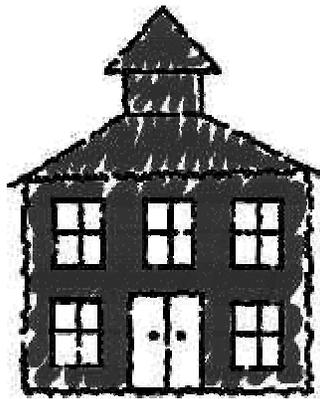


# FOR THE SAKE OF THE CHILDREN: A SYNAGOGUE GUIDE TO PUBLIC SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS



אין העולם מתקיים אלא בשביל הבל תינוקות

For the sake of the children, God  
sustains the world.  
Talmud, *Shabbat* 119b



<http://www.rac.org/pubs/partnership.html>

## INTRODUCTION

At the 2001 UAHC Biennial, Rabbi Eric Yoffie called upon Reform Jews to make public education a priority for the Movement. We have done that in a variety of forums, from the public policy arena to the social service sector. See, for example, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism web page “Protecting the Wall, Supporting Our Schools; The Reform Movement’s Campaign for Public Education.” ([www.rac.org/pubs/schools.html](http://www.rac.org/pubs/schools.html))

This manual is the latest of these initiatives designed to enable our synagogues to address the vital concerns faced by public schools in their communities. By creating partnerships with their local public schools, Reform congregations will embody both the ideals of our Jewish tradition and the civic values that have strengthened our nation. Through such projects congregations will build new bridges within communities and ensure local children a strong educational foundation. We must do it for the sake of the children.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our appreciation extends to many members of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC) staff. Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of the (RAC), and Mark Pelavin, Associate Director of the RAC, reviewed this publication and offered their thoughtful suggestions for its improvement. RAC Legislative Assistants Randi Levine (2002-2003), Sheryl Shapiro (2003-2004) and Rob Levy (2003-2004) provided research assistance and Machon Kaplan Interns Jill Cozen-Harel and Marisa Geer initiated the writing process under the supervision of RAC Program Director, Rabbi Michael Namath. Alexis Rice, RAC Communications Director, supplied technical support and expertise in the production of this publication. We also want to thank the members and leaders of Baltimore Hebrew Congregation of Baltimore, MD, Beth El Congregation of Fort Worth, TX, Temple Israel of West Bloomfield, MI, Congregation Or Ami of Calabasas, CA and Washington Hebrew Congregation of Washington, DC for sharing their experience in partnering with public schools.

Finally, we are grateful for the J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Conference and Program Fund of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism for support of this project.

Rabbi Marla J. Feldman, Director  
Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism

Deena Fox, Legislative Assistant  
Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism

# Table of Contents

<b>I. The Project: Partnering with a School</b>	<b>4</b>
A. Overview	4
B. Getting Started	4
C. Initiating the Partnership	5
D. Possible Partnership Activities	6
E. Advocacy	7
<b>II. Examples of Successful Synagogue Partnerships</b>	<b>9</b>
A. Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, Baltimore MD	9
B. Beth El Congregation, Fort Worth, TX	10
C. Temple Israel, West Bloomfield, MI	11
D. Congregation Or Ami, Calabasas, CA	12
E. Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, DC	13
<b>Appendix I: Challenges Facing Public Education in America</b>	<b>15</b>
A. Education Funding	16
B. School Vouchers	17
C. Effective Solutions	18
<b>Appendix II: Reform Judaism and Public Education</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Appendix III: Additional Resources</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Public School Partnership Response Form</b>	<b>25</b>

# I. THE PROJECT: PARTNERING WITH A PUBLIC SCHOOL

## רמב"ם הלכות תלמוד תורה פרק א הלכה ב

כשם שחייב אדם ללמד את בנו כך הוא חייב ללמד את בן בנו שנאמר והודעתם לבניך ולבני בניך, ולא בנו ובן בנו בלבד ... שהתלמידים קרויין בנים .

It is a commandment on each and every wise person to teach every student, even though they are not their children...since the students that one teaches are called one's children.  
Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, The Laws of Talmud Torah, Chapter 1, Law 2

## A. OVERVIEW

The Jewish commitment to public education dates back to the time of the Torah and Talmud. According to Talmudic texts, all towns were expected to build schools and class sizes were to be kept below twenty-five students (*Baba Batra 21a*). As Reform Jews today we continue to affirm this commitment to quality public education through activism and social action.

Provision of educational opportunities for Americans of all classes is a foundational tenet of our country. The opportunities that it provides to millions of American youth have made our country what it is today. Historically, the public schools have been the ladder that American Jews, and others, climbed to rise from poverty to affluence in American life. Jews remain deeply devoted to the public school system; for many North American Jews, public education is among the most hallowed of civic virtues.

One way to become active and demonstrate real dedication to the public school system is to begin a partnership with a public school in your community. A synagogue has many critical resources to provide a school struggling to meet the needs of its students and to equip them for success in life. The congregation can raise funds for special projects or to supplement school resources, serve as a volunteer base, and organize special programs for students. There are many models of successful partnerships that provide critical support for schools and meaningful experiences for volunteers. This manual contains examples of such partnerships and tips for congregations beginning similar projects.

## B. GETTING STARTED

One of the first challenges you will face after deciding to act as a public school partner organization is identifying a school that needs AND wants a partner. Some of the characteristics of a school in need of assistance are classroom shortages, oversized classes, insufficient textbooks and supplies, undernourished students, large numbers of ESL students, teacher shortages, location in an impoverished area, and an insufficient funding base.

