

Dream, Little Children...

This is the heritage we bequeath to you. This school was not established to leave you untouched, uninspired. Ours is more than an institution devoted to pursuing excellence in general studies and Hebraica. We have built this school so that you can dream dreams, see visions, and do wonders.

— Shraga Arian, Founding Principal



Annual Report 2009-2010



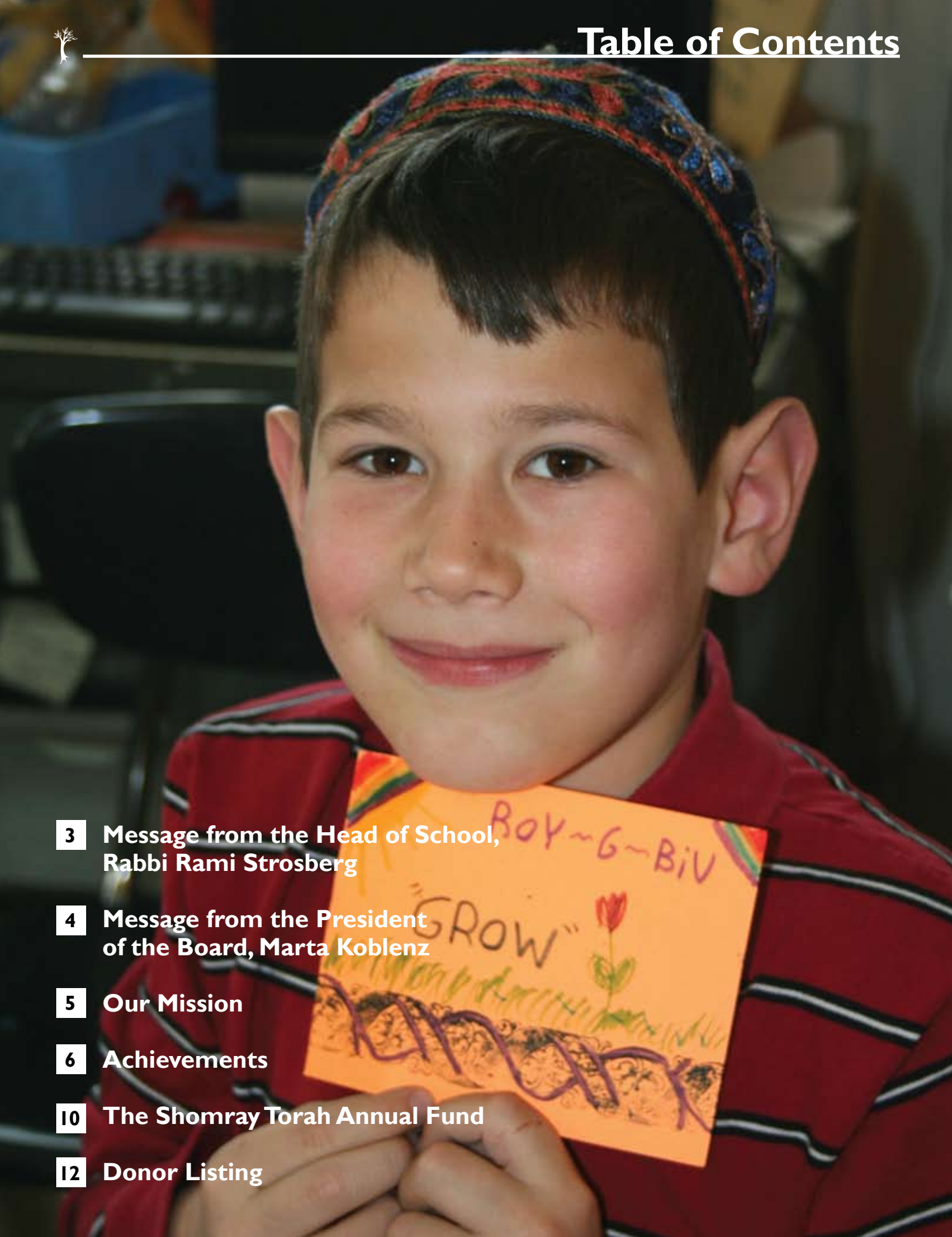
*Academic Excellence
Rooted In Tradition*

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Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York is a generous supporter of Bet Shraga Hebrew Academy of the Capital District





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Dear Friends,

2009-2010 was Bet Shraga's forty-seventh year, and it was again a year in which the school left its distinctive imprint on its students and the wider community. Despite the economic upheaval, we moved forward during the year with our mission to encourage intellectual curiosity and critical thinking and we continued to teach and celebrate the beauty of Torah, Hebrew and the land of Israel. I am pleased to share with you some highlights:

Our athletic department launched three new after school team sports - cross country, volleyball and track and field.

