survey indicated they would consider Jewish day school for their children, thus affirming the existence of a sizeable untapped potential for increased enrollment. These potential users are attracted to schools with small class size, a proven track record for high quality education and college acceptances. Further, financial aid was cited as an important factor. Respondents suggested annual tuition rates between \$4,000 and \$6,000 per year. Average tuition for the five day schools in San Diego is \$9,900.

More than 50% of surveyed non-users, as well as those who participated in the non-user in-depth interviews, do not appear likely to consider Jewish day school education. Survey respondents in these groups believed that Jewish day schools lacked a commitment to high quality secular education. Respondents stated the quality of education did not warrant the substantial financial investment. Further, Jewish day school non-participants suggest the day schools lack diversity. Finally, many families have chosen to relocate to specific San Diego neighborhoods to gain access to quality private and public educational options.

## Recommendations

The research findings suggest that there are several segments in the Jewish day school market. Reaching each segment requires a multi-faceted marketing and recruitment effort. There are three segments in the market:

1. Parents who *do* send their child(ren) to Jewish day school
2. Parents who *would consider or would like* to send their child(ren) to Jewish day school
3. Parents who *would not* send their child(ren) to Jewish day school

General recommendations include clearly defining the mission and goals of each day school, improving each school's web presence to outline and highlight differentiable offerings, and instituting a consistent and standardized exit interview process. Further recommendations include demonstrating academic rigor at Jewish day schools by participating in standardized testing and academic competitions used by public schools as well as developing a tiered pricing strategy so that tuition falls in a range accessible to middle-income families.

Targeted recommendations are aimed at two segments: Current users (retention) and potential users (recruitment). Retention strategies include publication of college acceptance statistics, mentoring programs between older and younger students, and development of a pipeline strategy for students moving from one day school level to



another. Recruitment strategies include pre-school outreach programs, tours of day schools, a centralized summary of Jewish day school features on the UJF web site, and outreach programs to parents with students leaving elementary school which emphasize the safety of a Jewish day school environment for teens.