## *FIND THE RIGHT SCHOOL*

Some methods of finding the most appropriate partner school include:

- 1) Find a school in or near the temple neighborhood;
- 2) Locate a school in a needy or poor neighborhood, ideally with some congregational connection (i.e. congregants are alumni of the school or work at the school);
- 3) Use congregational contacts in the school system (school administrators, teachers, students) to identify a needy school;
- 4) Contact a congregation near you that has successfully initiated a school partnering program and learn from its experience; or
- 5) Contact the county or city school district and ask for direction. There may be an organized network for school partnerships already in existence. Many districts have a community liaison whose job is to facilitate such partnerships.

## *BE SELECTIVE*

It is important to gain Temple and community support for your partnership. By following a deliberative process you can generate interest and enthusiasm among your members. Consider the following steps:

- 1) Speak with school administrators at several schools to gauge support for a partnership program and assess the needs in each school. It is critical that there be a strong and committed school liaison to assist the volunteers.
- 2) Bring the committee planning the program to the most promising sites. Attempt to include members of each of the temple auxiliaries in the subcommittee that works on the program.
- 3) Ensure that congregants will be comfortable visiting the school neighborhoods being considered.
- 4) Make a selection and bring the decision to the synagogue leadership to gain approval.

## **C. INITIATING THE PARTNERSHIP**

- 1) Speak with the school administration, faculty and/or PTA to determine the needs of the school. Do they need books, lunches, tutors, pen pals, landscaping help, clerical help, volunteer aides, and/or assistance in after-school programs?
- 2) Be creative in planning how your congregation can help to meet those needs. It is okay to begin with incremental steps. Even a few volunteers at the beginning of a school partnership can set the ball rolling and make a difference, eventually growing into a partnership that engages the entire congregation.
  - a) Make sure to include the youth as well. High school students can be important role models for younger students and can use their involvement to help complete community service hours often required for graduation.
  - b) Consider different types of involvement for congregants with different time availability.
  - c) Some people may volunteer for two hours a week in a classroom, while others plan special events like career fairs.

- d) Make sure to include the youth as well. High school students can be important role models for younger students and can use their involvement to help complete community service hours often required for graduation.
- 3) Make sure the expectations for volunteers are clear to both teachers and volunteers.
- 4) Take the initiative to follow up with the school administration. Administrators may be overworked and may not respond quickly, but this does not mean the congregation's work is not appreciated. Work with the school to develop ways to acknowledge volunteers and evaluate the success of the partnership.

## **D. POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES**

Below are some examples of projects that have been successful in existing school-congregation partnerships. Keep in mind that every situation is different and a great idea is not equally applicable in all settings.

### *MATERIAL AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT*

- Hold back-to-school book and school supply drives
- Host fundraisers to purchase textbooks and other school supplies
- Create and/or enhance the school library or resource center
- Support extracurricular activities including bands, choirs, and cultural organizations (i.e. collect used instruments, sponsor a choir performance, etc.)
- Begin a "Gifts in Kind" program (see the Congregation Or Ami example in section IID)
- Provide space for tutoring and after-school programs in the synagogue facility

### *VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES*

- Hold school clean-up days and landscaping assistance projects
- Provide after-school tutoring
- Serve as mentors
- Become pen pals for students with reading and writing difficulties
- Volunteer in the school nurse's office
- Provide college application editing and assistance
- Assist school advisors to connect children with community libraries, organized recreation, arts and science programs, and other activities
- Provide additional support for students with special needs (i.e. volunteer as aides in classrooms, provide additional tutoring)

- Begin a READ\*WRITE\*NOW! Summer Reading Program with materials from the U.S. Department of Education, for more information, visit: [www.ed.gov/pubs/goodideas/rwn](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/goodideas/rwn)
- Affiliate with the National Jewish Coalition for Literacy, which helps Jewish groups provide one-on-one weekly reading tutors to children in grades K-3, for more information, visit: [www.njcl.net/](http://www.njcl.net/)

### *SPECIAL PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS*

- Organize a career fair with congregants speaking about their jobs and opportunities in their fields
- Provide networks to help high school students find jobs and internships during the summer
- Sponsor a field trip or cultural experience for students
- Hold award ceremonies or achievement parties

### **E. ADVOCACY**

In addition to the hands-on work of a school partnership, it is important to tackle our educational system's problems at their roots. Advocating on behalf of schools at the federal, state, and local levels is the key to achieving legislative advances, which will help alleviate current challenges for future generations of students.

It is important to identify a clear, focused issue for your advocacy efforts by consulting with local experts to identify "hot" issues in your community and considering the interests and priorities of your members. Once an advocacy issue is identified, the following action suggestions might be considered:

- Initiate a letter writing campaign. Depending on the issue, you may choose to address state legislators, school board members, or federal officials.
- Hold a state advocacy day with other congregations – both Jewish and non-Jewish — from your state. Visit your state Capital to meet with your state legislators to advocate for support of public education. Join with your local school boards, PTAs and other religious groups in advocacy efforts. Involve your congregation's youth group in your lobbying efforts, for their voices and first-hand experiences in the public schools may have a powerful effect.
- Encourage your rabbi and/or other active members of your community to develop relationships with local school officials, such as principals, teachers, and school board members. It establishes the synagogue representative as someone to whom the school officials can turn whenever issues involving church/state relations arise.
- Encourage your synagogue to become a Congregation to Leave No Child Behind, pledging to educate, directly serve, and advocate on behalf of our country's school children. Go to [www.childrensdefense.org/ms\\_conglncb.php](http://www.childrensdefense.org/ms_conglncb.php) for more information.

- Participate in the annual Children’s Sabbath in October, organized by the Children’s Defense Fund. Endorsed by more than 200 religious organizations, including the UAHC, the Children’s Defense Fund’s National Observance of Children’s Sabbaths unites thousands of congregations of many faiths in speaking out and acting for justice for children. During the Children’s Sabbath, religious congregations hold special worship services, educational programs, and social action activities to inspire congregants to respond to children’s needs. For more information go to [www.childrensdefense.org/ms\\_childsab.php](http://www.childrensdefense.org/ms_childsab.php).
- Honor members of the congregation who work in the field of public education and/or invite them to speak from the pulpit about the issues affecting local schools. For suggestions about how to create a synagogue event honoring teachers, go to [www.uahc.org/reform/rac/pubs/teachers.html](http://www.uahc.org/reform/rac/pubs/teachers.html).

