JData Revealed
JEWISH EDUCATION DATA WHEN YOU WANT IT

Make a (J)Date with JData

Jewish leaders are deeply and passionately immersed in the work that they do, as are the people with whom they work most closely, be they lay leaders or professionals. Given these deep commitments to "our" organization, it is easy to apply the transitive property and assume that the whole world knows and understands "our" organization's mission and vision. Every once in a while, though, it's worth checking that assumption.

This past fall, we at JData decided to ask a few questions of you, the people on our email distribution list. We weren't looking to conduct high-level research—though that is the hallmark of what we and our colleagues at the *Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies* do. We just wanted to know how to best connect with the people on our distribution list.

Thank you to all who took the time to complete the survey. We are very pleased with the response rate and want to share some of what we learned.

- 80% of you either made the choice to join our mailing list on your own or were included because your work interfaces with JData in some way.
- When asked what comes to mind when you hear JData, the vast majority of respondents spoke, in some form or fashion, about the work we do collecting and analyzing data about Jewish education. While responses ranged from positive to negative, the fact of the matter is that most of you know why we do what we do—and that is encouraging.
- We enjoyed that 14% of respondents admitted to some "brand confusion" with a popular Jewish dating website (and know that more of you have thought it at least once). While participants in Jewish educational programs often end up in wonderful personal relationships with other participants, JData is not JDate, nor are we in the business of cultivating or measuring this phenomenon.
- If you have read this far, then you are part of the 51% of respondents who regularly read all or part of JData Revealed. We wish more on the list were and appreciate the various content suggestions that we received; we hope you will notice as the newsletter's content evolves over time.
- 63% of respondents have visited our *website* at least once. Whether it was to learn more about us, to search for information, or to enter or retrieve data from a school or camp's profile, that site traffic is important to us. And, to those who have never visited our website, we encourage you to do so.

We know that there are a lot of organizations, Jewish and otherwise, vying for your attention. We know, too, that what JData does and how it does it is unique, and incredibly important to the field of Jewish education. This endeavor deserves high-quality data and thoughtful analysis that leads to informed planning and decision-making. Thank you for being part of JData's circle.

Jonathan "J.C." Cohen, MAJCS/MSW
Executive Director, JData

Data's Role in Growing Enrollment

Amy L. Sales, Ph.D., JData Principal Investigator

How is your school's enrollment growing, and what can you do to raise the trend line? Here is a lesson from 35 Jewish day schools that are working to build their enrollments.

Enrollment, the bedrock of the strength and sustainability of Jewish educational institutions, depends on successful recruitment and retention of participants. Data play an important role in the effort to grow enrollment. In the day school world, JData gathers and analyzes data on how well schools recruit and retain students and it tracks the impact of these efforts. Our partner, *Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE)*, uses these data to help schools improve their performance in this area and to measure outcomes over time.

JData gathers two types of information related to growing enrollment:

1. School's self-assessment of its recruitment and retention practices.
2. Data for key metrics: percent retention, recruitment success rate, enrollment growth, capacity utilization, and tuition revenue as a percent of total expenses.

Our analysis links these two types of information in order to test the extent to which schools with greater practices achieve higher scores on their key metrics. A school's first action steps are to complete the assessment of best practices in recruitment and retention and use them to spur discussion with the staff and board.[1] Over time, as the school adds or upgrades practices, it should expect to see improvements in its key metrics. (See Figure 1.)

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[1] The assessment is available on the Student tab of the day school Profile form at *www.jdata.com*.

