

JData Revealed

JEWISH EDUCATION DATA WHEN YOU WANT IT

Note from the Director

With the shifting landscape of Jewish education, it is difficult to predict the future of congregational and other part-time Jewish schools. Communal rhetoric now prefers *engagement* over *education*, and attention is increasingly drawn to the creation of alternative forms of youth engagement. The Reform and Conservative movements have closed their education departments, and there is no national umbrella organization to lead the way forward. In terms of research, there is scant data on the part-time schools to inform planning and action.



JData has stepped into the breach and assumed responsibility for regularly gathering information from these schools. In Summer 2015, our dedicated research assistants called almost every part-time school in the JData directory to get information on enrollment, staffing, and budget. Responses came from over 430 schools, about one-fourth of the field. We are pleased to share the results with you. [Read results.](#)

In addition, JData works with 17 communities in North America, 13 of which gather information from their part-time schools. A most notable example is Chicago. Read [Rabbi Scott Aaron's discussion](#) of how his community has begun to use data to strengthen its 51 congregational schools. For a sense of the kind of information being used, check out the [sample of Chicago data](#).

At JData, we do not believe in data for the data's sake but rather seek to turn data into useful information that can make a difference—to schools and camps, the agencies that work with them, and the broader field. We hope this issue of *JData Revealed* helps illuminate the status of the part-time schools, a “mighty system slowly waning.” We welcome your comments.

Amy

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Part-time Schools: A Mighty System Slowly Wanes

Amy L. Sales, Ph.D., JData Project Director

Jewish part-time schools are the most pervasive form of Jewish education in the United States. According to JData estimates, they may reach a quarter-million Jewish children and their families every year. Yet the landscape is best described as static or in decline. [Learn more.](#)

JData in Action: Community Foundation for Jewish Education, Chicago

Chicago's Jewish community is tightly knit for a city of its size. Even at over a quarter-million members we tend to know a lot about each other. That, however, has not been the case in terms of Jewish education. Until this past year, little information beyond budget and student demographics was regularly and systemically collected and analyzed by central agencies or the federation. As a result, many of our working assumptions regarding curriculum, teacher training, resource allocation priorities, student retention, and the like were based on anecdote. Thanks to a generous grant from the Crown family, the [Community Foundation for Jewish Education](#) (CFJE) of the [Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago](#) (JUF) began to utilize JData to gather critical information about our Jewish education programs. We began with congregational education in 2014–15 and are expanding to early childhood programs and day schools in 2015–16.



Our goals are twofold. First, we need hard data to adequately plan, fundraise, and support Jewish education. Anecdotal evidence is simply not reliable for making strategic decisions that benefit our diverse systems of Jewish education. Second, the data give educators, funders, and other stakeholders a common and transparent baseline of information. For example, JUF is convening congregational school educators by geographic region to examine the data collectively as institutions serving families in overlapping zip codes and school districts. By giving everyone access to select information (financial data are not shared outside of CFJE), we can highlight common challenges and opportunities. JUF will then be able to marshal communal resources more strategically in order to assist congregational schools in addressing common needs. Current areas of discussion include support for special needs students, shared high school programs, common *madrichim* training and others. We are also planning a day-long symposium in May 2016 with educators, stakeholders, and outside experts to delve into the findings from Year 2 of our data collection.

JData has provided our federation with an excellent resource. While we hope that JData will develop the capacity to use the data more flexibly in the future, the assistance JData has already delivered to us in our efforts to improve support for Jewish education providers has been well worth the investment.

Rabbi Scott Aaron is the Executive Director of the [Community Foundation for Jewish Education](#) of the [Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago](#).

Understanding Attrition in Chicago Part-time Schools

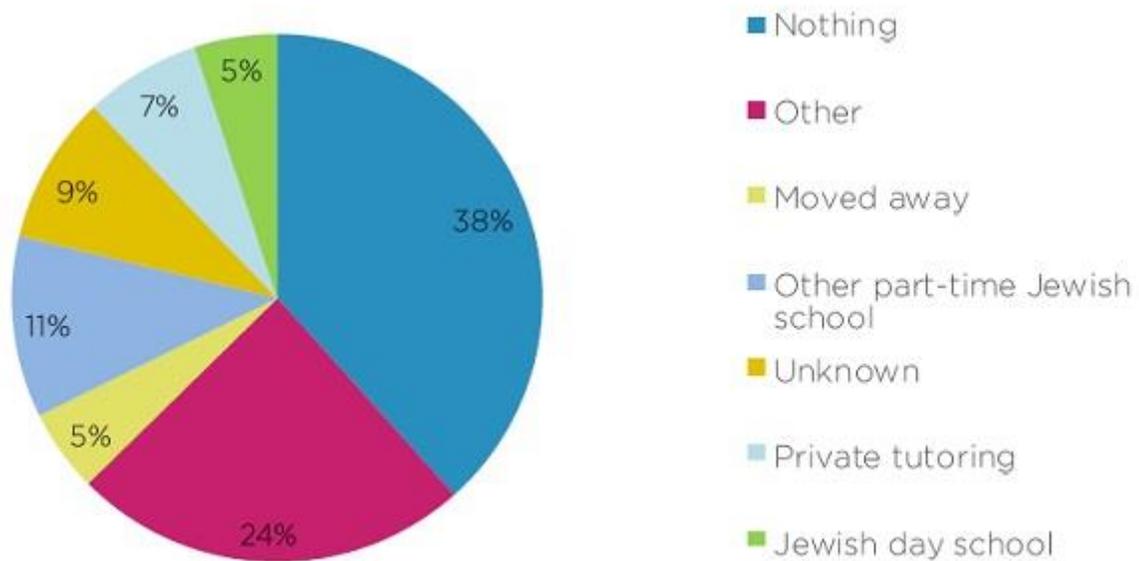
As enrollment in part-time schools declines, educators need to pay closer attention to student attrition. ([Read article on declining enrollment.](#)) It's important to understand why students leave and where they go.

