

Education



SINAI Schools Dinner celebrates over 25 years serving Special Needs students in Jewish communities

Northern NJ – SINAI Schools, dedicated to educating special needs children and young adults within the Jewish community, held its annual benefit dinner Sunday, February 10, 2008. Over 750 people celebrated SINAI's 26 years of service in North Jersey. SINAI Schools have become models for academic and social programming, today operating five separate schools in New Jersey, as well as two Jewish residential homes for disabled young adults.

SINAI is credited with being the first to create a curriculum that incorporates intense special needs services with secular and religious studies, and is the first Jewish day school program for students with special needs to be accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges & Schools.

In 26 years, close to 1,000 students have benefited from SINAI Schools programs, which have grown through its elementary school, girls and boys high school programs, after-school support programs, college guidance, and vocational training. SINAI's innovative schools have changed the landscape for special education within the Jewish community. Prior to the creation of SINAI, only public and unaffiliated programs were available to Jewish children with special needs. SINAI Schools serve students from Northern New Jersey and the entire New York metropolitan area and has attracted students as far away as Dallas, Florida, Holland, and Canada.

"Many of our first graduates are now functioning adult members of their communities. I am especially gratified to have helped so many young people achieve success in integrating into Jewish schools and maintaining Jewish lives," said Laurette Rothwachs, Dean of SINAI Schools. "Today, we continue to expand on our mission to help children and families not only from an educational standpoint but also to provide for the psychological, developmental, and emotional needs of our students from elementary school and into adulthood."

SINAI Schools' benefit dinner honored four couples who have devoted themselves to SINAI'S success: Moshe & Arianne Weinberger and Mark & Nomi Schwartz, of Teaneck; Jason and Chanie Teigman of Englewood; and Carol and Peter Weissman of Fair Lawn. Guest speaker Senator Robert Menendez applauded SINAI'S commitment to helping children become an integral part of the Jewish

community. "All children deserve the chance to open the door to opportunity and growth," he said. "All of you here are helping to fulfill a child's dream."

SINAI Schools took root in 1982 as an elementary school program called the Learning Disabilities Program of Metropolitan New Jersey, at the Hebrew Youth Academy of Essex County (currently the Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy) – for Jewish children and young adults with varying types and degrees of learning and developmental disabilities. The program was proposed and pursued by Rabbi Wally Greene and a determined and courageous board of directors. As enrollment increased, SINAI Schools have helped hundreds of children realize their potential by providing them with the social and educational tools to help them gain confidence and become self-motivated and self-aware.

Many features have lent SINAI Schools its unique identity; its success is due to its commitment to help students explore, discover, and challenge themselves. With a well-trained and talented staff at their side, students learn to access their own talents and abilities which may otherwise lie dormant or undiscovered. As a result, SINAI Schools have graduated hundreds of students who are better and higher functioning adults because of their experiences and education.

Hosted in various school facilities throughout New Jersey, SINAI students are able to benefit from academic and social integration in classrooms and during extracurricular activities with mainstream students. With over 100 students enrolled in their various programs and approximately 80 highly skilled and dedicated staff members, SINAI Schools continue to grow.

In the fall of 2007, SINAI's Adult Transitional Program, called "SHELI" (Supervised Home Environment for Learning Independence), expanded its services to include a full-time residential program for young women. Similar to the Nathan Miller SHELI Residence for young men, created in 1995, young women are provided with a structured, supervised living environment that meets their social, recreational, and emotional needs and promotes their independence as adults. Others reside part-time in the residence or just participate in its life skills and social programming. The program is geared toward young women ages 16 and above, as they age out of day programs and prepare to live more independently in

a group residence.

Many of SINAI's programs have been duplicated around the country and around the world, where they have raised academic standards, given teens leadership skills, and empowered students to assume their rightful places as members of the Jewish community. "SINAI is now an integral part of the educational opportunities available to Jewish children, and I am grateful to the community for providing financial support and numerous other resources," commented Rothwachs. "Our dream is that a day school education should be available to all Jewish children. Each year, the community brings this goal closer to fruition."

Timeline of milestones in SINAI Schools' history:

- 1982 – SINAI became the first special education yeshiva to receive formal accreditation from the Middle States Association of Colleges & Schools;
- 2004 – SINAI opened Maor Boys High School Program at the Mesivta of North Jersey, offering high school boys with mild-to-moderate learning disabilities with a structured academic setting, with the support and guidance of professionally trained and experienced faculty. Maor moved to the Rae Kushner Yeshiva High School in 2006;
- 2006 – SINAI at Yavneh opened its doors at the Yavneh Academy in Paramus. It marked Northern New Jersey's first preschool, elementary, and middle school programs for children with learning and developmental disabilities. The yeshiva includes the Riva Blatt Weinstein SINAI Judaic Studies Program.
- 2007 – the SHELI Program for girls was established to help young women age 16 and above learn the skills of independent living in a supervised, warm environment.
- 2008 - The name "SINAI Schools" and the descriptive phrase "A Uniquely Special Education" were adopted. Please visit the website www.sinaischools.org for more information.
- 1989 – marked the first graduating class from SINAI's elementary school at Joseph Kushner Hebrew Academy;
- 1989 – SINAI opened its doors in Torah Academy of Bergen County. It was later named the Rabbi Mark and Linda Karasick Shalem Program;
- 1991 – became known as The SINAI Special Needs Institute;
- 1996 – SINAI's "Gesher" program was formed to serve as a transition for graduates who needed more skill development for independent living and gainful employment;
- 1996 – SINAI's second girls high school program opened its doors at Ma'ayanot High School for Girls;
- 1998 – the SHELI (Supervised Housing Environment for Living Independently) Program was



SINAI dinner Guests of Honor Moshe and Arianne Weinberger pose with another honored guest, Senator Robert Menendez (left).