FIGURE 1: MODEL OF ENROLLMENT GROWTH
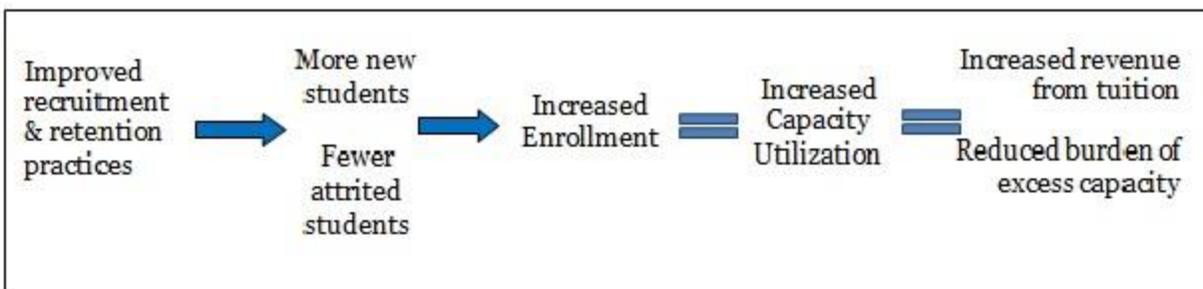
Our model was first applied last year in the ***PEJE Recruitment and Retention Academy***, a concerted effort to help schools improve how they build their enrollments. The analysis and use of the data follows six steps (described below).[2] We invite you to go to ***www.jdata.com*** and try these out for your own school:

1. Assess best practices in retention and recruitment.
2. Track attrition.
3. Calculate recruitment success rate.
4. Understand enrollment.
5. Measure capacity utilization.
6. Link best practices to enrollment.

1. Assess best practices in retention and recruitment.

Retention

Retention has to be someone's job. The first question, then, is who—if anyone—is in charge. In our sample, the head of school was responsible for retention management in 22 of the schools. The admissions professional was in charge in five schools. And, in one school, no one was responsible.

The second question is whether faculty are explicitly involved in student retention. Is it part of their job description? Do they understand that it is their responsibility? And have they been trained in specific retention processes? Fewer than one-third of the schools in our sample could answer "yes" to explicit and systematic faculty involvement.

The other questions concern four school practices designed to stem attrition. As seen in Table 1, most of the schools in our sample are intentional about maintaining good relationships with students and their families. Fewer, however, seek out those who are at risk of leaving the school, and even fewer keep track of the effort to retain them.

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[2] Data in this report were retrieved from ***www.jdata.com*** on May 6, 2014.

TABLE 1: RETENTION BEST PRACTICES (IN DESCENDING ORDER BY PREVALENCE)

	Percent "Yes"
School intentionally practices *constant re-recruitment*. Re-recruitment uses communications and relationships to maintain current families' and students' positive feelings for and connections to the school.	74%
School has a *moving-up* program that actively promotes attendance at the next grade or division.	57%
School has systematic procedures for identifying dissatisfied students and families.	54%
School has a system for tracking the impact of retention activities with families who are at risk of leaving.	25%

n = 28

Where does your school stand in terms of retention practices? Is someone in charge? Do faculty know it is their job? Does the school engage in the four best practices?

Recruitment

The recruitment assessment asks about ten best practices and whether these are followed generally and/or to targeted audiences. As seen in Table 2, schools often have structures for appealing to a general audience but have not taken the next step to segment their potential market. Also note that one-third of the schools are operating with no recruitment plan and no goals, a difficult set of conditions for monitoring performance.

TABLE 2: RECRUITMENT BEST PRACTICES (IN DESCENDING ORDER BY PREVALENCE)

Recruitment Practices	GENERAL Percent "Yes"	TARGETED Percent "Yes"
Use of social media to build brand awareness	96%	20%
Updated website that conveys the school's uniqueness and effectiveness	85%	18%
Board members serve as ambassadors for the school	69%	26%
Recruitment plan	65%	--
Recruiting goals	63%	25%
Training for parents and students to serve as ambassadors for the school	58%	21%
Recruitment committee	48%	12%
Recruitment communications plan	35%	13%
Training for faculty and staff to serve as ambassadors for the school	33%	8%
Regular, systematic assessment of communications and outreach strategies	23%	5%

Where does your school stand in terms of recruitment practices? To what extent does your school look like the schools in our sample? How explicit, intentional, and systematic are your school's practices? What are its market segments, and to what extent are messages and actions targeted to them?

