



Yeshiva U. institute gets \$1.6 million to boost day schools

By Jacob Berkman · December 1, 2010

NEW YORK (JTA) -- The Avi Chai Foundation has given a \$1.6 million grant to Yeshiva University to help Jewish day schools improve their financial situations.

The grant will go to the YU Institute for University-School Partnership to support its efforts in helping 30 day schools in five Jewish communities figure out their long-term financial goals and strategies. The program also will provide extensive consulting support for the schools.

Along with these initiatives, the program will go toward bringing in more students by offering three-year matches for funds that each school brings in from local donors, foundations and Jewish federations.

If the project, which was piloted in Bergen County, N.J., is successful in the five communities, Avi Chai and YU plan on expanding it to as many as 200 schools in 30 communities.

The initial five communities have not yet been identified.

“It will provide great transparency into day school finances, from costs to revenue, so that they may achieve significant improvements based on hard facts, while preserving educational quality,” Dr. Harry Bloom, the YU Institute’s director of planning and performance improvement, said in a news release. “Ultimately, our goal is to help these 30 schools achieve a 10 percent improvement in their finances, with a collective target value of \$30 million in benefit to them.”

Here is the release announcing the project:

INSTITUTE FOR UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP RECEIVES \$1.6 MILLION GRANT FROM AVI CHAI FOUNDATION TO STRENGTHEN DAY SCHOOL FINANCES

(New York, NY) – In support of the necessary goal of achieving financial stability and sustainability of the Jewish day school movement, the Avi Chai Foundation has made a \$1.6 million grant to the Institute for University-School Partnership at Yeshiva University (YU) to support YU’s comparative financial benchmarking work with 30 Jewish day schools in five communities across the country. The goal is to greatly improve their financial operations and planning and help make them more affordable without sacrificing quality.

The three-year capacity building grant, which is designed to match an equivalent amount of funding from local sources, including local foundations and federations, establishes a comprehensive program that involves comparative financial benchmarking, long-term financial planning, and extensive consulting support for those schools.

Local communities, with the support of their area philanthropists who view sustainable day schools as a key communal priority, are actively pursuing participation in the program, and the Institute is currently working on the selection process. The Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education (PEJE) will provide consulting support to the program.

YU and Avi Chai view the program as a “Phase I” effort, which, if proven successful, would ultimately be scaled up to encompass 200 schools in 30 communities.

“This initiative marks the first time such an all-encompassing effort of comparative financial analysis and long-range planning has been established on a communal level,” said Dr. Harry Bloom, the Institute’s director of planning and performance improvement. “It will provide great transparency into day school finances, from costs to revenue, so that they may achieve significant improvements based on hard facts, while preserving educational quality. Ultimately, our goal is to help these 30 schools achieve a 10% improvement in their finances, with a collective target value of \$30 million in benefit to them.”

“We are delighted to be working together with Yeshiva University and the Institute for University-School Partnership towards our shared goal of building a strong and sustainable day school field,” said Yossi Prager, executive director of Avi Chai North America.

The initiative is an expansion of a pilot program facilitated by the Institute in several communities across the country, including Bergen County, NJ. That effort employed a “Benchmark Survey” to identify significant school-specific revenue enhancement and expense reduction opportunities.

“The YU Benchmarking survey helped our schools learn a great deal about themselves,” said Dror Futter, co-chair of the Cost Reduction Committee, Jewish Education for the Generations in Bergen County. “The information gathering effort required by the study yielded insights by requiring schools to look at their own information in new ways and different categories. The comparative aspect of the study helped each school identify areas for savings and increased effectiveness in both their operations and fundraising.”

Dr. Bloom noted that comparative financial analysis is a promising tool in the independent school world and has been used by the National Association of Independent Schools and PEJE.

“Hence the need for this new initiative,” said Dr. Scott J. Goldberg, Institute director, who stressed that, “comparative financial analysis and long-term financial planning are part of a multi-pronged solution to day school sustainability, including endowment building and efforts to increase government funding.”

He added that it is “critically important that Jewish day schools achieve baseline financial management and fundraising efficiencies, and build organizational capacity. In so doing, they will be better able to offer a quality product at a reasonable price, level off the rate of future tuition increases, engage in more sophisticated financial sustainability activities, and bring transparency to day school finances in a manner that inspires the confidence of philanthropists, parents, the community and other funding and investment sources.”

About the Institute for University-School Partnership

The Institute, a division of Yeshiva University’s Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration, is committed to the advancement of Jewish education and to providing comprehensive solutions to the complex challenges confronting day schools today. Through the Institute, one gains access to the building blocks of better Jewish education. It provides the academic knowledge and research, educational experience and expertise, and strategic planning and performance improvement programs necessary to build a better day school. Collectively, these initiatives help improve the academic, behavioral, social, emotional, and religious outcomes for students in Jewish schools, develop more and better quality educators and lay leaders, and create a culture of research and innovation in the field. And, most importantly, they strengthen Jewish education today and bring wisdom to life for generations to come.

About Yeshiva University

Founded in 1886, YU brings together the heritage of Western civilization and the ancient traditions of Jewish law and life. More than 7,000 undergraduate and graduate students study at YU's four New York City campuses: the Wilf Campus, Israel Henry Beren Campus, Brookdale Center, and Jack and Pearl Resnick Campus. YU’s three undergraduate schools — Yeshiva College, Stern College for Women, and Sy Syms School of Business — offer a unique dual program comprised of Jewish studies and liberal arts courses. Its graduate and affiliate schools include Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, Wurzweiler School of Social Work, Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology, Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration, Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies, and Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary. YU is ranked among the nation’s leading academic research institutions. www.yu.edu.