



Frequently Asked Questions

On March 24, 2014, the Board of Directors of the Perelman Jewish Day School adopted a resolution to make a fundamental change in the manner by which the school operates with respect to its faculty. The resolution provides for a transition from the current association/unionized workplace model guided by a labor agreement to a collaborative system guided by a Faculty Handbook. Beginning with the 2014-2015 academic year, there will no longer be union representation of the faculty or a collective bargaining agreement. These questions and answers are designed to help you better understand the transition and the benefits to all involved. If you have further questions, please feel free to contact PJDS Board President, Tracey Specter, at tspecter@pjds.org

1. What are the primary reasons for the Board's decision?

After careful and considerable study, the Board's decision was based on numerous factors, including:

- A management structure that allows for a closer, more flexible and direct working relationship between our teachers and the school's administrators as the best way to serve our student-focused educational mission. The new relationship will allow administrators to interact directly with the teachers and clarify lines of communication.
- Removing tenure and seniority will provide administrators with greater flexibility in recruiting new teachers, managing assignments of teachers to appropriate classrooms, and retaining and recognizing excellent teachers.
- Many members of our community, including parents, donors and even some teachers, expressed a preference to the Board in recent years for this type of change to enhance and sustain our school.
- Consideration that we are the only accredited, independent elementary school in Pennsylvania that has a unionized faculty (according to the Pennsylvania Association of Independent Schools) and that there is no legal obstacle to moving in this direction.

2. When will the changes take effect?

The changes will take full effect on September 1, 2014. PJDS will honor all provisions of the teachers' current contract until its expiration on August 31, 2014.

3. Does this action mean the school is anti-union?

No. Our decision has nothing to do with anyone's feelings about unions. The decision is solely about doing what is best for Perelman students and families, for now and for years to come. It is wrong to characterize Perelman as being pro or anti-union, or being anything other than pro-student and Perelman community.

4. Isn't the school obligated to renegotiate the current Collective Bargaining Agreement?

No. Under the current Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), the Board is obligated to notify the union representative by April 1, 2014 if the Board wishes to negotiate a new contract. The Board's decision means that there will be no new union contract. Instead, the school will move to the system used at nearly every other independent school: individual, one-year contracts with each teacher and a Faculty Handbook that sets out the terms and conditions of employment.

5. Did the Board attempt to negotiate with the union before withdrawing recognition?

The Board did reach out to the union to begin negotiations in the fall. The response from the union indicated that negotiations including the future of tenure and seniority were a non-starter. Given this response, amending the collective bargaining agreement would not have accomplished what the school needed and any attempt to negotiate would have been disingenuous and disrespectful to our highly valued faculty. Again, the Board's decision reflects a desire to fundamentally change how the administration relates to the faculty.

6. Is PJDS trying to cut benefits, cut staff, or otherwise save money at the expense of the teachers and staff by changing to a non-union workplace?

No. The Board's decision to withdraw recognition of the union was not based on finances, but rather on our continuing commitment to excellence. Every currently employed teacher will receive an employment offer to teach in our school next year (contingent, as always, upon enrollment). In addition, the Board is authorizing a raise in salary, an increase in pension and health care benefits, an expansion of tuition credit and other benefits for our school's teachers.

7. Will the teachers have rights after they are no longer members of a faculty union at Perelman?

Yes. While they will no longer be subject to a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), the faculty will still enjoy numerous benefits from their association with the School and, of course, under all applicable laws and regulations that pertain to an employee in the workplace. It is absolutely false to assert that somehow they waive their rights by virtue of transitioning from union members to non-union status. More to the point, they will have their salary, benefits, and work rules defined in conjunction with their individual contracts and the new Employee Handbook. This is the same approach that has served numerous schools, including peer schools of Perelman throughout the country, well for many years.

8. Can a teacher be terminated for no reason or for reasons not related to their teaching performance?

Like in any workplace, there will be rules and regulations relating to employee conduct. However, the administration will continue to be guided by respect for our educators and no one familiar with our school has suggested for a moment that the new structure, in the absence of a union, will be any less respectful of our professionals. On the contrary, we look forward to an environment with enhanced communication and collaboration without the need for an intermediary as required through labor contracts.

