



Collective Wisdom:

A National Summary of Principal Response to COVID-19



06.16.20

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During the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing school campus closures, CoJDS has worked to support schools through this uncharted time, offering training, lesson materials, serving as a meeting place for principals to discuss and share, and the publication of a special edition of the Journal of Jewish Day School Leadership. With input from many of our partner principals, Dr. Eli Shapiro and the CoJDS team designed and distributed a national survey to learn how they were reacting and planning for the future. The purpose was to provide affiliated schools with perspective and direction based on the input of the larger Jewish day school community. 122 school leaders responded to the survey, and the Orthodox Union's Center for Communal Research was commissioned to digest and analyze the data.

It is our hope that this data and the analysis help you in your planning and offer a big-picture view of the decisions being made by schools as we continue through this period. Please share your thoughts and observations with us at info@cojds.org.



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A National Summary of Principal Response to COVID-19

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Meet the Schools

Representatives of 122 Jewish day schools filled out this survey.

According to data that Rabbi Hart Levine has compiled on day schools in the United States and Canada using data from the Jewish day school census conducted by Marvin Schick for the Avi Chai Foundation¹ and government sources, there are 921 Jewish day schools in the United States and Canada. CoJDS identified 285 of these schools as the schools in their “universe,” that they aim to serve. We will use these 285 schools to assess non-response bias in the CoJDS survey data. That is:

**how do the schools
that filled out the survey
compare to all day schools
in the CoJDS universe?**

¹ Schick, “A Census of Jewish Day Schools in the United States, 2013-2014.”

Religious Affiliation

Slightly more than half (52%) of the schools that filled out the CoJDS survey fall under the category of Modern or Centrist Orthodox.² Slightly less than half (46%) of the schools in the CoJDS universe share this distinction. Overall, it appears that this sample skews to the ‘right’ within the CoJDS universe. Yeshivish and Chabad schools are slightly overrepresented, while community and Schechter schools are slightly underrepresented.

	COJDS SURVEY RESPONDENTS	COJDS “UNIVERSE”	ALL JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS
Modern and Centrist	52%	46%	20%
Yeshivish or Chasidic	28%	26%	46%
Chabad	14%	11%	8%
Community	5%	12%	13%
Special Education	0%	<1%	3%
Liberal Denomination	<1%	3%	8%
Immigrant	<1%	1%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%

² Another 4 of the 122 schools that completed the survey declined to indicate their school’s name or address. Their religious affiliation is unknown.

Grades Served

The majority of schools that filled out the survey are K-8 schools. This matches the overall pattern schools that CoJDS aims to work with. Overall, survey respondents represent the CoJDS universe well in terms of grades served.

Table 2. Grades served, CoJDS survey respondents v. CoJDS schools v. all Jewish day schools:

	COJDS SURVEY RESPONDENTS	COJDS "UNIVERSE"	ALL JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS
High School	20%	20%	18%
K-8	58%	57%	65%
K-12	19%	22%	15%
Pre-School	3%	1%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Location

Slightly more than one third of schools that responded to the CoJDS survey are located in the Greater New York area ³, while only slightly more than a quarter of the schools in the CoJDS universe are. Schools in the New York area are overrepresented in the sample.

Table 3. Location, CoJDS survey respondents v. CoJDS schools v. all Jewish day schools

	COJDS SURVEY RESPONDENTS	COJDS "UNIVERSE"	ALL JEWISH DAY SCHOOLS
Greater New York	34%	26%	41%
Elsewhere ⁱⁿ the US or Canada	66%	74%	59%
Total	100%	100%	100%

³ As defined by the New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA Core-Based Statistical Area, defined by the United State Office of Management and Budget.

Enrollment

Because enrollment data on Jewish day schools only exists in the aggregate, it is not possible to compare the enrollment in schools that responded to the CoJDS survey to enrollment in all schools in the CoJDS universe. In Schick’s Jewish day school census for the Avi Chai Foundation, 39% of all Jewish day schools had enrollments under 100 students,⁴ whereas only 21% of CoJDS survey respondents had enrollments under 100 students.⁵

Table 4. Enrollment, CoJDS survey respondents

Under 100 students	20%
100 to 250 students	58%
251-400 students	19%
400+ students	3%
Total	100%

Coeducational Status

Slightly less than two-thirds of responding schools are coed. This variable can be used as a proxy for school *hashkafa*, indicating a higher representation of ‘Modern’ than ‘Centrist’ schools.

