

Day School Numbers Stabilize



[Marvin Schick: Day schools may not yet have weathered economic storm.](#)

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News on the Jewish day school front was better than expected this week, with 2010-2011 nationwide enrollment figures overall holding steady. (Haredi schools, which are thought to experience consistent growth due to high birth rates, were not included in the survey, conducted by the Avi Chai Foundation.)

Despite declining enrollment in the Conservative movement's Solomon Schechter schools and a "negligible decrease" in community schools (documented earlier this fall by RAVSAK: The Jewish Community Day School Network), enrollment figures for Jewish schools are up from last year, when the sector experienced a 3 percent drop, largely due to the recession.

Whether day schools have truly weathered the tough economic storm and remain stable, however, won't be determined until the spring, when schools do the bulk of their enrollment for the 2011-2012 academic year.

"Despite the good enrollment numbers, I believe a great number of schools are experiencing significant financial difficulty," Marvin Schick, a longtime consultant on Jewish education for the Avi Chai Foundation who conducted the annual enrollment survey, told The Jewish Week. "Contributions are down and schools are providing greater scholarship assistance."

Day schools were able to keep enrollment figures steady largely by increasing scholarship funds and putting off tuition hikes — or even, in a handful of cases, reducing tuition.

“Schools that do not continue a more benevolent policy toward scholarships ... they’re going to pay a price,” warned Schick.

Solomon Schechter schools experienced a 4.8 percent decline in enrollment. “This is a reaction not to any weakness in day schools per se, but the fact that the Conservative movement is experiencing less affiliation, so there is less likelihood that Conservative schools are attracting students,” said Schick.

The Solomon Schechter Day School Association is in the midst of a re-branding process in an effort to improve recruitment.

Three hundred day schools responded to the survey, which was conducted via e-mail. Schick plans to conduct his next in-depth day school census for the Avi Chai Foundation in September 2013.