It is critical to advocate for public education at both the state and federal levels. Since education funding is derived from both governments, we must make our voices audible in each forum. The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism provides regular legislative updates through its listserves, the RAC Weekly Legislative Updates and RAC News. These resources will assist you in determining when there is current federal legislation pertaining to education and what the appropriate advocacy actions are. To speak with a legislative assistant at the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, call (202) 387-2800. To join the RAC list-serves, go to [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org) and click on “take action.”

At the state level there are educational associations and coalitions that can provide similar updates. Teachers or school administrators from your congregations should be able to direct you to the most helpful coalitions in your community. In order to make sure that your activity in the schools does not infringe on the First Amendment read: *Religion Expression in Public Schools* is available online at [www.ed.gov/inits/religionandschools/guides.html](http://www.ed.gov/inits/religionandschools/guides.html).

[See Appendix III. for additional resources such as the national school board and parent-teacher associations.]

**תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא בתרא דף כא עמוד א**

שבתחלה, מי שיש לו אב - מלמדו תורה, מי שאין לו אב - לא היה למד תורה, מאי דרוש? (דברים י"א) ולמדתם אותם - ולמדתם אתם, התקינו שיהו מושיבין מלמדי תינוקות בירושלים, מאי דרוש? (ישעיהו ב') כי מציון תצא תורה; ועדיין מי שיש לו אב - היה מעלו ומלמדו, מי שאין לו אב - לא היה עולה ולמד, התקינו שיהו מושיבין בכל פלך ופלך; ומכניסין אותן כבן ט"ז כבן י"ז.

At first if a child had a father, his father taught him, and if he had no father he did not learn at all. By what [verse of the Scripture] did they guide themselves? — By the verse, “And you shall teach them to your children” laying the emphasis on the word ‘you’. They then made an ordinance that teachers of children should be appointed in Jerusalem. By what verse did they guide themselves? — By the verse, “For from Zion shall the Torah go forth.” Even so, however, if a child had a father, the father would take him up to Jerusalem and have him taught there, and if not, he would not go up to learn there. They therefore ordained that teachers should be appointed in each prefecture, and that boys should enter school at the age of sixteen or seventeen. Talmud, *Baba Batra* 21a

## II. EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL SYNAGOGUE PARTNERSHIPS

### A. BALTIMORE HEBREW CONGREGATION, BALTIMORE, MD

Baltimore Hebrew Congregation's (BHC) partnering program was its first congregation-wide social action project. When making the decision to take on the project, the social action committee voted and then won the support of the Board of Directors. Once they had approval to continue, the committee contacted acquaintances at the county school district to obtain information about possible schools in a relatively safe area. After they had located a few schools that fit the description, the group visited some of the administrators to gauge support. Ultimately the committee picked a particular middle school because it was a failing school with a community liaison who was open to beginning a serious program with the temple group.

In the initial stage, volunteers worked as classroom aides, state testing monitors and peer mediation group-leaders. Additionally, the group of about ten volunteers created an award ceremony for children with special needs because there were no school-sponsored awards for special education students.

Once the project was initiated, BHC expanded its plans for the future. In 2003, the project's coordinator reached out to a church near the school to expand the pool of volunteers and make the program a community effort. They also developed a teacher supervised after-school peer tutoring initiative that paired NFTY youth from the congregation with students from the school. Involving NFTY was particularly appropriate because the county has a 75-hour community service requirement for high school graduation that can be met by working at the school. As a bonus, the NFTY social action theme for 2003 is public education!

The congregation's involvement with the school has brought it a great deal of publicity and community goodwill. An article was written about the relationship in the Baltimore Sun and the chair of the program was invited as a VIP to the PTA Spring Fling where she met the Superintendent, whose blueprint for improving education involves community volunteerism.

There has also been publicity about the volunteers within the congregation itself, which has increased synagogue involvement. In the future, the temple day school classes may partner with classes at the public school and religious school parents will be encouraged to donate time to the program.

For More Information Contact:  
Baltimore Hebrew Congregation  
(410) 764-1587  
Or  
Marlyn O'Mansky  
[Bomar326@cs.com](mailto:Bomar326@cs.com)

## **B. BETH EL CONGREGATION, FORT WORTH, TX**

Beth El Congregation participates in an Adopt-a-School program through the Fort Worth Independent School District. Organizations are matched up with a school by the program, which has a staff liaison and other resources to aid the schools and the organizations in establishing and maintaining a substantial partnership. Beth El Congregation was paired with De Zavala Elementary, a school that is downtown, in close proximity to the synagogue. Their partnership has been in existence for a number of years, and has been quite successful.

The projects facilitated by the congregation have been multifaceted and have involved many congregants at different levels. The temple held a school supply drive in which they distributed empty bags on Rosh HaShanah with lists of school supplies that were needed by the school. Congregants brought the bags back, filled with donated supplies. On Yom Kippur, the Temple Youth Group (TYG) collected them. Several members of the synagogue have acted as mentors and tutors, while other Beth El volunteers were paired with students who were struggling with reading and writing. The children were flagged by their teachers and then given a Beth El pen pal. The pen pals wrote to each other throughout the year, and then met at a pizza party at the end of the year. More congregants were able to assist by landscaping at the school on Mitzvah Day. In yet another project the synagogue provided volunteers at Stone Soup Connection, an after-school enrichment program for latchkey kids.