Table 5. Coeducational status, CoJDS survey respondents

Separate gender	35%
Co-educational	65%
Total	100%

In sum, this sample appears to be fairly similar to all Modern and Centrist Orthodox schools in the United States and Canada in terms of grades served and location, but larger schools are slightly overrepresented. About two-thirds of the responding schools are co-ed, indicating a fairly ‘left’-leaning sample.

⁴ Schick, “A Census of Jewish Day Schools in the United States, 2013-2014.”

⁵ It is not possible to compare rest of the enrollment distribution because Schick used difference intervals for school size: 1-25, 26-50, 51-100, 101-200, 201-350, 351-500, 500-750, 751-1000, 1000+.

Analysis Paradigm

In statistics, a “p value” is a measure of certainty: it is the probability of a “false positive,” of finding a significant relationship between variables in the sample data when no such relationship exists in reality. In most survey research and analysis, a finding is considered significant if $< .05$, meaning that the likelihood of a false positive is less than 5%.

Because CoJDS’s survey data are to be used for policy and planning purposes, we feel that reporting relationships only when $p < .05$ would unduly prioritize certainty over utility, because of the risk a “false negative,” of missing a significant relationship between variables in the sample data when one does exist. For this analysis, we report findings when $p < .2$. We will be examining whether there are differences in school plans or policy by grades served, location, enrollment, or coeducational status. We will only report differences that are significant at $p < .2$.

Summer Plans

Most schools do not plan to provide virtual academic or recreational programs if summer camps do not open this summer.

Table 6. Summer plans if no camp

Virtual recreational program only	5%
Virtual academic program only	11%
Both virtual academic and recreational programs	10%
Neither virtual academic nor recreational programs	74%
Total	100%

If camps do not open this summer, 18% of schools said they would start the academic year earlier than usual.

There were no differences in school plans for the summer by grades served, location, enrollment, or coeducational status.

Finances

Tuition

Very few high schools agreed that tuition must be modified if school is virtual at the beginning of the coming academic year, whereas more schools that serve younger grades agreed with this sentiment.

Table 7. Tuition reduction if school virtual, by grades served

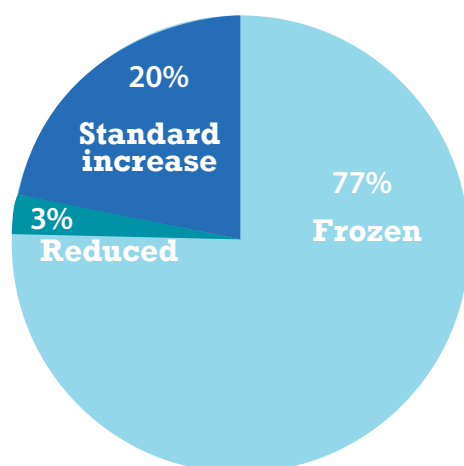
	AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE	NEUTRAL	DISAGREE OR STRONGLY DISAGREE	TOTAL
K-8	30%	25%	46%	100%
K-12	47%	24%	29%	100%
High School	6%	41%	53%	100%

There were no differences in school plans for tuition reduction by location, enrollment, or coeducational status.

Staff Salaries

Eighty-six schools indicated that they had already come to a decision regarding staff salaries for the coming year. Most of these 86 schools are freezing salaries for the coming year.

Table 8. Staff salaries



The smallest schools, under 100 students, were the most likely to be maintaining the standard increase.

Table 9. Staff salaries, by enrollment

NUMBER OF STUDENTS	REDUCED	FROZEN	STANDARD INCREASE
<100	0%	63%	37%
100-250	9%	87%	4%
251-400	0%	74%	26%
400+	4%	80%	16%

There were no differences in school plans for staff salaries by grades served, location, or coeducational status.

Enrollment Clauses

106 schools answered the question on whether or not they have enrollment clauses in teachers' contracts, making employment contingent on the school maintaining a certain percentage of the previous year's enrollment. About one quarter (26%) of all these schools have enrollment clauses.

