

Re-thinking the future of Jewish education

Making high-quality Jewish education
accessible to more Jewish children
in Victoria.

DISCUSSION PAPER JUNE 2022



Jewish Education
Foundation

Acknowledgements

In 2020 Alan Schwartz AM convened a Working Group, comprising Leah Balter, Nathan Cher, Graham Goldsmith AO, Mark Harrison, Genia Janover, Lisa Kennett and Professor Andrew Markus AO, to identify opportunities to improve access the Jewish education. Members represent a cross section of the community, have deep experience in the issues under discussion, but do not speak for any specific school with which they may be or have been affiliated.

In the absence of a communal planning body in Victoria such as the JCA in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, the Working Group has adopted a custodial rather than fiduciary approach. In other words, rather than focus exclusively on the interests and priorities of individual schools, it has examined how well the overall Jewish school system serves the community.

We thank Bialik College, King David School, Leibler Yavneh College and Mount Scopus Memorial College for their cooperation at President, Principal and CFO level, by giving up their time for open and frank discussion, and for providing input into and feedback on our modelling. We note that the schools were not involved in the creation of the 2021 or 2022 Discussion Papers, and do not necessarily agree with all their suggestions.

Nechama Bendet has acted as Secretariat for the Working Group. Reuben Finighan designed the Fee Assessment Model described on page 10 of this paper. Laurence Slomoi of Slomoi Immerman Partners provided financial advice. The philanthropists listed below have generously funded the Discussion Paper and the new Jewish Education Foundation and the JCCV have assisted with enabling the discussion paper to be shared across the Victorian Jewish community.

The Hon. Ray Finkelstein AO QC has assisted the Working Group with its governance structure, and has moderated discussions with the participating Jewish schools.

The Jewish Education Foundation, which replaces the Working Group, has formed a strategic partnership with the government of Israel, facilitated by the Australian Council of Jewish Schools. Israel's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs is helping to fund the Fee Assessment Board pilot as part of its commitment to strengthen Jewish education in the diaspora.

Anonymous
Supporter

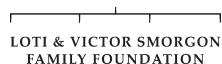


P & S Bassat
Foundation



Justin Liberman

Pointmade.



An open letter from Alan Schwartz

In this 2022 update of our 2021 Discussion Paper, *Re-Thinking the Future of our Jewish Schools*, I am very pleased to announce two initiatives that I believe will do a great deal, over time, to strengthen Jewish education in Victoria.

The first is the establishment of the Jewish Education Foundation, whose *members* are named on page 5, to support Jewish schools and Jewish education.

Secondly, the Foundation has created an independent Fee Assessment Board (FAB). The board will run a two-year pilot that will enable a limited number of Jewish children currently enrolled in government schools to enrol in a participating school of their choice, through a discreet, standardised process that assesses affordable fees for each family.

Six schools – Bialik College, King David School, Leibler Yavneh College, Mount Scopus Memorial College, Sholem Aleichem College and Yeshivah Beth Rivkah Colleges – have signed on to the pilot. This is a remarkable development, a first in the history of Jewish education in Victoria, and I commend the schools for their willingness to work together to tackle a significant challenge for our community.

When members of the Jewish Education Foundation (formerly the Jewish Schools Working Group) launched a project two years ago to make Jewish education accessible to more Jewish children in Victoria, we knew that escalating school fees were

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putting an education at a Jewish Day School out of reach for many families. About a third of householders polled by the Gen17 Australian Jewish Community Survey said that the cost of fees had prevented them from sending one or more of their children to a Jewish Day School.

We were also troubled by demographic projections showing that over the next 20 years, Victoria's population of Jewish school age children would fall by nearly 25 percent – or 2000 students. That could mean anywhere between 800 to 1700 fewer students at four of our schools: Bialik College, King David School, Leibler Yavneh College, and Mount Scopus Memorial College.

Our 2021 paper, *Re-thinking the future of our Jewish schools*, has sparked an extraordinary communal conversation about the meaning and purpose of Jewish education. Knowing our community as we do, none of us will be surprised to hear that the debate has been lively, intense, passionate, with many different voices and views.

More than a thousand people attended forums to discuss the paper. More than 1400 people joined the Jewish Schools Facebook group. More than 300 people answered a survey that was part of a community consultation conducted by a Monash University research team (a detailed report is available on our website).