Their future partnership plans will allow opportunities for congregants to volunteer on a one-time basis, instead of needing to make long-term commitments. They also hope that each religious school class can participate in some way, such as collecting clothes for a clothing drive or organizing a holiday party at the school. The retired congregants will also be encouraged to participate in the program, taking advantage of the flexibility that many have for volunteering.

**For More Information Contact:**  
**Beth El Congregation**  
**(817) 332-7141**

## **C. TEMPLE ISRAEL, WEST BLOOMFIELD, MI**

At Temple Israel, a member who was active in the Detroit Jewish Coalition for Literacy instigated the alliance between the suburban temple and Bagley Elementary School in the city of Detroit. After four years, the project has grown to fifteen volunteers working two hours a week in the school.

When the partnership was developing, the temple members learned the importance both of a supportive school administration and a strong synagogue leadership. The principal and volunteer coordinator at Bagley were helpful and interested, but the teachers were not initially open to volunteer support. When it became apparent that the volunteers were dependable and committed, the teachers began to accept them and appreciate their assistance rather than viewing them as a threat. The volunteers carved out a place in the school community and were even allocated a room in the school. Now they help students with math and reading skills and assist in large classes.

As the volunteering program grew, congregants began working on additional projects to support the school. In particular, they held book drives to revitalize the school library and make it a place for reading, instead of a place for books. Another project consisted of getting newer computers donated to the school by a company that was upgrading and setting them up for student use. They also sponsored electrical work that would allow installation of a washing machine to clean donated clothes for needy children.

Bar and Bat Mitzvah students have undertaken projects with the Bagley school as part of their commitment to social justice. One pair of boys decided to collect coats for Bagley students. They designed a flier asking for lightly-used winter coats and then circulated the flier in their suburban neighborhood. The boys organized specific pickup days and walked around the neighborhood collecting coats on their wagons. Then the boys' parents washed all of the coats and they packed them into twenty large garbage bags to be transported to the school. Now when students come to school in the winter wearing only a sweater, they can choose a coat to take home.

While revitalizing the library, the two communities collaborated to create a quilt. Students, parents and temple volunteers read books with a quilt theme and discussed the ways in which Jews and African Americans use quilts to express their histories. The conversations culminated in individuals creating squares of a quilt that represented the alliance. The quilt now decorates the library and serves as a constant reminder of their partnership.

**For More Information Contact:**

Temple Israel

(248) 661-5700

Or

Helen Pickett

[pickettchg@aol.com](mailto:pickettchg@aol.com)

## D. CONGREGATION OR AMI, CALABASAS, CA

Congregation Or Ami of Calabasas, CA has a school partnership with the Seventy-Fifth Street School that consists of ongoing programming of all types. In addition to clothing, blanket and book drives held directly by the congregation, a volunteer family established a corporate donation program through the charitable internet program, "Gifts in Kind." Through the work of that organization, the temple was able to obtain teacher appreciation gifts, holiday clothes for students, school supplies, physical education clothes and backpacks. This collaboration helped the temple provide more than it could have on its own and is a great model for other communities. In addition to the donations, the congregants also offered hands-on support by helping to care for the school community's peace garden and by taking a field trip to the California Science Center with interested students.

In support of this project the rabbi has preached on the topic of *tikkun olam* and *tzedakah*. The synagogue bulletin and the religious school provided additional venues for publicity for the partnership.

The following are two sample Or Ami newsletter articles, which could be adapted to your temple's needs:

The Congregation Or Ami Social Action Committee thanks all of you who donated so generously to the High Holiday uniform collection for our newly adopted school, the Seventy-Fifth Street School, in South Central Los Angeles. Your donations will be a big help to children there who desperately need clothes to wear to school. We are planning a number of other collections and activities throughout the year and we hope that all of you will join us and support these projects.

As part of our support for Seventy-Fifth Street School, we have compiled a Wish List of educational tools requested by teachers at the school. This list includes items our children generally take for granted, but that classrooms in this inner city school lack. We know that we may not be able to honor all of their requests, but we are committed to contributing whatever we can to support these dedicated educators.

Please review the Teachers' Wish List with your family and determine if there are any items that you have and are no longer using, or would be willing to purchase and donate to the Seventy-Fifth Street School. Both large and small items are needed. The school has 1,700 students, so every little bit helps.

You may drop these gifts off at Religious School, the Synagogue office, or at Friday night services. Gently used items are fine, but please only send donations that are in good condition. Our goal is to fulfill this Wish List and make our first delivery to the school around Chanukah time. When you make your donation, please attach a note with your name, address, phone number, and a list of the items donated so that we can keep track of our progress.

**For More Information Contact:**  
**Congregation Or Ami**  
**(818) 880-4880**

## E. Washington Hebrew Congregation, Washington, DC

With budget cuts hitting an all time high for D.C. public schools, Duane L. Ross, the Principal of the Abram Simon School has said that the Washington Hebrew Congregation (WHC) is the only positive note his school can count on. He has praised the efforts and support of the WHC volunteers, and said they make a tremendous difference in the quality of education provided to the Abram Simon students. This unique partnership between WHC and this D.C. public school, named after the Congregation's second Rabbi, Abram Simon, has been in existence since 1991 and thanks to the generosity of its congregants—both young and old—continues to thrive. The following are descriptions of specific components of the WHC partnership with the Abram Simon School:

**Classroom Volunteers:** Because of the budget cuts, the Abram Simon School lost four full time teachers and four teacher assistants. What is clearly an obstacle for the school in providing small classes for the students becomes an opportunity for WHC congregants to help in these already stressed classrooms. This year, the volunteer core has grown to 12 regular volunteers, which means that every class from K through 3rd grade has volunteer involvement.

**Arts Program:** The school has not been able to offer any art classes to the students for the past two years. Volunteers from WHC found this situation to be so unacceptable that they launched an art program for the third and fourth grade classes.

