



Gratz Insider, March 2012 - Story Continuation

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### **JCHS: Student Hub and Home to Jewish Youth Groups**

JCHS is like a nucleus of Jewish youth activity. “Simply put,” says Ruth Schapira, Director of Academic Affairs, “this is the address where many Jewish teens have decided to be.” In fact, there are hundreds of Jewish teens from 77 zip codes enrolled in the JCHS system, who buzz through these halls on Sundays and Tuesdays, attending classes, student teaching, participating in leadership programs and otherwise strengthening their connections to Judaism.

Lately, JCHS has become a center for Jewish youth groups as well. While United Synagogue Youth (USY) has had a regional office at Gratz for more than a year, the JCHS wing has recently become home to the regional desk of B’nai B’rith Youth Organization (BBYO) and to the winter camp office of Camp Galil/Habonim Dror. “In real estate terms, the mantra is ‘location, location, location,’” says Schapira, as she discusses the youth groups’ recent decision to locate in what she describes as a “hub of teen activities.”

But the benefit has been mutual. A shared nondenominational mission has facilitated collaboration between JCHS, BBYO and Habonim Dror, resulting in expanded programming that has benefited JCHS students. There have been joint service projects, as well as a collaborative Israel fair, a Yitzhak Rabin memorial program, and a Jewish identity scavenger hunt. In April, JCHS will partner with BBYO and Habonim Dror on a program commemorating Yom HaZikaron (Israel’s Memorial Day) and Yom Ha’atzmaut (Israeli Independence Day). Hopefully, Jewish teens from surrounding synagogue schools and other youth groups will participate in this program as well.

JCHS strives to offer interesting and engaging programs like these to its students because “the more committed young people are to Jewish activities, the more solidified their Jewish identity becomes,” explains Schapira. While in college, the students who graduate from JCHS tend to be active in Jewish issues on campus, and many teach at local Hebrew schools. With almost maternal pride, Schapira rattles off a list of accomplishments of some recent JCHS graduates: heads of Jewish student unions, youth group directors, students in Israel, soldiers in the Israeli Army, a Hillel president and a Hasbara Fellow. (Hasbara is a selective program that brings North American college students to Israel for education in pro-Israel advocacy.)

“Our goal is to provide the kids with programming to create Jewish leaders,” she concludes. And it seems that JCHS - with the help of its youth group partners - is doing just that.