Co-ed schools were more likely to have such clauses in their contracts, and none of the 13 boys' schools that answered this question had enrollment clauses.

Table 10. Enrollment clause, by coeducational status

	ENROLLMENT CLAUSE	NO ENROLLMENT CLAUSE	IN DISCUSSION	TOTAL
Boys	0%	100%	0%	100%
Girls	13%	74%	13%	100%
Coed	36%	50%	14%	100%

Larger schools were also more likely to have these clauses than smaller ones.

Table 11. Enrollment clause, by enrollment

NUMBER OF STUDENTS	ENROLLMENT CLAUSE	NO ENROLLMENT CLAUSE	IN DISCUSSION	TOTAL
<100	4%	83%	13%	100%
100-250	25%	59%	16%	100%
251-400	33%	57%	10%	100%
400+	40%	50%	10%	100%

Standalone high schools were the least likely to have enrollment clauses.

Table 12. Enrollment clause, by grade level

NUMBER OF STUDENTS	ENROLLMENT CLAUSE	NO ENROLLMENT CLAUSE	IN DISCUSSION	TOTAL
K-8	29%	60%	11%	100%
K-12	33%	62%	5%	100%
High School	5%	70%	25%	100%

There were no differences in school plans for the summer by location.

Academics

Academic Strategies for Spring 2020

There was no one dominant academic strategy that schools described themselves as using during the pandemic. Most strategies had the same prevalence, except for the less-popular

“Reduce academic standards, expectations and subject matter and focus on student participation.”

Table 13. Academic strategies

Maintain the same academic standards, expectations and subjects	5%
Reduce academic standards, expectations, subject matter and student participation; focus on student well-being	11%
Modify academics to only the high priority subjects, but maintain the same standards and expectations	10%
Modify academics to only the high priority standards and expectations, but maintain the same amount of subjects	74%
Reduce academic standards, expectations and subject matter and focus on student participation	100%

Note: Answers do not sum to 100% because schools could select multiple strategies.

Coeducational status was a significant predictor of academic strategy. First, none of the boys’ schools said they were attempting to maintain the same academic standards, while just over one quarter of both girls’ and coed schools said they were.

Table 14. Maintaining same academic standards, expectations and subjects, by coeducational status

	MAINTAINING SAME STANDARDS	UNCHECKED	TOTAL
Boys	0%	100%	100%
Girls	26%	74%	100%
Coed	29%	71%	100%

Second, although reducing standards and focusing on student participation was the least common solution used overall, it was used twice as often in single-gender schools than in coeducational schools. Reducing standards and focusing on student wellbeing was also more common among single-gender schools than coeducational schools.

Table 15. Focus on student participation and wellbeing, by coeducational status

	REDUCE ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND FOCUS ON STUDENT PARTICIPATION	UNCHECKED	TOTAL
Single-gender	19%	81%	100%
Coed	9%	91%	100%
	REDUCE ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND FOCUS ON STUDENT PARTICIPATION	UNCHECKED	TOTAL
Single-gender	33%	67%	100%
Coed	19%	81%	100%

Further, high schools were most likely than schools serving younger grades to say they were maintaining the same standards but focusing on ‘high priority subjects.’

Table 16. Modify academics to only the high priority subjects, but maintain the same standards and expectations, by grades served

	MODIFY ACADEMICS TO ONLY THE HIGH PRIORITY SUBJECTS, BUT MAINTAIN THE SAME STANDARDS AND EXPECTATIONS	UNCHECKED	TOTAL
K-8	16%	84%	100%
K-12	22%	78%	100%
High School	42%	58%	100%

There were no differences in academic strategies by location or enrollment.

Formative Assessment Tools

Forty-nine schools responded to the question asking them what formative assessment tools they were using. Many schools use multiple tools, with the most common being in-house tools.

Table 17. Formative assessment tools

Self-made, in house	27%
JSAT	14%
MAPS	12%
READY	10%
NWEA	6%
ELA	6%

There were no differences in formative assessment tools by grades served, location, enrollment, or coeducational status.

Note: Answers do not sum to 100% because schools could select multiple strategies.

Remediation

In terms of methods for dealing with students who may be struggling or falling behind, assessment and remediation was by far the most popular method.