**Speech Pathology:** A WHC volunteer who is a licensed speech pathologist is helping students with communication and speech issues. Since the school does not provide this assistance to mainstream students, WHC is providing an invaluable service.

**Dental Hygiene:** Through the personal efforts of a dentist from the congregation, all of the Abram Simon students have their teeth cleaned and assessed at the Howard Dental School.

**B'nai Mitzvah Projects:** B'nai Mitzvah students continue to wow the school with fabulously generous and creative projects. WHC students have organized collections of hundreds of gently used books, created centerpieces out of art and school supplies which were delivered to the school, recorded books on tape focusing on material from the third grade curriculum, and conducted clothing drives for the WHC/Abram Simon clothing closet. Two B'nai Mitzvah students sponsored 45 Abram Simon students so they could attend Camp Moss Hollow, which is an overnight camp run by D.C. Family and Child Services.

**Family Partnership Project:** This year, the school has identified 25 of the most needy families to be partnered with WHC families. The school has taken a particular interest in this program since children of these families are often chronically absent from school and their parents typically are not involved. It is the ambition of the school that those families selected for inclusion in this partnership understand that student attendance and family involvement with the school are prerequisites for being included in the WHC partnership program.

**Special Programs:** Contributions from WHC congregants have provided funds to support special programs such as the banquet for students with perfect attendance and a GED course for Abram Simon parents, and to host 80 students and faculty as guests to the annual Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Shabbat. Students sponsored a unique Shabbat where each student donated a toy so that during the summer Abram Simon students had something special to play with.

Included below is an open letter from Rabbi M. Bruce Lustig to the WHC school partnership committee chairs in support of their work. It serves as a model for ways congregational leaders can acknowledge volunteers for their efforts.

I want to thank you and the entire Abram Simon Committee for the wonderful work you are doing. I know that you and your volunteers are transforming the school and have had a real impact on the lives of the children at the Abram Simon School. When I spoke this past Yom Kippur on the ideal of tzedakah being able to help us connect to each other and ultimately to God, it was work like the work being done at Abram Simon School that resonates in my heart.

Your volunteers, along with the volunteers of our Mitzvah Day Committee and Carrie Simon House Committee, inspire these words: “Tzedekah is an obligation, the only way to bring justice to the world. We are to remember the stranger, for we were strangers in Egypt; to love our neighbor as ourselves; to leave the corners of our fields. We are to remember how lonely the world must be for one who is poor, how much more so for one who is poor in a rich country. How disconnected to have no means or resources or support system, no recourse to justice; and to have one’s integrity destroyed or identity demeaned.

By engaging in tzedakah, we can perhaps help to ease the pain of others, reminding them and ourselves that we are in fact all interdependent. The rabbis instruct, “do not reach down from above to your brother in the mud; rather go down and embrace him that you might both reach the light of day.” We can make the stranger feel more welcome, more connected, to our community and maybe even to God.” (Kol Nidre Sermon 5764)

When our congregants go into the school and teach a child to read or simply make a child feel loved they are helping that child realize that he is not alone or abandoned. When a family packs a basket for their adopted family for Thanksgiving or Christmas, it makes the ideals of TZEDEKAH real and tangible. I know it is one of my own children’s favorite parts of Thanksgiving. The opportunities you have created teach us how to live our Judaism, and how to connect with others and with God. Thank you for your work. I hope your numbers grow and others will experience the joy and satisfaction that you and your volunteers know from simply choosing to be God’s partners.

May this year be a sweet year.

Thankfully,  
*Rabbi M. Bruce Lustig*

**For More Information Contact:  
Washington Hebrew Congregation  
(202) 363-7100**

## APPENDIX I

### CHALLENGES FACING PUBLIC EDUCATION IN AMERICA

תלמוד בבלי מסכת בבא בתרא דף כא עמוד א

ואמר רבא: סך מקרי דרדקי - עשרין וחמשה ינוקי, ואי איכא חמשיין - מותבינן תרי, ואי איכא ארבעין - מוקמינן ריש דוכנא, ומסייעין ליה ממתא

Raba said: The number of students for one teacher should be twenty-five. If there are fifty students, they appoint two; if there are forty, they appoint an assistant, who is supported by the funds of the town. Talmud, *Baba Batra* 21a

As it has developed over the last three hundred years, the public education system in America has grown to encompass pre-kindergarten through university level training. Today, with some public schools failing to meet the needs of our nation's children, America must make public education reform a priority by investing funding in our nation's public schools, reducing class size, hiring quality teachers, modernizing schools, ensuring that children have an early childhood education, and providing comprehensive service to address children's many needs.

The following statistics, provided by Children's Defense Fund reveal the challenges facing our schools:<sup>1</sup>

- States spend an average of \$6,189 on each student per year while they spend an average of \$18,428 on each prisoner.
- The wealthiest school districts spend 56 percent more per student than do the poorest.
- The United States only provides enough funding for three out of every five eligible preschoolers to participate in Head Start, a pre-kindergarten program for low-income families.
- More than one-fourth of new teachers have not completed their state's licensing requirements.
- Over the next decade, schools will need to find 2.2 million new teachers to replace retiring teachers and those leaving for other professions, as well as to accommodate population increases and the movement to reduce class size.
- Thirty-eight percent of the nation's fourth-graders do not read at basic level, according to National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) studies.
- One in eight American children never graduates from high school.
- One in five American children is born to a mother who did not graduate from high school.
- One in three American children is behind a year or more in school.
- Two in five American children never complete a single year of college.

<sup>1</sup> Children's Defense Fund. Key Facts About Education. Children's Defense Fund. 23 Sept. 2003  
[http://www.childrendefense.org/keyfacts\\_education.htm](http://www.childrendefense.org/keyfacts_education.htm) and <http://www.childrendefense.org/keyfacts.htm>.

