

A Sharp New Advocacy Tool for Jewish Day Schools

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Jewish day schools make a difference in the lives of children, the educators who learn with them, and the communities they serve. However, with escalating costs, a lagging economy, and disruptive new educational models, the sustainability of day schools has become an existential challenge.

We've long encouraged schools to clarify their missions and articulate their cases with strength, emotion, and evidence. In turn, they've learned to sharpen their value propositions and use data that demonstrates a significant return on investment.

Research conducted from the within the Jewish world in recent years has supported the argument for Jewish day school education. Now, a new academic study provides dramatic evidence about the power of faith-based education to help Jewish day schools advocate more forcefully.

William Jeynes, a senior fellow at the Witherspoon Institute in Princeton, New Jersey – not a Jewish day school professional – has published an important paper in the *Peabody Journal of Education* that notes: “attending private religious schools is associated with the highest level of academic achievement among the three school types [religious private schools, charter schools, and public schools], even when sophisticated controls are used to adjust for socioeconomic status.”

Jeynes' data, which derives from a meta-analysis of 90 studies on a variety of educational institutions, is extremely relevant for those of us making the case for Jewish day school. Its very existence – which came to our attention via the [Council for American Private Education \(CAPE\)](#) – instantly boosts the reputation of Jewish day schools for current families, alumni, and friends. This research persuasively confirms for our Jewish day school families that they've made the right decision. For families that have not yet made the choice, it makes the case that their children will benefit when they do.

Jeynes' paper is an invaluable advocacy tool for Jewish day schools, providing an unprecedented form of external validation. Because the data comes from a totally unaffiliated source, with no investment in Jewish day schools' success or failure, it achieves a kind of objective authority our own data can't possibly possess.

This research confirms what we have been saying for a long time: Jewish day school education does make a significant difference. By promoting this research, in conjunction with school-focused advocacy, day schools will create an opportunity for the wider Jewish world to realize how much our version of a “private faith-based school” has to offer. Jewish parents, after all, universally subscribe to the notion of educational excellence. In an interview with the Council for American Private Education, Jeynes says: “Students who attend religious schools score at an academic level about 12 months ahead of their counterparts.” This striking result and affirmation of the quality of religious schools should influence the educational choices of every Jewish parent.

(Note: Jeynes' paper has other uses as well. For those who must contend with competition from Hebrew charter schools, Jeynes offers this: “Students from public charter schools, however,

performed no better than their counterparts in other public schools.”)

This research has particular implications for schools’ financial sustainability because parents’ perceived quality significantly influences enrollment, and word-of-mouth marketing can make or break an enrollment program. Of course, this study alone won’t necessarily cause local parents to choose a Jewish day school, but it can, and should, become part of every school’s advocacy plan. Smart schools will publicize Jeynes’ findings, in tandem with data that argues their own academic excellence, and they will announce this in a variety of ways (to ensure that the message gets out there, and sticks): blog posts, email blasts, tweets, webinars, and even live “Day School Data” events on campus.

Jewish day school leaders have been handed a bonus in the form of an outsider’s research. The challenge: To make Jeynes’ work matter to their communities. It will, for the schools that use it, provide deep, structural support for any Jewish day school argument.

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