2. Track attrition.

On average the schools in our sample lost 11% of their students to attrition in 2013-14 (Table 3), similar to their past rate. Attrited students are those who were in the school the previous year and could have returned in the current year but did not. The greatest attrition occurred in Kindergarten and Grades 5, 9, and 11.

TABLE 3: ATTRITION RATE (N = 27 SCHOOLS)

Min	Max	Median	Average
1%	29%	10%	11%

Size matters when it comes to attrition. The smallest schools had an attrition rate ten points higher than the largest schools (17% vs. 7%). This is in part because small numbers can yield high percentages. But it is also a sign of the particular challenge of critical mass within grades in small schools. Note that community size or urban/suburban location do not substantially affect attrition rate.

Schools also use JData to record the destination of attrited students. This is important marketing information and, in the best case, is gathered during out-take conversation. These records show that independent (private) schools are not the main competition for this group of schools. On average, 80% of their attrited students left for public school or by reason of family relocation.

Where does your school stand in terms of attrition? Is your attrition rate above or below 10%? How does this compare with previous years? Do you know your attrition by grade? Do you have a system for tracking why students leave and where they go, and, if so, how do you use this information?

3. Calculate recruitment success rate.

Recruitment is a process often envisioned as a funnel. It begins with the large number of individuals in the schools' potential market and then narrows to those who inquire, those who then apply, those who are accepted, and finally those who matriculate.

On average, schools came into the Recruitment and Retention Academy with a 78% conversion rate, meaning that 78% of applicants ultimately enrolled in the school (Table 4).

TABLE 4: RECRUITMENT SUCCESS RATE

	Min	Max	Median	Average
% visitors who applied	37%	96%	74%	69%
% applicants accepted	70%	100%	94%	92%
% accepted applicants enrolled	50%	100%	88%	84%
Overall conversion rate (applied →enrolled)	49%	100%	81%	78%

In order to improve recruitment, schools need to enlarge the universe of potential applicants, increase the applicant pool, and do more to assure that those who are admitted accept the invitation. We would also note that feeder programs should be an important resource for recruiting potential students. On average, the schools in our sample got 10% of their students from their top feeder programs. These numbers were essentially the same for schools that operate their own preschool and those that do not.

In our sample, conversion rate varies by the size of school, community size, and denomination. Those most challenged were the largest schools (69% success rate), schools in the largest communities (73% success rate), and community or pluralist schools (71%). Those with the greatest success were the Orthodox schools (94% success rate).

Where does your school stand? Do these numbers describe the experience of your school? How big is your recruitment funnel and what is your success rate? Is the rate stable or has it been improving or declining over the past few years?

4. Understand enrollment.

All of this is in the name of enrollment growth. As such it is essential to track enrollment figures overall and grade-by-grade, currently and over time.

Grade-by-grade

Each grade has its own recruitment and retention opportunities and challenges. In small schools, if a critical mass is not reached or sustained, an entire grade can be lost. For example, we have seen K-6 schools that, with time, have become K-5 schools.

The schools in our sample served almost 8,000 students in 2013-14. Figure 2 shows a familiar pattern, with the steep drop-off in the high school years. Smaller enrollment numbers are due in part to the relatively small number of schools that offer high school education (in this cohort and nationally). It is difficult to know the direction of causality: whether fewer families choose a Jewish high school for their children because there are fewer or no options in their community or whether there are fewer options because the market does not support the establishment of high school programs. Keep in mind in looking at this figure that the greatest attrition in this cohort occurred in grades K, 5, 9, and 11.