Nearly 80 percent of respondents to the Monash survey found the challenges facing Jewish schools to be “extremely” or “quite” concerning. A vital issue was affordability – many average and even above-average income earners in the Jewish community consider school fees to be beyond their means.

Our 2021 paper set down four options for the future of the four schools cited above. Most participants in the consultation, presented with these options, saw maintaining the status quo as not viable. Yet few agreed on what should change. School mergers were not popular, although some saw them as most likely to address the affordability challenge. Many liked the idea of a Jewish VCE school, but others thought such a change would do too much damage to existing Jewish schools.

However, many participants endorsed one initiative proposed in the 2021 paper – the creation of a Fee Assessment Board. This paper sets out in detail how the FAB pilot will work. Its benefits include an application process that is anonymous and does not inquire into a family’s household expenditure. If the enrolment is confirmed, the child will be guaranteed a place for the remainder of the child’s school life (barring unusual developments) for the fee assessed each year by the FAB. The schools will also benefit through students filling empty places and bringing extra fee and grant revenue.

Our community conversation and consultation also show that an allegiance to Jewish education extends far beyond the schools discussed in this report. The families of the estimated 4000 Jewish children attending non-Jewish schools – more than 40 percent of their age cohort – want to be part of

this conversation. Many of these parents provide their children with Jewish education through programs offered by the United Jewish Education Board (UJEB), among other organisations, or simply through Jewish experiences in their home. Most reject any idea that their decision not to send their children to Jewish schools lessens their commitment to Jewish education and Jewish life.

The Jewish Education Foundation sees the FAB as a significant initiative but acknowledges that more needs to be done to address concerns about the future of Jewish education in Victoria. With an increasing number of Jewish children enrolled in non-Jewish schools, critical thought must be given to how to support education outside the Jewish Day School system. While we look forward to seeing the results of the FAB pilot, we will also explore, in consultation with the community, other opportunities to improve access to quality Jewish education for all who seek it.

I am proud that the Jewish Education Foundation has initiated a debate that reminds us of the place education holds at the heart of Jewish life. We have put options for change, however contested, on the table. People are talking. I am sure that the conversation will expand and deepen, driven as it is by an unwavering commitment to our children’s future.



Alan Schwartz AM
Chair, Jewish Education Foundation

To learn more about this important initiative or to join the Jewish schools community conversation go to [jewisheducationfoundation.com](https://www.jewisheducationfoundation.com)

Creation and members of the Jewish Education Foundation and Fee Assessment Board

The Jewish Schools Working Group has implemented a formal governance structure by establishing itself as the Jewish Education Foundation (Vic) Ltd, a charitable company, to support Jewish schools and Jewish education. The Foundation is registered as a deductible gift recipient, operates a scholarship fund and has approval for the establishment of a public fund. Alan Schwartz and members of the former Working Group have become members and directors of the Foundation.

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The Foundation has appointed the five members of the FAB. The board will be chaired by Kevin Slomoi, Principal of KS Advisory. Other members are Nathan Cher and Lisa Kennett, two directors of the Foundation, Nathalie Chasen and Ruth Kaye.

After widespread feedback that parents in government schools were not represented on the Working Group, Gabi Crafti, President of the United Jewish Education Board (UJEB), has been appointed a director and member of the Foundation. To further broaden its base, the six schools who will participate in the FAB pilot and the Australian Council of Jewish Schools have all been invited to choose a representative to be a member of the Foundation.

Background: financial and demographic pressures on Jewish schools

Melbourne's ten Jewish schools represent the great diversity of Jewish life, catering to strictly orthodox, modern orthodox, progressive and non-observant families. All deliver a curriculum of both Jewish and general studies. Most rank among the top schools in the state in VCE results. For the 5,400 students enrolled in them and their families, it's a world-leading system. However, our modelling raises serious concerns about its viability.

Today the annual cost of educating a Year 12 student in the Jewish schools that were the subject of our 2021 paper is between \$34,000 and \$39,000. These costs, and the fact that school fees have consistently been increasing at a faster rate than CPI, help to explain why, between 2006 and 2016, Victoria's estimated school-age Jewish population increased by 16 per cent, but enrolments in Jewish schools increased by only 4 per cent. And why the proportion of Jewish children attending Jewish schools in Victoria fell from an estimated 69 per cent in 2006 to 57 per cent in 2016.

By contrast, the number of Jewish children attending government schools has risen sharply, particularly in primary school. According to ABS data, in 2006, 30 per cent of Jewish primary-aged children attended government schools; 10 years later that figure had risen to 38 per cent. Overall, about 4000 Jewish children in Victoria are in non-Jewish schools.