## A. EDUCATION FUNDING

### רמב"ם הלכות תלמוד תורה פרק א הלכה ז

היה מנהג המדינה ליקח מלמד התינוקות שכר נותן לו שכרו, וחייב ללמדו בשכר עד שיקרא תורה שבכתב כולה.

Where [teacher compensation] is the custom, a parent must give a salary to the one who teaches children and provide a teacher until the child has learned the entire Torah. Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, The Laws of Talmud Torah, Chapter 1, Law 7

Federal government involvement in public schooling began in the nineteenth century with the establishment of the Department of Education, however, the majority of funding for schools has always come from state and local agencies. The current Department of Education provides only about six percent of the monies spent on schools in America. That percentage is focused on the areas of education that are not being adequately met by the state and local authorities. Current Department of Education activity includes providing need-based financial aid for all levels of education, funding education for the disabled and the gifted, and for those with low English proficiency.

Federal funding is well-targeted, reaching those schools and those students with the greatest needs. However, funding for successful programs including Head Start has not kept pace with dramatic increases in enrollment or with the rising costs of educating a diverse student body with varied needs. Since 1990, the number of students enrolled in Head Start alone has increased by over 370,000. As a result, many critical federal programs are significantly underfunded.

While federal funds comprise five to ten percent of a school's budget, state education funding contributes forty-five to fifty percent of school funds. Local governments provide the remaining funds. This three-tiered funding system ensures that all schools are not funded equally. Schools within the same state will receive equitable state funding based on the number of enrolled students. However, the level of local funding is closely tied to the amount of property tax collected in the school district. Thus, wealthy areas have more money to invest in public education, while public schools with high numbers of disadvantaged students have limited resources.<sup>2</sup>

Our nation's schools, especially those serving low-income neighborhoods, need a major infusion of capital. Federal education spending is an essential investment in our economic strength and our national security. Though education is the focus of much political rhetoric, the actions of our government leaders have not displayed appropriate concern for the health of the educational system. We must make education funding a national priority.

---

<sup>2</sup> People for the American Way. Facts About School Funding. People for the American Way. 7 Oct. 2003 <http://www.pfaw.org/pfaw/general/default.aspx?oid=2454>.

## B. SCHOOL VOUCHERS

Vouchers are a form of government subsidy given to parents for use toward tuition and related expenses in private and parochial schools. Though some propose vouchers as a solution to the funding crisis, they are ultimately harmful to education because they do nothing to help the ninety percent of students who are enrolled in public schools. Vouchers divert desperately needed funds away from the public schools, while adding money to the private and parochial school systems where the public exerts little or no control. Although many school voucher programs ostensibly aim to assist low-income and minority students, a typical voucher in the amount of \$1500 or even \$3000 is not enough to help a poor child make the leap to private school. Most proposed voucher programs do not prohibit participating schools from charging tuition and fees in excess of the value of the voucher, which thereby keeps the cost out of the reach of most families.

Voucher programs permit public funds to be used in a discriminating manner. They do not require participating schools to accept all applicants as public schools are required to do. Indeed, according to a survey of private schools conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, most private schools would decline to participate in a voucher program that required them to accept students with disabilities or, in the case of parochial schools, to refrain from including their religious mission in their education. The "choice" in "choice programs" thus lies with private school administrators, not with parents.

The constitutionality of voucher programs is questionable. Supporters of vouchers claim that vouchers for parochial schools do not violate the separation of church and state, because families serve as intermediaries between the government and religious institutions and, therefore, federal funds do not flow directly to religious organizations. Furthermore, they claim that parental choice allows vouchers to be used for any private school and have no religious purpose. Yet, because school vouchers provide such a small sum of money to needy families and because secular private schools are often the most expensive, private religious schools become the only affordable alternatives for families receiving vouchers. Therefore, school vouchers are designed to funnel federal funds directly into the religious institutions.

Many civic groups have touted vouchers as a solution to our country's educational woes. But calls for vouchers are indicative of problems with our educational system that require us to invest money and creativity into our public schools rather than contribute to their difficulties by taking away needed funding and support. For more information about vouchers, go to [www.rac.org/pubs/schools.html](http://www.rac.org/pubs/schools.html).

## C. EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

### *CLASS SIZE*

There is overwhelming evidence that confirms what every teacher and parent already knows: smaller class size leads to greater school achievement. In 1999, the U.S. Department of Education reported, “A consensus of research indicates that class size reduction in the early grades leads to higher student achievement.”<sup>3</sup> The National Assessment on Educational Progress, the Economic Policy Institute, RAND, the Educational Testing Service, and the American Institute of Research have all found similar positive results from class size reduction. Project STAR, the class size reduction study based in Tennessee, followed students from kindergarten through high school. By the time they reached eighth grade, children who had attended smaller classes in K-3 were at least one full year ahead of their peers academically.<sup>4</sup> Research has documented that reduced class size also reduces discipline problems, increases teacher retention, and decreases student dropout rates.

### *SCHOOL MODERNIZATION*

Too many of America’s schools are crumbling, crowded, and obsolete. The average public school in America is forty-two years old and twenty-eight percent of the public schools in America are more than fifty years old. Overcrowding compounds the problems caused by the age of the school structures. Record enrollments and growing communities are leading to severe overuse of our nation’s public schools. The popular solutions to this problem - using trailer classrooms and creating school shifts - are not permanent answers. They do not address the underlying problems, nor do they assist in making schools compatible with current technology. Forty-six percent of the public schools in America lack the electrical and communication wiring to support today’s computer systems.<sup>5</sup> Students learn better with smaller classes in modern and safe surroundings. We need a federal, state, and local partnership to address this school building crisis.