FIGURE 2: GRADE-BY-GRADE ENROLLMENT
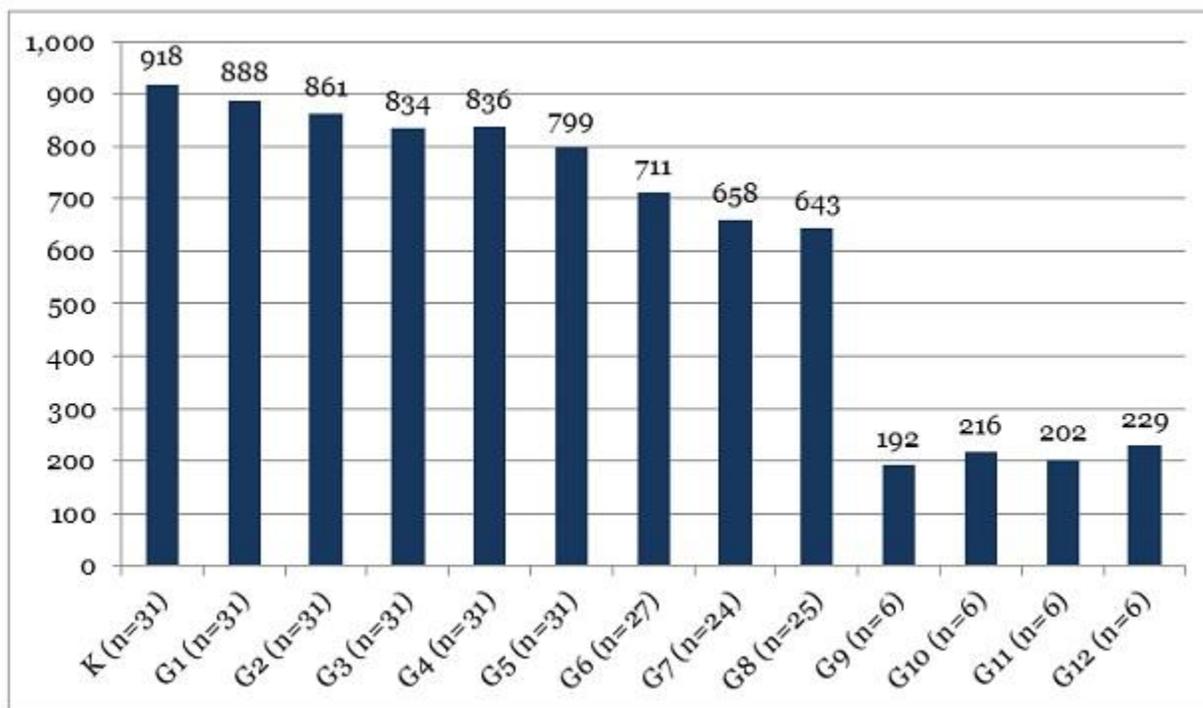
Note: Number in parentheses is the number of schools offering this grade and providing information on enrollment in this grade.

Over Time

Twenty-five of the schools in the Recruitment and Retention Academy have recorded total enrollment in JData since 2008-09. All totaled, these schools declined by over 650 students across the six years (about 9%). Although there is an overall downward trend, some schools fared better than others: 11 gained enrollment, 1 remained essentially the same, and 13 lost enrollment.

In future years, as these schools continue to track their enrollment, they will be able to see if their efforts from the Academy in 2014 have an impact on their numbers. PEJE, for its part, will be able to see the collective impact of its work with these schools.