Cost is one problem; demographic change is another. The number of young people in our community is no longer growing, as it was during the first two decades of this century. In an analysis undertaken for the Foundation, demographer Dr David Graham found that Victoria's school-aged Jewish population, which

peaked at just over 9500 in 2021, would fall from that point on.

We know that some parents enrol their children in non-Jewish schools, including government schools, for factors unrelated to affordability. These include the availability of subjects or programs that better meet the needs of their children, to enable their children to mix with students from diverse backgrounds, or for values-driven reasons.

For Jewish schools, the shift towards state schooling creates a vicious circle. The fixed costs of operating the schools must be shared among a smaller number of children, thereby driving up the cost of education for those who remain. As competition between Jewish schools for a shrinking pool of students grows, so does the demand for fee subsidies. But fee discounts strain budgets and affect quality, which can only result in more children leaving Jewish schools.

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Options for change

The [2021 Discussion Paper](#) made no recommendations for change but rather sought to open a communal conversation. However, it put forward four possible options for our schools. These options, described in detail in the 2021 paper, are summarised briefly below.

1: Maintain the status quo

Bialik College, King David School, Leibler Yavneh College and Mount Scopus Memorial College continue to operate from Prep to Year 12. All offer a continuous Prep to Year 12 education, in which staff know the students well and can cater to each child's learning and pastoral needs. Parents can choose a school that reflects their beliefs.

2: Merge four schools into two

Combining the four schools into two – most likely at Prep or Year 7 – would enable children to share their school years with a larger and more diverse group of peers. They would create economies of scale and generate substantial savings, while increased class sizes, particularly in VCE electives, would enable more subjects to be offered and drive down the cost of fees.

3: Create a new, independent Jewish co-educational VCE School

A new VCE school would bring together all students from the four schools for Years 10 to 12, with the existing schools finishing at the end of Year 9. With up to 400 students per year level, the new school would make many more subjects viable, and could recruit the best educators. Greater economies of scale would significantly reduce the cost of fees.

4. Foster greater collaboration among Jewish schools

The four schools could implement reforms to make them more accessible almost immediately. Possible reforms include creating a VCE Academy that would bring together students for subjects with low student numbers, and creating a new independent Fee Assistance Board to fill spare enrolment capacity.

The 2021 Discussion Paper made no recommendations for change but rather sought to open a communal conversation.

The Monash University Community Consultation: a call for change

Last year the Working Group commissioned a Monash University research team to hear the views of the Jewish community on the 2021 Discussion Paper and on Jewish schools and education in general. This section summarises the Monash research. You can [read the full report](#) on our website.

The researchers interviewed school leaders, and conducted focus groups of principals, presidents, teachers, students and parents, at the four schools, parents at non Jewish schools and philanthropists. More than 300 people and organisations, representing a wide spectrum of the Jewish community, answered a survey seeking responses to issues raised in the discussion paper.

Perhaps the most important finding to emerge from the consultation was that 79 per cent of survey respondents considered the challenges facing Jewish schools to be “extremely” or “quite” concerning. Only 7 per cent considered them to be “slightly” or “not at all” concerning.

Other findings include:

Financial challenges: the different views of parents and schools

- Participants in the consultation saw affordability as a crucial challenge, with school fees considered to be “out of reach” for many average and above-average income earners in the Jewish community. Some parents criticised what they saw as the schools’ lack of regard for cost-of-living pressures and their limited efforts to mitigate fee increases.
- By contrast, while acknowledging the affordability challenge, some principals and presidents pointed out that it was not hurting

their enrolments. Some also challenged the framing of the affordability issue as being about Jewish schooling alone, when the cost of any private school and even living in Melbourne were big challenges for many people.

- School principals and presidents identified their fee assistance programs as vital in reducing cost pressures. While they insisted the programs were fair and accessible, parents’ negative experiences of the programs – notably a lack of consistency, transparency, intrusiveness and indignity – was a common theme.
- Many families in the “middle-band” – dual-income households for whom fees would be a financial burden – do not wish to approach the schools for fee relief, and choose instead to send their children to government schools.

