

I still remember when I was a timid eighth grade student as Solomon Schechter contemplating where I was going to attend high school the next year. At the time, I still lived in Skokie, and so my choices were between Rochelle Zell and Niles North, my district's public high school. I remember creating a chart to lay out the pros and cons of attending each school. Some of the pros that I listed for RZ were things that would automatically come to mind when thinking about a Jewish private school, such as the ability to have a unique Jewish education, or the Jewish community that the school provides you with.

However, standing here four years later, I have discovered an immeasurable number of other factors that have made my time here at RZ so meaningful to me. I have the unique privilege of knowing each and every single person that I go to school with. This has given me the opportunity to create meaningful connections with people who I may not have otherwise known, an opportunity that can be found almost nowhere else. The smaller class size has allowed me to establish relationships with my teachers where they not only know me as a worker and student, but as a person as well. Like many others, I played on the Schechter basketball team. My long and not so decorated career would likely have ended if I had gone anywhere else. However, Rochelle Zell allowed me to continue playing the sport that I loved. If I was allowed to speak about all the things that made my time at Rochelle Zell so special, I would be here for hours: the college counseling help, the trips, the RZ traditions, and the unique effort that the administration goes to in order to ensure that every single student, freshman through senior, is able to be included in this special place.

I will admit, coming in my freshman year, I was incredibly nervous, intimidated by the upperclassmen and the high school environment. However, the seniors my freshman year went to great lengths to ensure that I immediately felt welcome to the community, and the

freshman-senior shabbaton, a weekend overnight that the school plans at the beginning of first semester, really helped facilitate my transition to high school. Many of you may go to camp, like me, and think fondly about the opportunities to sing with friends, particularly on Shabbat. The Friday night of my freshman shabbaton, all of the seniors and freshman gathered into the ballroom at the Embassy Suites down the road to do that exact same thing. It may sound corny, but being in there with everyone singing together, reminded me of camp, and it was then that I really knew that I was going to be comfortable here. What other school has the genuine feel of summer camp? It was because of the welcoming atmosphere that I experienced that weekend, and that has continued on since then, that I was able to pursue my social, athletic, academic, and extra-curricular interests and shape me into the person I am today.

Recently, I had an interview for one of the colleges that I applied to. In the interview, I was asked what, if anything, I would change about my high school experience. The question sort of caught me off guard, as I hadn't really thought about it before. I was more prepared for questions about my strengths, weaknesses, and interests. As I contemplated the question, it occurred to me that I was struggling to think of an answer. Nothing came to mind. I really would not trade my high school experience for anything.