

BUILDING THE RESOURCES OF YOUR RELIGIOUS SCHOOL

By Arlene Agress

An uncertain economy and shrinking budgets are having an impact on many religious schools. For you as a principal, this may mean a smaller school with a smaller budget for texts, materials and other classroom resources, programming, and professional development.

The following are some creative suggestions for boosting your school's budget and maintaining a rich and varied program:

1. Approach parents and grandparents as resources.

- The software and CDs accompanying your texts are wonderful tools for reinforcing student learning at home. **Invite parents to the school for a demonstration, and ask them to purchase this home component for their child.** Few parents will object; for the cost of a latté or two they'll be supporting their child's studies with homework that kids want to do!
- **Hold fundraisers**, which can be lucrative, especially if centered around a holiday. For example, at Passover, buy haggadot at a discount and resell them to families; sell Passover candy; or offer wine or flowers for the seder table. At Purim, ask for donated items to raffle at your Purim carnival; at Hanukkah, sell gift wrap or create a school cookbook by collecting family recipes, photocopying and binding them into books, and selling them to religious school families or the congregation at large. And don't forget the dependable bookfair, which not only raises money for the school, but helps families build a Jewish library.
- **Hold a meeting for b'nai mitzvah families.** Parents often spend a small (or large) fortune on bar and bat mitzvah celebrations. Speak with the 7th grade parents about the needs of the school and encourage students to donate a portion of their gifts or their expenses to purchase a needed school resource. Suggest that books and/or CDs (beautifully wrapped, of course) be used as centerpieces on the tables, then donated to the school. Families may find this more meaningful than floral centerpieces.
- **Hold a grandparents' day**, inviting grandparents to the school to see what their grandchildren are doing in class, and to participate in a project with them. Two weeks later, send a mailing asking grandparents to contribute to a fund for purchasing resources for the school or, specifically, their grandchild's class.
- **If your synagogue holds bingo or poker games to raise money, ask if you can have a school-sponsored night**, where you invite your parent body, and a percentage of the proceeds goes to the school.

2. Make the PTA, sisterhood, brotherhood, and the rabbi your partners.

- **Let your PTA know** if you need new textbooks, computers, or software, or want to do a special program. They can help you raise funds, but need your guidance. Give them a target amount of money to raise; the chances are good that they will succeed. Don't forget to acknowledge them in the temple bulletin and/or from the bimah during Shabbat services.
- **Bring sample of things your school needs to synagogue sisterhood and/or brotherhood meetings and make a presentation.** These organizations may choose to work to raise the needed funds for you. Again, acknowledge them in the temple bulletin and/or from the bimah.



- **Enlist your rabbi's help in identifying individuals who might like to set up an endowment or trust for the school;** the income can be used to purchase materials and texts in perpetuity. You never know who might be interested!

3. **Involve outside resources**

- **Don't overlook corporate sponsors.** Corporations spend big bucks on advertising, and may like to get their name into every home on a child's textbook or CD ("Donated by..."). A listing in your temple bulletin is good PR for them, and they may also get tax credits. Don't be afraid to approach corporate offices with your request; send your request in writing on school stationery and follow up with a phone call.
- **Honor a benefactor at a reception.** Create a program book by selling ads to well-wishers in honor of someone who has made generous donations to your school.
- **Sell gift certificates (scrip) good at a local supermarket,** which will often donate a portion of sales (usually 5–10%) to your school or synagogue.

With some creative thinking, in spite of cost cutting measures and shrinking budgets, you can help provide your school with the resources it needs to buy the best materials, hold meaningful programs, and offer your teachers vital ongoing development.

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