Cultural challenges: why parents choose a range of schools for their children

One phrase in the discussion paper – a “diminishing commitment” to Jewish day school education – provoked strong views. Many parents who send their children to government or non-Jewish private schools objected to the phrase and said they had chosen these schools for positive reasons, such as school culture, or the availability of subjects or programs that better met the needs of their children, rather than an inability to afford a Jewish school. Some participants did not object to the phrase but said it needed to be understood in the context of rising fees, cost-of-living pressures and shifting values in generations more distant from the Holocaust and the immigrant experience.

Views from the consultation on the four options for Jewish schools

- **Maintain the status quo.** Most participants believed this option was not viable. Several stakeholders even believed the status quo would inevitably lead to the collapse of one or more of the schools.
- **School mergers.** This option was the least popular, especially among students, former students and parents at Jewish schools. Among the latter three groups, 52 percent ranked it as their least preferred choice and only 9 percent as their most preferred. A common objection was that mergers would limit parents' ability to choose a school that best reflects where they "fit" in the community. Many also believed they would simply "never happen" due to the vested interests of school leaders and donors.
- Nevertheless, many participants conceded that mergers appeared to be the option with the most potential to address the affordability challenge. After initial negative reactions, some focus group participants were interested to learn more about successful Jewish school mergers overseas. Strikingly, some principals and teachers were among those most supportive of mergers, noting their financial, social and educational benefits.
- **Establish a new, independent, co- educational VCE school.** Many participants were enthusiastic about this option. They liked the idea that students in their senior years of secondary school would be able to meet a more diverse cohort of students. They could also see the educational and financial benefits of consolidating the teaching of small VCE subjects. Yet many problems were also identified, including the risk to the existing schools of losing

senior students who served as role models for younger ones, and the risk of losing high-quality teachers attracted by the opportunity to teach VCE.

- **Establish greater collaboration among Jewish schools.** Participants considered this option a "no-brainer". Yet they acknowledged that measures such as greater subject collaboration were unlikely to have any significant impact on fees.

Other ideas for making Jewish education more affordable

- Rather than rely on what they saw as an inadequate system of fee assistance, some participants proposed exploring the establishment of a "no-frills" Jewish school with a much lower fee structure. Some suggested the initiative could draw on models such as Australia's Catholic school sector and the Jewish public school system in the UK.
- Several participants suggested that the only way to sustainably keep school fees down was to establish an endowment with a large corpus, to be funded by philanthropic families and foundations in the community.
- Alongside options to assure the future viability of Jewish schools, many participants called for greater focus on and investment in outside education programs, such as the United Jewish Education Board. Some suggested extending the conversation to organisations, such as youth movements, that offered more informal educational provision.

To learn more about this important initiative or to join the Jewish schools community conversation go to jewisheducationfoundation.com

A new Fee Assessment Board to encourage more students to attend Jewish schools

The 2021 Discussion Paper raised the option of creating an independent Fee Assessment Board (FAB) to address the affordability challenge for the Jewish schools cited in this paper. About 4000 Jewish children in Victoria do not attend these schools, which have about 700 vacancies in existing classes. Filling these empty places would ensure more Jewish children can receive a Jewish day school education. It would also help schools to operate more efficiently, by generating additional revenue from both fees and government grants.

Many participants in the consultation endorsed the idea of the FAB, arguing that it could provide a more discreet, consistent and transparent approach to the provision of fee assistance than was offered by existing fee relief programs in schools. It should be noted that some parents in focus groups expressed gratitude to the schools for their flexibility and commitment to keeping their children enrolled, sometimes through fee relief.

The Jewish Education Foundation is conducting a two-year pilot to establish the FAB, and to offer places in six participating schools to a limited number of Jewish children in government schools for the 2023 and 2024 academic years. Establishment of the FAB follows discussion with the schools that were the subject of the 2021 paper – Bialik College, King David School, Leibler Yavneh College and Mount Scopus Memorial College – and with Sholem Aleichem College and Yeshivah Beth Rivkah Colleges, which have also agreed to join the pilot. The Foundation thanks these schools for their willingness to take part in the pilot.

How the FAB will work

A sophisticated, non-intrusive model will be applied to assess applicants' capacity to pay fees. The model considers the applicant's income, assets and liabilities but does not inquire into a family's personal expenditure. Instead, it estimates living costs based on reasonable averages for Jewish households in Victoria, taking into account family size, housing and other relevant costs.

The model has five guiding principles.

1. Our community must strive to make Jewish education an affordable right for every Jewish student.
2. Parents should make a fair contribution towards fee payments based on their individual financial situation.
3. The process should be simple, robust and dignified.
4. Parents are entitled to retain some discretionary funding and some savings for non-school fee related expenditure.
5. Finally, and crucially, no parent should be driven into relative poverty to pay fees for any form of Jewish education.

