

## JData: Welcome aboard!

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Today was the official launch of **JData.com**, a **Brandeis Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies** and **Jim Joseph Foundation** project designed to democratize the collection and distribution of data on Jewish educational institutions in the United States.

Schools, synagogues, community centers, and agencies set up profiles with any demographic and institutional data they choose to share. In return, they get access to the (anonymized) data of other institutions. For example, a part time school that has entered data about its student enrollment and funding can run a query that compares itself to other part time schools with a similar student body size. It can generate reports on comparison, and internal, data to share with its board or funders. Agencies and philanthropists can run searches to find out how the majority of children in their community are being served, in what size institutions, what class sizes, and so on. Parents can run searches for part time schools with resources for special needs students or social justice emphasis. Researchers can easily identify institutions and contact people for studies.

**JData**, like **BJPA**, is attempting to leverage modern technology to serve the needs of Jewish community leaders, scholars, and organizations. As a community, we love to study ourselves, and talk and read about ourselves - bookstores tend to have Judaica sections all out of proportion to the ratio of Jews in the larger population. And yet, basic information can be surprisingly hard to access. At the launch, Professor Leonard Saxe noted that almost a day doesn't go by when he doesn't get a query from a Jewish journalist about schools/enrollment, etc, in a particular area, and when he can answer, it's never without caveats about the accuracy of the data. We are just starting to set up infrastructure to collect, store, and make information accessible. And the investment is considerable - about 1.5M has been invested in the project so far.

The website is aesthetically and functionally very user friendly, but its usefulness depends on the choice of Jewish educational institutions to enter, update, and share their data. Confidentiality of data is a priority, but with restrictions, most of the data will be accessible to anybody, institutionally affiliated or not (a free registration is required). The hope is that institutions will find the site useful enough for their own internal purposes that they will keep their information accurate and up to date.

This new technological age is revolutionizing the possibilities access to information and data, and the potential impact on Jewish community and education work is, I think it's fair to say, incalculable. **BJPA** is glad and proud to be part of that movement alongside **JData**, and thankful for the visionary support of funders like our own, the Mandell L. and Madeleine H. Berman Foundation and the **Revson Foundation**, as well as the **Jim Joseph Foundation** who are behind **JData**.