### *TEACHER TRAINING AND RECRUITMENT*

Research has shown that academic achievement in public schools is related to the quality of the teachers. In fact, a study in Texas found a correlation between student achievement and teacher quality as measured by teacher scores on a test of basic language skills.<sup>6</sup> As United Federation

---

<sup>3</sup>Department of Education. Archived Information: Reducing Class Size, What Do We Know. March 1999. National Institute on Student Achievement, Curriculum and Assessment, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education 23 Sept. 2003 [http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ReducingClass/Class\\_size.html#research](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ReducingClass/Class_size.html#research).

<sup>4</sup> Project STAR (Student Teacher Achievement Ratio) Final Executive Summary Report. June 1990. Project STAR. 23 Sept. 2003 <http://www.cde.ca.gov/classsize/eval/projstar.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> National Education Association. School Modernization. National Education Association. 23 Sept. 2003 <http://www.nea.org/modernization/>.

<sup>6</sup> Harold O. Levy. NYC Public Schools Chancellor’s 60-Day Report. 15 Mar. 2000. New York City Board of Education. Online. 27 Feb. 2001.

of Teachers President Randi Weingarten said, “Volumes of research have made it clear that a well-qualified and well-trained teacher is the most important factor in students' success.”<sup>7</sup>

In addition to the need to properly train teachers, the severe shortage of teachers must be addressed. According to the National Education Association:

A historic turnover is taking place in the teaching profession. While student enrollments are rising rapidly, more than a million veteran teachers are nearing retirement. Experts predict that overall we will need more than 2 million new teachers in the next decade.<sup>8</sup>

A national study conducted in 1995 by the University of Pennsylvania’s School of Education demonstrated that 40 percent of new teachers leave the profession after only five years. According to this study, the national turnover rate for teachers is 14.3 percent. Furthermore, 11 percent of teachers nationwide leave after only one year of teaching. In order to attract qualified, certified teachers, especially to schools in low-income neighborhoods, we must provide higher teacher salaries, better teacher training opportunities, and targeted recruitment programs.

---

<sup>7</sup> Randi Weingarten. Letter. The New York Post 31 Dec. 2000: 48.

<sup>8</sup> National Education Association. Teacher Shortage. National Education Association. 23 Sept. 2003 <http://www.nea.org/teachershortage/>.

## APPENDIX II

### REFORM JUDAISM AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף קיט עמוד ב

לא הרבה ירושלים אלא בשביל שביטלו בה תינוקות של בית רבן, שנאמר: (ירמיהו ו) שפך על עולל בחוץ וגו' מה טעם שפך - משום דעולל בחוץ.

R. Hamnuna said: Jerusalem was destroyed only because they neglected [the education of] school children; for it is said, pour it out [sc. God's wrath] because of the children in the street: why pour it out? Because the child is in the street. Talmud, *Shabbat* 119b

The Reform Jewish Movement has long stood in support of public education. Over the last half-century, the UAHC and the CCAR have adopted a number of resolutions supporting public education in the United States. These resolutions relate to the following findings:

- An educated population is the cornerstone of democracy. The United States' well-being depends on the decisions of its educated, informed citizens;
- 90 percent of all school-aged children are enrolled in public schools;
- Because public schools operate under strict compliance with anti-discrimination laws, public schools are the only schools that must meet the needs of every student, including those with physical, emotional, and mental disabilities, as well as those who are gifted, with no bias against any race, creed, or gender;
- Public schools serve to promote tolerance and diversity, fostering interaction and understanding among people of different ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic backgrounds;
- Contemporary society has a strong need for an educated workforce. More than 95 percent of future jobs will require a high school or college degree;
- Public education fosters community development, involvement, and growth. Better public schools create stronger communities and strong communities build a stronger nation; and
- When we invest in public education, we invest in our children and our nation's future.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> "Protecting the Wall, Supporting Our Schools; The Reform Movement's Campaign for Public Education"

Resolutions of the UAHC, the CCAR, and the WRJ can be found at the following links:

### *UAHC Resolutions*

Public Education:

[uahc.org/cgi-bin/resodisp.pl?file=education&year=2001D](http://uahc.org/cgi-bin/resodisp.pl?file=education&year=2001D)

Tax Credits for Non-public Schools:

[uahc.org/cgi-bin/resodisp.pl?file=schools&year=1972D](http://uahc.org/cgi-bin/resodisp.pl?file=schools&year=1972D)

Religion in Public Schools:

[uahc.org/cgi-bin/resodisp.pl?file=education&year=1961](http://uahc.org/cgi-bin/resodisp.pl?file=education&year=1961)

### *CCAR Resolutions*

Making Public Education a National Priority:

[www.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/resodisp.pl?file=pubedu&year=1998](http://www.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/resodisp.pl?file=pubedu&year=1998)

Religion and the Public Schools:

[www.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/resodisp.pl?file=schools&year=1987](http://www.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/resodisp.pl?file=schools&year=1987)

Segregation:

[www.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/resodisp.pl?file=segr&year=1972](http://www.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/resodisp.pl?file=segr&year=1972)

### *WRJ Resolution*

School Vouchers:

[rj.org/wrj/reso/vouchers.html](http://rj.org/wrj/reso/vouchers.html)

## APPENDIX III

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

#### **National Jewish Coalition for Literacy**

The National Jewish Coalition for Literacy is the organized Jewish Community's vehicle for mobilizing volunteer tutors and reading partners for at-risk children in kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

Website: [www.njcl.net](http://www.njcl.net)  
Box 202  
Accord, MA 02018  
Phone: (212) 545-9215  
Fax: (212) 545-9321  
Email: [njcl@worldnet.att.net](mailto:njcl@worldnet.att.net)

#### **Gifts In Kind International**

Gifts In Kind International distributes products that support the work of school programs in providing creative recreational and educational opportunities for the disadvantaged. Arts and crafts supplies, computer training labs, books and educational products and sports equipment are some samples of items offered by Gifts In Kind International. Donors include Binney & Smith, Brunswick Corporation, The Disney Store, Golden Books Family Entertainment, Time Inc. and many more.