How is your school's enrollment trending? Do you have your enrollment numbers handy? Do you use them to assess the impact of your marketing, communications, recruitment, and retention efforts?
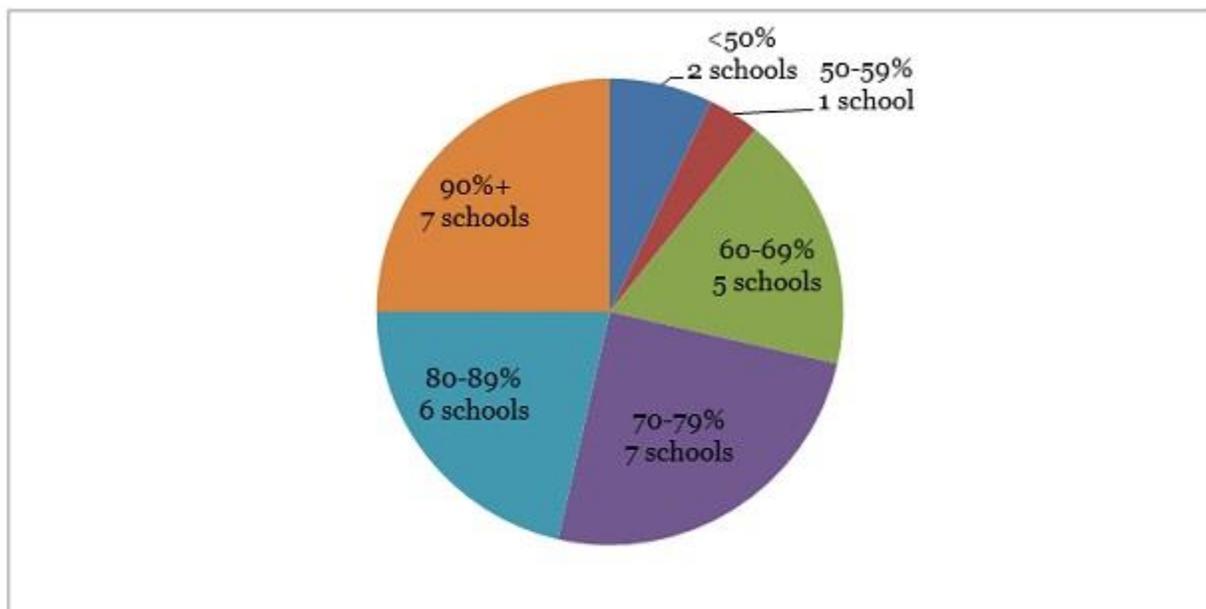
5. Measure capacity utilization.

Capacity utilization is a measure of how much of a school's capacity is being used. It is calculated by dividing the number of students the school is serving this year by the number it could have served given available space and staffing.

Low capacity utilization costs the school in two ways. One is loss of revenue from tuition and fees that might have been collected if the unused seats had been filled. The other is the carrying cost of the physical plant and the program. Utilities, insurance, AV equipment, and other expenses are by and large fixed costs that change little with each additional student.

Average capacity utilization in our school sample was 77%, with a range from 43% to 98%. This means that, on average, almost one-fourth of a school's capacity went unused in 2013-14. Or, simply put, almost one-fourth of the seats were unfilled and generated no tuition revenue for the school.

If we assume that 80% is a sustainable rate of capacity utilization, then 13 schools in the program (46%) were in the safety zone and 15 schools (54%) were not (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: CAPACITY UTILIZATION

n = 28 schools

Once again, size matters. On average, schools with fewer than 100 students had substantially lower capacity utilization rates than larger schools (66% versus 83%).

On average, capacity utilization improved by 2% between 2012-13 and 2013-14. The range, however, was great—from the school whose utilization rate declined by -22% to the school whose rate improved by +47%.

Where does your school stand in terms of its capacity utilization? How many students could your school accommodate this year, and how many are enrolled? Given those figures, what is your capacity utilization rate? Are you above or below 80%? How much is unutilized capacity costing your school?

6. Link best practices to enrollment.

At the beginning of the Recruitment and Retention Academy in 2014, our question was whether the schools' retention and recruitment practices were linked to their success in retaining current students, bringing in new students, and thereby growing their enrollment. Using their self-assessment in JData, we counted the number of best practices each school said it followed in both recruitment and retention. Schools were then divided into three categories: those that followed few of the best practices (8 schools), those that followed some (13 schools), and those that followed most of these practices (6 schools). Here is what we found:

The number of best practices is associated with recruitment success rate (from applicants to matriculating students). The schools in the top category had an average conversion rate of 86%, versus 77% for the other schools.

The number of best practices, however, seemed not to have a positive effect on the attrition rate. Those in the top category had a 14% attrition rate, close to the 10% rate of the other schools. These findings hold whether we consider all best practices or only the subset that refer to retention. The number of best practices was also not reflected in enrollment success. About half of the schools in each category had maintained or grown their enrollment from the prior year and the others had not.