9. Does the Board's decision make Perelman an outlier compared to other schools in its dealings with teachers?

Quite the contrary. According to the Pennsylvania Association of Independent Schools (PAIS), Perelman is the only accredited, independent elementary school in the entire Commonwealth of Pennsylvania whose teachers are unionized.

10. What part does the fact that Perelman is a Jewish Day School play in the Board's decision?

The United States Supreme Court has held that federal labor laws do not apply to religiously oriented schools. This means that PJDS has the legal authority now to join an impressive list of other Jewish Day Schools that have adopted – with success – a similar model in recent years, including Jewish Day Schools in Detroit, Chicago and Boston.

11. How will this change impact classroom instruction and the overall educational product?

We are confident that this move will only enhance the quality of instruction at our school, a primary reason for the Board's decision. Giving our administrators flexibility in recruiting new teachers, managing assignments of teachers to

appropriate classrooms, and recognizing excellent teachers will assure that our curriculum and overall educational experience is of the highest caliber.

12. *Can the teachers reject this decision or go on strike?*

No. The current CBA specifically prohibits a strike. That said, we are all going to work hard – mindful of the Jewish value of *derech eretz* – to ensure a smooth transition. Together, we must make sure this new administrative structure can be implemented without disruption to the important business of our school: our collective mission to educate our children.

13. *Is this just a way to get rid of teachers?*

No. Every currently employed teacher will receive a contract offer for the 2014-2015 school year (contingent, as always, upon enrollment). Going forward, hiring decisions will be based on performance, rather than tenure under a collective labor agreement. This will allow administrators to match the best-performing teachers with the demands of our educational program.

14. *Perelman is a Jewish school. How do these decisions reflect Jewish values?*

Our Jewish values motivated the Board to reach this decision. We take seriously our responsibility to instill in our children a love of learning and to inspire them to lead meaningful Jewish lives. As parents of current and former Perelman students, we appreciate the important role of Jewish day school teachers and the significant impact they have on the classroom. Despite comments to the contrary, our respect for the impact teachers make undergirds our action; this is manifested in our belief that recognizing and retaining excellent teachers requires administrative flexibility. To achieve the school's ultimate goal – the development and mentorship of students while giving them the skills and desire to become lifelong learners – school administration must be able to structure and staff the learning environment in the manner that best supports the children.

We realize our decision is generating strong reactions among some of the Perelman faculty and are aware that the change to a non-union environment comes with a measure of uncertainty. We have tried to balance the loss of seniority and tenure with the continuation of many familiar and longstanding benefits and practices. School families and the wider community should know that we thought a lot about our teachers' feelings, yet ultimately decided that a more flexible management model would better meet the needs of our students, the expectations of our parents, and the desire of our faculty to be the best professionals they can be.

As with many matters, Jewish tradition does not speak with a monolithic voice on this issue. As a school, the education of the students is of paramount importance and is a mitzva that must not be hindered. It is also a mitzva, though, to compensate the educators in a dignified manner by providing appropriately fair wages and safe working conditions. Unionization has been an important element in different industries at various times. Jewish tradition, however, neither mandates nor advises that teachers in a Jewish day

school be given seniority and/or tenure. Tellingly, almost no Jewish day schools have teachers represented by a union. Moreover, after speaking with other Jewish day schools across the country, we learned that administrators feel their teachers were happier and more professionally satisfied without a union.

15. Was the entire Board involved in making this decision?

Yes. A Board task force reviewed our management system, consulted with other Jewish Day Schools, as well as legal counsel, before bringing the findings, alternatives and recommendations to the full Board. The Board voted and reached this decision.

16. Is it true that the Board acted without any input from anyone other than its own members?

No. The Board deliberated long and hard on this matter before voting to move ahead. Input was solicited and received from many stakeholders, from peer Jewish schools to teachers within the Perelman community, and many, many parents.

17. Were the Principals asked for their input?

This was a Board decision based upon the Board's obligation to act in the best interests of the School. The Board sought the principals' input to make sure the best interests of our educators – principals and teachers - were considered and protected in this process.

18. Why were the teachers not included in the decision?

The Board did reach out to the union to begin negotiations in the fall. The response from the union indicated that negotiations including the future of tenure and seniority were a non-starter. Furthermore, the current collective bargaining agreement we have with our teachers precluded our negotiating directly with our teachers or talking to them about our plans.

19. Will tuition go up as a result?

No. This is not a financially motivated decision and should have minimal, if any, financial impact upon the school.