Our Mathcounts team placed 7th in the regional competition. (The six schools above us are all at least twelve times our size).

We introduced new publications including our inaugural Annual Report and *Bet Shraga Shelanu*, our Alumni newsletter and we upgraded the *Shabbaton*, our weekly publication.

For the 4th year in a row, our eighth graders traveled to Israel as an educationally and emotionally unparalleled culminating experience. It was a trip that our students will continue to relive and that will live within them for many years to come.

Despite the challenging economy, our Shomray Torah Fall Campaign was our most successful in recent history, doubling our number of contributors and raising over \$162,000.

At our Heritage Awards Dinner we honored outstanding and devoted individuals who have helped build and strengthen Bet Shraga, including former principal Dvora Heckelman, our current Art teacher Amy Rosenstrauch and long standing supporters Dr. Gavin and Karen Setzen.

In June 2010, we graduated our eighth graders into area public and private high schools. Our newest alumni are exceptional young adults who, like their predecessors, are destined to be leaders and contributing members of their academic and Jewish communities and excel in their ongoing studies.



I hope you'll enjoy discovering the accomplishments of our students, faculty and the entire Bet Shraga Hebrew Academy community as you read this annual report. On behalf of our entire Bet Shraga family, I thank everyone who has helped to support our mission. Your commitment has enabled Bet Shraga to thrive and to continue to offer "Academic Excellence Rooted in Tradition."

Sincerely,

Rabbi Rami Strosberg
Head of School

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I am pleased to present you with our first annual report.

Bet Shraga Hebrew Academy of the Capital District continues to carry forward the educational vision and mission of our founding principal, Shraga Arian. "Bet" Shraga is a "house" of learning, in its broadest sense, and a "home" to our children, families, faculty and administration. Our role as a board, first and foremost, is to safeguard this incredible environment and its mission.

The challenges we faced this past year in this pursuit were not unlike those faced by other small schools in small Jewish communities across the country: changing community demographics amidst tumultuous economic times. We would like to share with you how we have navigated these challenges and the accomplishments we have realized.

Much of our work has focused on two areas crucial for our continued growth and development: fundraising and recruitment. It became clear that our ultimate goal, moving to a more energy efficient and right-sized building would only be realized through strategic emphasis on these areas. Utilizing a reenergized, constituency based approach to fundraising, within an updated and improved financial infrastructure, we were able to more than double our donor base and increase our gifts by over 70,000 dollars. This has led to greater day to day financial stability and has launched us on our way to doubling the Shomray Torah Annual Fund, our goal over the next two to three years.

Our partnership with the Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York matured as we collaborated on efforts that strengthened our community. Not only did we receive a generous allocation of monies again this year, but we also greatly benefited from the Federation's expertise as we sought to professionalize our fundraising efforts, institutionalize our endowment programs, and work towards hiring a development professional.



To address our second major board goal of recruitment, we established a working relationship with an admissions consultant from PEJE (Partnership for Excellence in Jewish Education). We developed a recruitment team led by our Director of Admissions and consisting of parents, representative of the diverse fabric of our community. We also look forward to the results of ongoing demographic studies which will give us a better appreciation of the shifting makeup of our community.

Looking to next year, we will continue our efforts to open doors of awareness, welcoming families of our Capital District Jewish community and supporting access to a Jewish education. As we work to further broaden our base of community support, we will celebrate Bet Shraga for what it has become, a community school, one diverse in its Jewish life, and an essential institution within our community.

We are truly grateful for our donor support and remain dedicated to honoring this commitment to us and the children of our community. As always, we welcome your thoughts and guidance.