In 2014–15, Chicago's [Community Foundation for Jewish Education](#) (CFJE) used JData to gather such information from part-time school leaders. Rabbi Scott Aaron, CFJE Executive Director, used both existing questions in JData and also created custom questions for the community. The results proved intriguing and useful for CFJE's work.



Figure 1 shows reasons why students left Chicago part-time schools in 2014–15. Part-time schools struggle to retain students in upper grades, and 11% of students in Chicago left after their bar/t mitzvah. Students today have busy schedules, and it is valuable to know that 17% of students left due to scheduling conflicts. Getting families to prioritize religious school on the child's calendar has long been a challenge for part-time schools.

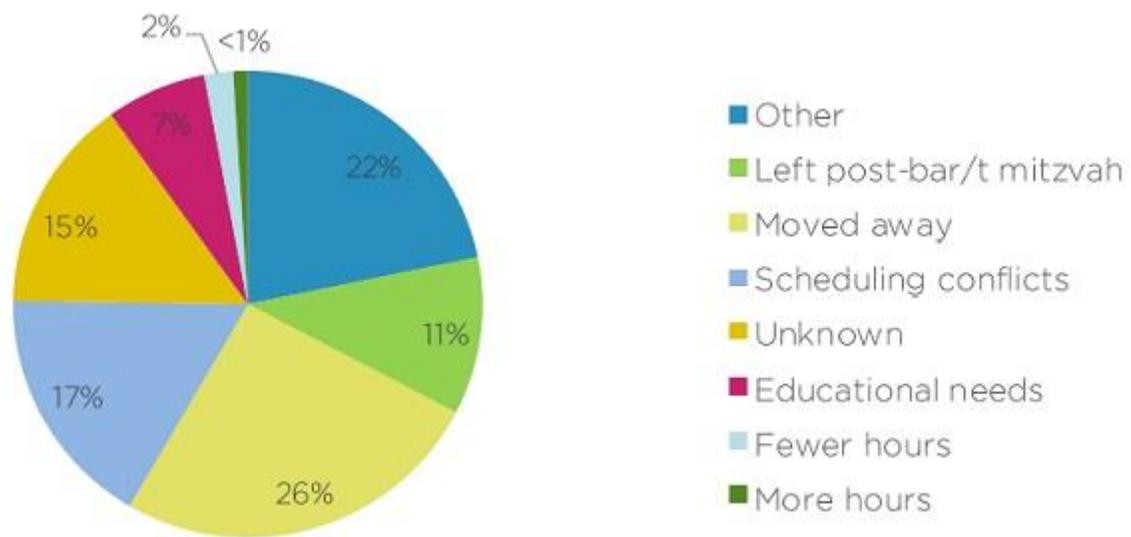
Figure 1: Reasons for Attrition: Chicago Part-time Schools Core JData Profile (2014-15)



n=39 schools reporting on 475 students

Figure 2 shows the destinations of students leaving Chicago part-time schools. Most striking is the one-third of students who dropped out of Jewish education entirely—they went nowhere. The data confirmed anecdotal knowledge of the field with hard numbers. They are helping CFJE engage stakeholders to develop a plan of action for part-time student retention. Perhaps schools could have conducted out-take interviews to help maintain relationships with exiting families while garnering important feedback about why students are leaving and where they are headed. Perhaps some of these students might have stayed if the school had been aware of and responsive to the issues that caused the impending move.

**Figure 2: Destination of Attrited Part-time Students
Chicago Custom Profile Tab (2014-15)**



n=32 schools reporting on 339 students

First-year data, such as those presented here, are baseline data. They describe the status of the schools during Chicago’s first year as a JData partner and point to potential areas for intervention. Data from 2015–16 and beyond will reveal trends over time and show the impact of CFJE’s efforts to bring new ideas, energy, and resources to the congregational schools.

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JData Day School Benchmarking: Year 2

On December 1, JData will embark on the second year of our day school financial sustainability benchmarking project. The **Year 1 results** showed schools where they stand vis-à-vis other day schools on key measures related to enrollment, budget, and fundraising.

Year 2 will help schools assess their rate of change on these measures in comparison with that of other schools. To find out about joining the benchmarking project, **[click here](#)**.

Recent Publications

- **[UJA Federation of New York: Day Camp by the Numbers, Summer 2014](#)** presents data from New York day camps related to four key tasks of management essential for a strong and vibrant day camp—growing enrollment, building a strong staff team, improving the bottom line, and enhancing program.
- **[Schechter Day School Network: A Two-Year Picture, 2013-14 and 2014-15](#)** presents a two-year view of the [Schechter Day School Network](#) in terms of enrollment, staff, resources, tuition, financial aid, governance, and development.

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