

## Two local schools in projects with UJA-NNJ sister city

### Schechter supports special-needs Israeli kids

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Members of Schechter's eighth-grade class of 2009 hold the tallit at last spring's special needs b'nai mitzvah in Nahariya. On the last day of September, more than 300 students and faculty in grades three to eight at Solomon Schechter Day School of Bergen County walked laps around the New Milford school's new outdoor sports facility to benefit special-needs bar and bat mitzvah celebrants in Nahariya.

The second annual walkathon is the latest link in a four-year-old project joining pupils at the Conservative day school with students at a state-run special-needs school in the UJA-NNJ partner city. Religious education and bar/bat mitzvah preparation is provided for these students by the Masorti Movement, Israel's Conservative equivalent.

"This is a school for some very disabled boys and girls up to age 21," said Schechter Middle School Principal Larry Mash. "If it weren't for programs like the Masorti one, they'd get the life skills education but maybe not the Jewish education."

Though other Schechter schools also lend financial support for the cost of the program, the Bergen County branch is the only one that participates directly. Each spring, the eighth-grade class trip to Israel is scheduled around attending the Nahariya school's group religious coming-of-age celebration.



Schechter students do laps around the track.

"While our eighth-graders are privileged to participate in the b'nai mitzvah ceremony in Israel, the walkathon provides an opportunity for the entire Schechter community to contribute to this unique chesed [good deeds] project," explained Head of School Ruth Gafni. "In many ways, we see the walkathon as our students' 'walking their way to Eretz Yisrael [land of Israel] to participate in this joyous occasion."

"Our goal through this walkathon is to sponsor the entire special needs b'nai mitzvah class," said Schechter eighth-grade Judaic studies teacher and Israel-trip coordinator Mashie Kopelowitz. "It is a great way to kick off the excitement of our eighth-grade trip to Israel and the twin b'nai mitzvah that is such an integral, moving part of their trip."

Mash said he hoped to at least match last year's proceeds of \$2,000, earned through pledges per lap.