Moving Ahead

The recruitment and retention best practices assessment intends to animate schools' thinking about structures and procedures they can implement to improve their outcomes—communications plans, ambassadors, faculty involvement, assessment of efforts, and the like. Once they are aware of or have implemented these possibilities, they must learn how to engage in them in a thoughtful, systematic, and effective way. Simply checking "yes" to the question of whether or not the school has enrollment goals is not sufficient. The goals have to be set with intention, reviewed regularly, held up against weekly or monthly recruitment benchmarks, and reassessed at the end of the recruitment season in order to have the impact that we know goal setting can have.

PEJE's Recruitment and Retention Academy, and now its *__Atidenu Program__*, are designed not only to help schools adopt these practices but also to raise the level at which they perform them. The data show that when schools came into the Academy in 2014, many were lacking these practices, and those that had them were not using them to full effect. Over time, as we continue to track the data from this group of schools, we expect to see greater outcomes as a result of their intentional and informed efforts to grow enrollment.

JData in Action: Pittsburgh

When a Community or organization becomes a JData Stakeholder, they reap the tremendous benefits of our platform and data services. Stakeholders also help add important data about Jewish education to the collective pool—data that will inform and transform the field. Raimy Rubin contributes the first in an ongoing "JData in Action" series highlighting how JData is being put to good use by our Stakeholders.

Given how the nonprofit sector lags behind the corporate world when it comes to data collection, it is encouraging to know that JData is available to help organizations focused on Jewish education to track their growth, identify areas for improvement, and understand their capacity. Lord knows we can use all the help we can get. Here in Pittsburgh, we are dedicated to building a healthy and valuable data habit. To that end, we are now in our third year of partnership with JData, and have embarked on our own unique Pittsburgh Jewish Community Scorecard.

When I first explain the Community Scorecard to people, I am often asked how much automation there is that mechanizes the vast amount of data we collect. The answer is that there simply is not much at all—just a lot of manpower and manual input—, but the closest thing we have to a silver bullet is JData, which brings our efforts in the field of Jewish education for children and teens to a whole new, sophisticated level.

The Community Scorecard, launched in February 2014, measures how Pittsburgh is doing as a Jewish community. By reporting the collective impact of the services and institutions that work for our community members—and by reporting attitudinal and qualitative data by our community members about those services—, we can A) track our progress (or lack thereof), B) make better, data-driven decisions, and C) adjust both our individual-institutional strategies and our collective priorities accordingly.

It doesn't take a long stay on our **website** to realize that some of the most robust sections of performance data are the ones that detail the community's work in day schools, Hebrew schools, and early-childhood centers. Because we use JData to collect information in this arena, we are asking questions that we would not have otherwise thought to ask, utilizing national and regional benchmarks that would not have been available to us, and systemizing a process that—for us as well as our educational institutions—would be overwhelming and daunting.

The impact of such robust data was immediate. This past December, the Community Scorecard held its inaugural Leadership Roundtable, which brought together more than 70 influential community leaders for the explicit purpose of reacting to the Scorecard's findings and setting community priorities. The top concerns included (but were not limited to) the need to reduce the cost of being Jewish, the need for more Jewish educational programming for Jewish families and adults, and the value of increasing the number of Jewish children and teens participating in immersive Jewish experiences, all of which share a direct link with JData—the resource that made these numbers available.

JData set the pace for us by making data collection about Jewish education a priority. We in Pittsburgh took that commitment to data-driven decision-making even farther, and are thrilled with the results we've had just in our first year. The power of data will shape the Pittsburgh Jewish community for years to come.

*Raimy Rubin is the **Community Scorecard** Manager at the **Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh**.*

News from JData

- Jonathan "J.C." Cohen contributed an opinion piece, "*Getting on the Data Bandwagon*," to EJewish Philanthropy.
- Amy Sales was a featured panelist in the Consortium for Applied Studies in Jewish Education's blogcast, "*Jewish Camp: How's the Magic Made*."
- JData welcomes *Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Education/UJA Federation of Greater Toronto* as a new partner as they adopt JData for use within their broad array of educational institutions.
- The 2013-14 Jewish Education in Detroit report is *now available*.