Sincerely,

Marta Koblenz
President

In a nurturing and respectful school community that values the uniqueness of each child and the diversity of Jewish practice,

Bet Shraga Hebrew Academy:

- ✦ Creates an outstanding integrative curriculum in General and Judaic studies, encouraging intellectual curiosity, critical thinking and love of learning
- ✦ Celebrates the richness of Jewish tradition, Torah and Israel
- ✦ Inspires ethical growth rooted in the values of justice, kindness and tikkun olam, the principle that we must each do our part to make the world a better place



During the 2009-2010 school year, Bet Shraga Hebrew Academy remained a place of incredible intellectual, Judaic and ethical growth. From the school's classrooms to its performance stage, from local volunteer sites to holy sites in Israel, Bet Shraga students learned in traditional and innovative ways, honored their Jewish heritage and gave back to their community.

Creating an Outstanding Integrative Curriculum

Academics continued to thrive at Bet Shraga, with achievements often exceeding the school's high expectations. Bet Shraga emphasized not just the curriculum itself, but also a love of learning.

Our efforts to tailor learning to meet individual needs were a major part of the school's success.

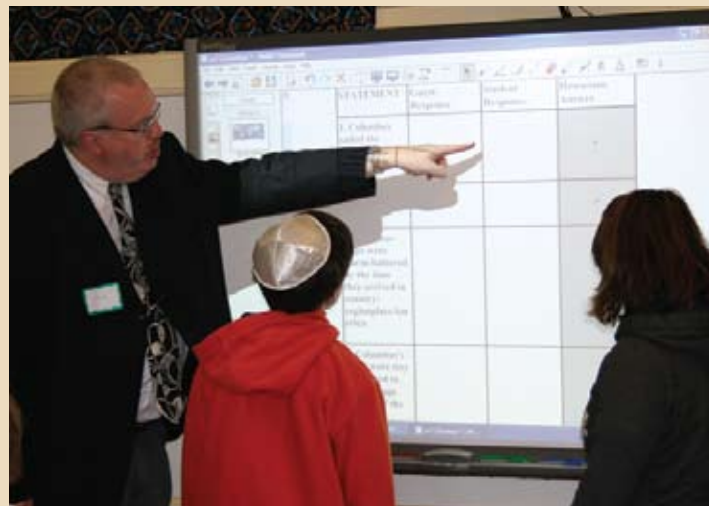
Students encountered opportunities to challenge themselves and enrich their learning both in and out of the classroom.

In the Classroom

Bet Shraga built a mathematical community by hosting the American Math Competition-8 (AMC-8), which draws the strongest math students from the greater Capital Region and Saratoga. Our team placed higher than ever before, coming in seventh among eighteen schools. All six of the higher-placing schools were at least twelve times Bet Shraga's size. The Bet Shraga team was especially proud of one student, Zachary Benson, who placed 21st out of the 150 best school mathematicians in the Capital District.

Using a newly adopted Mishna curriculum called V'Shinantam, created by Rabbi Dr. Pinchas Hayman, middle school students learned through a multimedia program linking them to the ancient Jewish methods of text study, reasoning and critical thinking. Students were treated to visits from Rabbi Hayman as well as incentives for reaching milestones.

SMART Boards helped bring Bet Shraga's classrooms into the digital age. These interactive whiteboards allowed teachers to display computer images on a touch-sensitive screen to create dynamic, visually motivating lessons. In history, teachers could show bright, beautiful maps of various parts of the world and move geographical masses with the touch of a finger. In math, they could manipulate shapes to let students see and measure them at different angles. SMART Boards created amazing potential for lessons that made abstract concepts visually concrete.



Outside the Classroom

Athletics and the arts were an integral aspect of Bet Shraga's offerings, with many occasions for students to hone and showcase their talents.



While our five existing girls' and boys' basketball teams proved to be as popular as ever, our three new co-ed after-school teams – cross country, volleyball and track and field – generated a lot of excitement. These new teams competed within the Friendship League, a group of Suburban Council and private schools that get together for meets and games at local high school facilities.

Five students from our school band were selected for the 2010 Capital Region School Honor Band. This band highlights students' musical accomplishments by combining the best school musicians from Albany, Schenectady, Saratoga, Montgomery and Rensselaer County parochial schools.

