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Students dedicate gender neutral bathroom at Philadelphia Jewish school

Bryn Mawr, PA, (March 25, 2015) – Students at Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy in Bryn Mawr, Pa., have dedicated a gender neutral bathroom. Gender neutral bathrooms are private, single-stall bathrooms that are open to any and all individuals within the school community, students and administrators said.

“For most people this will remain just a bathroom,” said Sharon P. Levin, Head of School. “But as a pluralistic Jewish school we are respectful of all of the communities here and of everyone’s needs. A student or adult may require the privacy of a single-stall bathroom for various reasons, be it gender identity, a medical condition or simply because they need a private bathroom.”

“I also think it is important to note that this initiative came from the students,” Levin said.

The dedication took place on March 12. A lunch and learn preceded the dedication featuring the topic “Transgender - Myth vs Fact”, presented by Patrick Rock, a class of 2005 alumni. The bathroom was dedicated in honor of Rock, who identifies as transgender.

The dedication, an optional school event, was attended by alumni, students, faculty and parents. Student members of the Gay Straight Alliance club read letters from Patrick's high school friends, performed an original song and designed the sign outside the bathroom.

“As our adolescent students develop their identities from 6th-12th grades, we want to be with them every step,” said Rabbi Judd Kruger Levingston, Ph.D. Director of Jewish Studies. “It is our role as adults in the community to provide safe spaces that support their occasional needs for modesty. Schools are busy, noisy, exciting places, and it is helpful for students to have a quiet place to take care of their personal needs.”

Levingston said the dedication also aligns with the school’s Jewish values. He said students abide by an honor code, called the *Derech Eretz* pledge, which calls for honor, honesty, humility, community, fellowship and modesty.

“We understand *Derech Eretz* to mean recognition of everyone's honor and integrity, so if our students aren't given that level of respect, then they won't be able to undertake the kind of study that will enable them to thrive in our school.” Levingston said.

In the past several years, schools and public accommodations across the country have begun to implement gender neutral bathrooms. More than 150 schools in the United States have gender neutral bathrooms, according to the University of Massachusetts Amherst's The Stonewall Center.

“I love it because it really feels true to the Jewish values that I learned [at this school],” Rock said during the dedication. “We talk a lot in Judaism about giving dignity to every individual in our community, about protecting the most vulnerable individuals in our community.

“To me this is a statement of knowing that... this is a place that cares,” Rock said. “That to me is incredibly Jewish.”

About Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy

Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy is a pluralistic Jewish day school for students in grades 6 – 12. Located in Bryn Mawr, PA (approximately 10 miles west of Philadelphia), JBHA is the premier Jewish day school in the Delaware Valley, attracting students from Philadelphia and its suburbs, Allentown, southern New Jersey, and Delaware. The school integrates a comprehensive and rigorous college preparatory curriculum with the teaching of essential Jewish and American values and texts. Barrack graduates value diversity, celebrate the richness of Judaism's language, culture, and history, and have a strong connection to Israel. Barrack prepares future leaders of the American, Jewish and global communities who work for a better world through acts of justice and compassion.

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