Table 18. Strategies to address academic gaps

	JUDAIC STUDIES	GENERAL STUDIES
Assessment & remediation	54%	59%
Students will catch up	31%	28%
Asynchronous learning	22%	25%
Looping	13%	14%
Summer programming	10%	14%
Holding students back	5%	7%

Note: Answers do not sum to 100% because schools could select multiple strategies.

While very few schools were delaying grade advancement in order to address academic gaps, none the 23 girls schools in the survey were doing so.

Table 19. Holding students back, by coeducational status

	JUDAIC HOLDBACK	GENERAL HOLDBACK
Boys	15%	15%
Girls	0%	0%
Coed	5%	8%

Schools in the Greater New York area were less likely to say they were using the summer to address gaps than schools elsewhere.

Table 20. Summer remediation, by location

	JUDAIC SUMMER REMEDIATION	GENERAL SUMMER REMEDIATION
Greater New York	3%	6%
Elsewhere in the US or Canada	13%	18%

There were no differences in remediation plans by grades served or enrollment.

Dealing with COVID-19 in Fall 2020

Capacity Issues

When it comes to addressing potential capacity issues, there was no dominant solution. More schools plan to use alternate days or schedules than satellite locations.

Table 21. Capacity strategy

	YES	NO	TOTAL
Satellite locations	23%	77%	100%
Alternating days	40%	60%	100%
Alternating schedules	39%	61%	100%
Creative use of teachers	31%	69%	100%

A thin majority of single-gender schools planned to use alternating schedules, compared to less than a third of coed schools.

Table 22. Alternating schedule, by gender of school

	YES	NO	TOTAL
Single-gender	53%	47%	100%
Coed	31%	69%	100%

There were no differences in plans for addressing capacity issues by grades served, location, or enrollment.

Plans for COVID-19 Diagnosis

Fifty-two schools followed the direction: “Please share your strategy if a student or staff member in your building is diagnosed with COVID-19 in the fall.” A plurality of schools said they would follow medical guidelines from either state or local government.

Table 23. Confirmed infection strategy

Follow government guidelines	40%
Isolate infected	25%
Plans in progress	23%
Close school	6%
Follow committee recommendations	4%
Other	2%
Total	100%

CoJDS Support

Forty schools followed the direction: "Please let us know what Consortium of Jewish Day Schools can do to support you in your endeavors?" By far the most common answer was sharing practices and bringing faculty from difference schools together.

Table 24. Desire for CoJDS support

Share practices	40%
Professional development	13%
Lesson plans and materials	10%
Legal guidance	5%

Note: Answers do not sum to 100% because schools could indicate multiple strategies.

Final Thoughts

First, the biggest differences were between single-gender and co-ed schools. Single-gender schools were more likely to be focusing on student participation and wellbeing, while coed schools were more likely to be maintaining the same academic standards, expectations and subjects. Single-sex schools were also less likely to have enrollment clauses, and more likely to plan to use alternating schedules in 2020-21 (as opposed to alternating days, creative use of teachers, or satellite locations). These differences may indicate a more resource-poor environment, with fewer options available.

Second, larger schools were more likely to have enrollment clauses and to be freezing staff salaries. This may be a function of a more settled or bureaucratic environment.

Third, we want to emphasize what that the data collected by the CoJDs survey of principals tells us—and what it doesn't tell us:

1. They tell us what principals (or other administrators) are planning, but don't necessarily tell us what will happen in the end. Follow-up in the fall would be necessary to answer this question.
2. They tell us how common particular practices are, but don't necessarily tell us the best practices. Sometimes the conventional wisdom takes on a life of its own, separate from an evidence base. A different type of study would be necessary to assess the efficacy of these choices.

Finally, there a number of other questions that we feel are critical to ask heads of school. One is whether they are anticipating changes in enrollment because of COVID-19. The other is about their financial situations. Are parents less willing/able to pay tuition? How are their fundraising efforts going, compared to last year? Are they anxious about solvency? We hope CoJDS will be able to delve into some of these questions in the future.

References

Schick, Marvin. "A Census of Jewish Day Schools in the United States, 2013-2014."

The AVI CHAI Foundation, October 2014.



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