A key role of the FAB is to assess any requests from applicants for special consideration for exceptional circumstances. Any issue of policy or principle that arises will be referred to the Jewish Education Foundation. Here is how the FAB pilot will work.

Step One: how to apply

Families with a child or children attending a government school whom they wish to enrol in a Jewish school are invited to take part in the FAB pilot. Applications for 2023 open on 15 June and close on 31 July 2022.

The participating schools and year levels with vacancies are listed in the [Fee Assessment Board Information](#).

If the school of choice has available places, parents can complete a confidential online [Fee Assessment Board Application Form](#).

The model will automatically calculate the family's fee assessment. If the family has applied for special consideration, the Administrator will make the application form anonymous, and submit it to the FAB.

The FAB will review the anonymised applications, taking into account any exceptional circumstances that affect the family's ability to pay fees, and will determine the fee that the family is assessed to pay.

The Foundation may also award a donor-funded scholarship to a limited number of applicants with little or no capacity to pay fees. The inaugural FAB scholarships have been generously donated by the Erdi Foundation.

Step Two: the school fee

Applicants will be notified of their fee assessment and can elect whether they wish to continue with the process.

Places offered by the schools are limited. If available places in a year level are oversubscribed, not all applicants who choose to proceed with the process will be allocated a place.

Step Three: enrolment

If the family chooses to proceed with the enrolment application, and it is likely that they will be allocated a place, they complete a statutory declaration confirming that the information in their Application Form is true and correct. In some cases, supporting financial documentation will be required to be provided to the FAB.

Once their application has been verified, the family then applies to the nominated school and follows its normal enrolment processes, with no further assessment of the family's capacity to pay fees by the school.

Once the enrolment is confirmed, the child commences at the school at the start of the school year and the family pays the fee stipulated by the FAB directly to the school.

Step Four: future years

A family who enrolls in a school through the FAB pilot submits an updated *Fee Assessment Board Application Form* to the FAB each year. The FAB will assess the fee annually, based on the family's current financial circumstances and stage of schooling (entering VCE, for example). Fees will automatically increase with school fee indexation and when a child enters secondary school and VCE. Aside from those inbuilt increases, a family's fee will only change if their circumstances change.

Regardless of whether the pilot continues after 2024, all children enrolled in Jewish schools through the pilot will be able to complete their schooling at their chosen school for the annual fee assessed by the FAB, subject to the school's normal terms and conditions for ongoing enrolment.

Step Five: future of the pilot

The pilot will be evaluated at the completion of the 2023 and 2024 enrolment intake and the model will be refined in light of feedback received. At the completion of the pilot, a determination will be made whether it will continue in 2025 and beyond.

The Foundation is pleased to launch the FAB pilot, and to provide an alternative pathway for parents in government schools to enrol in Jewish schools. Helping more Jewish children to receive a Jewish day school education by filling the vacancies in our schools will directly benefit families who want to attend a Jewish school, as well as children already enrolled in Jewish schools, by strengthening these schools' budgets.

Further information

- [Fee Assessment Board Information](#)
- [Fee Assessment Board Application Form](#)
- [Privacy policy](#)
- [Frequently asked questions](#)
- [Contact us](#)

Next steps for the Jewish Education Foundation

The Jewish Education Foundation is pleased that many participants in the consultation expressed their appreciation for the ongoing work of the Foundation, and their gratitude that this community conversation has begun.

We are also delighted that six schools are taking part in the Fee Assessment Board pilot. The initiative is just a step, but an important one, in the long journey to ensure that every Jewish child can have the opportunity to enjoy a quality Jewish education.

We acknowledge that all the steps to that goal are not yet clear. But members of the Foundation have never believed that our goal could be reached by one small group of people devising a plan and trying to persuade the rest of our community to adopt it. Rather, we believe that the best ideas for change will emerge from a long, patient and inclusive conversation within the widest possible cross-section of our community.

In the coming year, the Foundation will pursue opportunities to bring more members of our community into the conversation, and to propose and hear ideas for making a Jewish education more accessible to Jewish children in Victoria.

Our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page will continue to carry respectful contributions to the debate, and more public forums will be held over coming weeks to coincide with the release of the paper and the launch of the pilot.

We invite you to add your voice to this vital discussion about the future of our children and our community.

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