A team of Bet Shraga students participated in the statewide Olympics of the Visual Arts (OVA) competition. The OVA team worked throughout the year to create an artistic solution to a long-range problem. Their challenge this year was to research and design a fuel efficient car and create a magazine ad to sell it. By combining art, engineering, science and team building skills, they designed a car whose engine ran on compressed air. Their ad campaign, "Feel like a millionaire driving on air," and their solution to a spontaneous problem at the competition helped them to place second!

"Please, sir, I want some more." was the cry from the audience as it watched the spring performance of *Oliver!* Thirty-two students from grades 3 to 8, acted, sang, danced and worked behind the scenes to bring the full version of this musical to the stage. Together with a host of parent volunteers, our professional directors led our theater program to another successful show.



Celebrating the Richness of Jewish Tradition

Students constantly encountered ways to strengthen their Jewish roots and heritage. This year's eighth grade class was the fourth to culminate its Bet Shraga education with a ten-day trip to Israel. The students traveled and shared their experiences with the eighth graders from the Solomon Schechter Day School of Manhattan. Students who had learned for years about places like the Kotel (Western Wall) and Masada had the chance to experience them in person. They spoke the Hebrew they'd learned since kindergarten and met the Israeli pen pals with whom they'd corresponded. Along with other highlights, students hiked and camped in the Negev desert, visited the modern city of Tel Aviv, spent a night in a Bedouin tent, and toured Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem. Together with Israelis, they observed Yom Hazikaron, Israel's Memorial Day, and experienced the transition from somber remembrance to exhilaration as they celebrated Yom Ha'atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day.

Back home, our 6th through 8th grade students were exposed to a contemporary means of celebrating Jewish tradition. "Bible Rap" a group that describes itself as using rap and hip hop to enliven core Jewish texts, visited the school and helped students write, sing – and even record – their own compositions about Passover.



The Middle School *Shabbaton* (Shabbat experience) has become an eagerly anticipated staple of the curriculum. Students this year prayed, played, and studied together at Temple Israel. They had a chance to bond with different grades and realized that though they were large enough to be a middle school, they were also small enough to be a family.

Torah reading, a critical skill that the school introduces at an early age, is a stable trend in Bet Shraga's lower school. Every third grader this year learned to read a portion of Torah, an activity so popular that students volunteered to learn an additional portion with teachers on their own time. During the last *Tefilah* (prayer) session of the year, parents were invited in to *kvell* (take great pride and pleasure) as their children read their passages.

Inspiring Ethical Growth

Bet Shraga students' compassion was in evidence throughout the school year. In Mrs. Patricia Balmer's science class this January, a discussion of rocks, weathering, and erosion led the fourth grade students to start talking about the earthquake that had just left many of Haiti's people in desperate need. The students decided to raise money to help the victims, and collected over five hundred dollars from friends and family, attendees at school events, and their own pockets.

It was an ad in the *Shabbaton*, Bet Shraga's weekly newsletter that inspired seventh grader, Noah Levine, to participate in the Jewish National Fund Susan Sheen Walk for Water. He went from classroom to classroom educating fellow students about the water shortage in Israel and how participating in the walk could empower them to make a difference.

This year marked the tenth anniversary of the Capital Region Jewish Coalition for Literacy Reach Out and Read (ROAR) program. Bet Shraga's eighth graders made weekly visits to Eagle Point Elementary to work with their second grade buddies on their reading and English Language Arts development. The visits served as an enjoyable learning experience for the eighth grade students as well as their younger friends.

One of our special programs that brought out the best in the students was our kindergarten buddies program. Once a week our seventh graders spent time with their kindergarten buddies; they worked on projects, read or just had fun together. This shared time created a special bond, helping our youngest students feel a part of our school community.

Like their eighth grade role models, sixth graders took pride in helping the community through their twice-monthly visits to Daughters of Sarah Senior Community. Joining together in activities ranging from cooking to Nintendo Wii, the two generations learned about each other and brightened each other's days. One of the highlights for the year was participating in the residents' Purim Carnival. The sixth grade program further trained the students in thinking about their relationship with the world around them when they stayed at the TEVA Learning Center's Shomrei Adamah residential program. Joined by other day school students, they participated in activities which integrated hands-on study of nature and ecological concepts like energy flow and interdependence with Jewish ideas like *Tikkun Olam* (repairing the world) and *Bal Taschit* (valuing the lives of all creatures).