Website: [www.giftsinkind.org](http://www.giftsinkind.org)  
333 N. Fairfax Street  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Phone (703) 836-2121  
Fax (703) 549-1481

#### **Children's Defense Fund**

CDF provides a strong, effective voice for *all* the children of America who cannot vote, lobby, or speak for themselves. It pays particular attention to the needs of poor and minority children and those with disabilities.

Website: [www.childrensdefense.org](http://www.childrensdefense.org)  
25 E Street NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
Phone (202) 628-8787  
Email: [cdinfo@childrensdefense.org](mailto:cdinfo@childrensdefense.org)

#### **National Education Association (NEA)**

The NEA is the union and advocacy group for public school employees across the country. It is involved in grassroots educational activity and in legislative advocacy at the federal and state levels. It has resources on the benefits of public schools and is effective at tracking legislation affecting public education.

Website: [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org)  
1201 16th St., NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone: (202) 833-4000

### **National School Boards Association**

NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States. Its mission is to foster excellence and equity in public education through school board leadership.

Website: [www.nsba.org](http://www.nsba.org)  
1680 Duke Street  
Alexandria VA 22314  
Phone:(703) 838-6722  
Fax: (703) 683-7590  
Email: [info@nsba.org](mailto:info@nsba.org)

### **American Federation of Teachers (AFT), AFL-CIO**

AFT, a teacher's union, has been a major force for preserving and strengthening America's democratic commitment to public education. It has useful resources on vouchers and funding for public education.

Website: [www.aft.org](http://www.aft.org)  
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
Phone: (202) 879-4453

### **National Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)**

The PTA is a volunteer association that works in communities and in Washington, DC on behalf of families and children. It is strongly committed to public education and has useful resources on vouchers and education funding.

Website: [www.pta.org](http://www.pta.org)  
1090 Vermont Ave. NW, Suite 1200  
Washington, DC 20005-4905  
Phone: (202) 289-6790

### **U.S. Department of Education**

The U.S. Department of Education is an excellent source for studies, research, educational guidelines, and education news.

Website: [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202  
Phone: (800)USA-LEARN

### **People for the American Way (PFAW)**

PFAW conducts research, legal and education work, and monitors and researches the Religious Right movement and its political allies. It is a good resource for information on vouchers and public education.

Website: [www.pfaw.org](http://www.pfaw.org)  
2000 M Street, NW, Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20036  
Phone: (202) 467-4999 or (800) 326-7329

## **Americans United for the Separation of Church and State (AU)**

AU works to protect the constitutional principle of church-state separation. Mandatory prayer in public schools, tax dollars for parochial schools, government intrusion into religious affairs and meddling in partisan politics by religious groups are among the troubling issues that AU works to resolve. AU is another useful resource for information on school vouchers.

Website: [www.au.org](http://www.au.org)

518 C Street, NE

Washington, DC 20002

Phone: (202) 466-3234

## **Articles**

“Faith Communities and Public Schools: A Collaboration to Improve Education.” This article written by Jim H. Smith for the Connecticut Policy and Economic Council (CPEC) describes successful faith-based public school partnerships around the country. To access the report go to the CPEC homepage, then click on CPEC Reports, Best Practices Reports, then choose this article. [www.cpec.org](http://www.cpec.org)

“Faith Communities Joining with Local Communities to Support Children's Learning: Good Ideas.” This report put out by the Department of Education in 1999 includes ideas, tips, examples, and resources for members and leaders of faith communities who want to become involved in education. [www.ed.gov/pubs/goodideas/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/goodideas/index.html) or [www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/faith-good-ideas.pdf](http://www.ed.gov/PDFDocs/faith-good-ideas.pdf).

Rabbi Eric Yoffie’s 2001 Biennial address included a section about the importance of public education. To read the sermon, go to: [www.uahc.org/yoffie/bostonsermon.shtml](http://www.uahc.org/yoffie/bostonsermon.shtml) and to learn more about the 2001 Public Education Initiative, go to: [www.rac.org/pubs/schools.html](http://www.rac.org/pubs/schools.html).

\*\*\*

Published with support from the  
J. B. and M. K. Pritzker Conference and Program Fund  
of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism  
633 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017-6778

Phone: 212.650.4160

Fax: 212.650.4229

Email: [csarj@uahc.org](mailto:csarj@uahc.org)

[www.uahc.org/csa](http://www.uahc.org/csa)

Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

2027 Massachusetts Avenue NW

Washington DC 20036

Phone: (202) 387-2800

Fax: (202) 667-9070

Email: [rac@uahc.org](mailto:rac@uahc.org)

[www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org)

# Public School Partnership Response Form

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, my congregation initiated a Public School Partnership

Size of congregation \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate which of the following apply to your congregation's program:

\_\_\_\_\_ The rabbi delivered a sermon on public education. (If so, please attach.)

\_\_\_\_\_ We began our partnership with activities found in this guide. If so, which ideas did you implement? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ We studied the Jewish texts provided throughout the guide. If so, in what forum?  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ We found the descriptions of successful synagogue partnerships helpful.

\_\_\_\_\_ We read and used the background information provided in the appendices.

\_\_\_\_\_ We had great ideas of our own to incorporate along with the material the Commission on Social Action sent out. Please describe:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Our congregation is interested in knowing more about the issues described in the guide. In particular we want more information about:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other comments or suggestions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please mail, email or fax this form to: Rabbi Marla Feldman  
Commission on Social Action  
633 Third Ave (Seventh Floor)  
New York, NY 10017  
Fax: (212) 650-4229  
Email: [csarj@uahc.org](mailto:csarj@uahc.org)