Over the next several pages we would like to introduce you to the Shomray Torah Annual Fund. Our fundraising structure changed last year to better enable the school to achieve greater financial stability. The Shomray Torah Annual Fund, a key component of Bet Shraga's continued success, consists of three basic components – the Fall Campaign, Yearbook/Directory solicitation, and the Heritage Awards Dinner. Contributions provide for professional development, tuition assistance and direct funding for educational programming initiatives, bridging the gap between tuition income and actual operating costs.

One of our goals in 2009-2010 was to increase involvement from all constituencies that make up our Bet Shraga family. With the guidance of our friends at the Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York, we initiated **The Fall Campaign phonathon**, which was a true testament to the strength of our constituencies. Alumni, parents and grandparents of graduates, joined current families to reach out to others in the community for support. We reconnected with so many in our extended family. The message in the halls that day was clear: Bet Shraga Hebrew Academy of the Capital District has proven to be an essential component of the Jewish community for generations past, and together we will ensure that it will thrive for generations to come.

Our success this year is due to the hard work and commitment of our numerous volunteers. *Todah rabah* to our chairs for a job well done!

Liz Goldstein, *Vice President of Development and Yearbook Chair*

Carolyn Levine, *Shomray Torah Annual Fund Chair*

Andrea Spungen, *Parent Chair*

Julie Massry Knox and Mark Israel, *Alumni Co-Chairs*

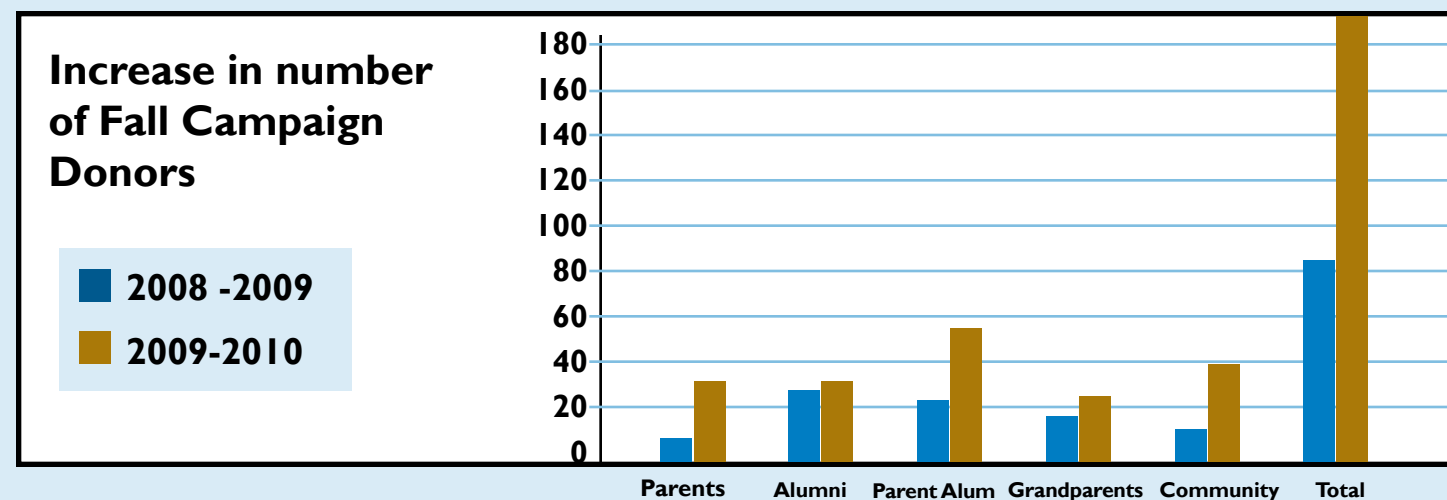
Sue Swartz and Jeffrey Bernstein, Anita and Ken Rabinoff-Goldman, *Parent Alumni Co-Chairs*

Rona and Louis-Jack Pozner, *Grandparent Co-Chairs*

Jerry Goldstein, *Community/Leadership Chair*

Amy Drucker and Elana Kamenir, *Heritage Awards Dinner Co-Chairs*

Most importantly, we wish to thank you, the members of our community, for your support. We appreciate your partnership and look forward to your continued participation in the Shomray Torah Annual Fund.



Heritage Awards Dinner

Our annual Heritage Awards Dinner, honoring four individuals who have shown outstanding dedication to and support of the school, was held this spring at Congregation Ohav Shalom. This year's honorees exemplified the qualities that define Bet Shraga.

Dvorah Heckelman, one of our original founders, has served our school for over 40 years. As a Board Trustee, teacher, parent, curriculum coordinator and ultimately principal, Dvorah helped to shape the fabric of our school.

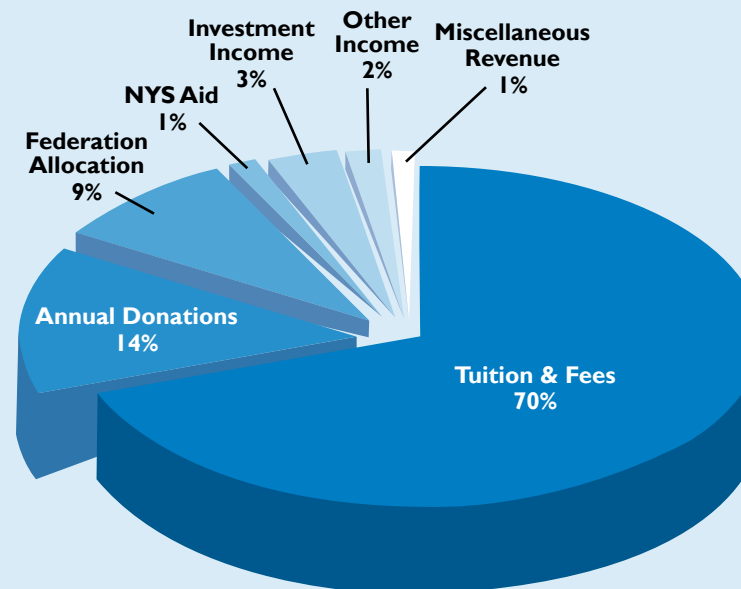
Dr. Gavin and Karen Setzen have served as co-chairpersons of the Shomray Torah Society for three years. Karen spent two terms as a Board Trustee and endless hours coordinating many school functions. The Setzens' tireless efforts in all facets of school life are a testament to their commitment to our school.

Amy Rosenstrauch joined the faculty as an art teacher in 1996. Her love of the arts and Bet Shraga are evident everyday. Whether she is mentoring a team of students to compete in a statewide arts competition or helping students find their inner artist, her passion is visible in the artwork displayed throughout the school.

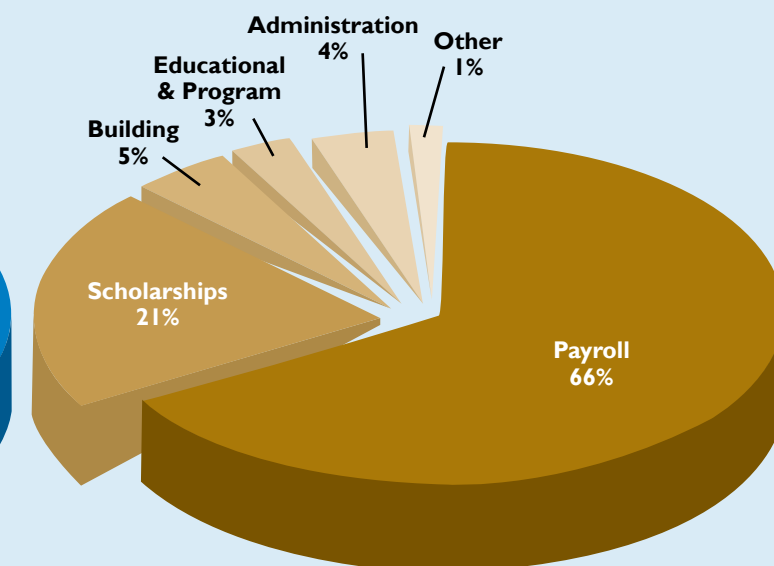


Financial Report 2009-2010

Income: \$2,062, 559



Expenses: \$2,062, 559



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