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Private, Jewish day school in Bryn Mawr, PA, United States
Jack M. Barrack Hebrew AcademyAddress272 S Bryn Mawr AvenueBryn Mawr, PA 19010United StatesCoordinates40°01′00″N 75°19′39″W﻿ / ﻿40.016786°N 75.327536°W﻿ / 40.016786; -75.327536InformationTypePrivate, Jewish day school & college prepReligious affiliation(s)JewishEstablished1946PresidentLisa B. SandlerHead of schoolRabbi Marshall LesackFaculty95Grades6–12GenderCo-edEnrollment410 total280 Upper School130 Middle SchoolStudent to teacher ratio1.3:1CampusSuburbanColor(s)Blue and White AthleticsBaseball, Basketball, Cross-Country, Frisbee, Golf, Lacrosse, Soccer, Softball, Swimming, Tennis and Track and FieldAthletics conferenceFriends Schools LeagueMascoCougarNicknameCougarsSchool feesActivity: \$400Security: \$675Technology: \$400Graduation: \$475PTO: \$36 per familyTuitionGrades 6-12: \$33,600-\$41,100[1]Websitewww.jbha.org
Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy is a private, coeducational, college-preparatory and religiously pluralistic Jewish day school for grades 6 through 12, located in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, United States. Founded in Center City, Philadelphia in 1946 as Akiba Hebrew Academy, the school renamed itself in 2007. It is the oldest pluralistic Jewish secondary school in the United States.[2] Akiba Hebrew Academy was founded in 1946 by a group of individuals, primarily Conservative rabbis, active in the Philadelphia Jewish community, including Dr. Joseph Levitsky, Rabbi Simon Greenberg, Rabbi Elias Charry, and Dr. Leo L. Honor. The school was originally located in rented rooms at the YM & YWHA at Broad and Pine Streets in Center City, Philadelphia.[3] The school was founded without a connection to any Jewish denomination.[4] According to Dr. Harold Gorvine, Akiba's founders created the school with the view "that all Jewish children - affiliated and non-affiliated - should come together under one roof to study their common Jewish heritage while simultaneously learning to respect all positions... This objective was not intended to blur differences. Rather, it was intended to strengthen the Jewish identification of every student without compelling acceptance of one particular interpretation of what is "THE" Jewish way of life. "[3] To fit this vision, the school took a middle of the ground approach to certain Jewish practices to ensure the school would remain pluralistic. For example, no school prayer was required and kippot were only required in Jewish classes.[3] The first year consisted of 20 boys and girls. The school graduated its first class of 14 students in 1951.[5] The founding of Akiba marked a point when enough Jewish leaders believed that Jews had been incorporated into American society that they were willing to create a school solely for Jews. The founding of Akiba was met with opposition from some within Philadelphia's Jewish community, particularly from the reform Jewish community.[3] Philadelphia Jewish leaders believed in American assimilation through the public school system and judged Jewish day schools to be parochial, un-American, and ghettoizing. Philadelphia's Jewish Federation would refuse to fund the institution until 1953.[4] Akiba was founded as a progressive school, which a 1946 brochure for the school described as "the needs, interests and aspirations of the individual pupil are the school's primary concern. "[3] The school hired Dr. Joseph Butterweck, the dean at the Temple University School of Education and a leading figure in progressive education, as an advisor for general studies.[3] Part of Butterweck's progressive curriculum included "core class", which encouraged students to research and discuss topics.[3] Butterweck's curriculum also encouraged democratic participation from students including a student government (made up of three branches: executive, legislative and judicial) that held power within the school.[3] Due to Butterweck's position at Temple, he was able to recruit quality teachers to teach secular subjects.[3] However, for the school's first 10 years, Judaic teachers only were hired on a part-time basis.[3] From 1951 to 1963, the school was led by Louis Newman, who was also the camp director of Camp Ramah in Wisconsin, until he was named the first director of the Mellon Center for Research in Jewish Education at The Jewish Theological Seminary.[3] After four years at the Center City site, Akiba's enrollment had grown significantly and moved to B'nai Jeshurun in Strawberry Mansion, Philadelphia.[3] However, the Strawberry Mansion neighborhood was facing urban decay and economic decline, which resulted in a significant fall in the school's enrollment.[3] Therefore, the school moved to Har Zion Temple at 54th and Wynnefield Avenues until a permanent location for the school could be established.[3] Akiba was located at Har Zion until 1956.[6] In April 1956, Akiba purchased a 5.3-acre (21,000 m2) estate on North Highland Avenue in Merion Station, on the Main Line for \$105,000.[7] The property had once been part of a large estate called "Ashdale," which had been built by William Simpson, a 19th-century insurance entrepreneur. After Simpson's death in 1909, his family broke up the estate, and the McMenamin family purchased a 5.3-acre (21,000 m2) section on which they built a mansion that they named "Drake Linden Hall." After extensive renovations, the school dedicated its new foyer, classrooms, library, and science laboratory in December 1958.[8] In 1967, Elie Wiesel spoke to Akiba's graduating class as the commencement speaker.[9] From 1973 to 1975, Akiba's campus underwent an expansion process which included the construction of a new building, library and auditorium.[9] Enrollment grew to 290 students in 1979.[10] Akiba continued to grow and enrollment grew to 350 students by the 1990s.[11] As a result of growing enrollment, the school began the process of expanding again. In 1992, the school purchased 1.1 acres (4,500 m2) in adjacent land as part of their plans to acquire neighboring properties to expand athletic facilities.[12] This acquisition expanded Akiba to about 7.5 acres (30,000 m2) of land.[12] Efforts to expand the school building in April 1994 were unsuccessful as Lower Merion Township declined Akiba's request to be exempted from four township building codes.[13] In October 1994, a committee for expanding the school found that the options to expand the school included expanding the school to the former Solomon Schechter Day School that was located across the street, moving to the campus of either Gratz College in Melrose Park or to a vacated high school in Conshohocken and constructing a third story onto the school.[11] Following his retirement from professional basketball in Europe, Joe Bryant served as head coach of Akiba's varsity women's basketball team during the 1992–1993 season. His son, Kobe Bryant, who went on to become an 18-time NBA All-Star and the 2008 NBA Most Valuable Player, was a freshman at Lower Merion High School and often met his father at the Akiba gym after practices.[14] Akiba Hebrew Academy was named for Rabbi Akiba. The school was approached by the Perelman Family Foundation in 1999 and offered a \$2.0 million donation on condition that the school change its name to honor the Perelman family. After vocal student objections, Akiba was compelled to decline the offer.[15] In February 2007, the school accepted a gift of \$5 million from Leonard and Lynne Barrack's charitable organization, the Barrack Foundation and renamed itself "Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy," after Leonard's older brother, who died in a plane crash at age 27 in 1960.[16][17] The \$5 million gift to the school was given under the condition that 90% of the funds will be allocated towards a scholarship fund.[17] The school was officially renamed on September 10, 2007 at the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia's Radnor Campus in Bryn Mawr.[18] In September 2008, Barrack sold the property to the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia for \$4 million. At the time of sale, the mansion measured 20,247 square feet (1,881.0 m2), including additions made in the mid-1970s such as the gym, and the new classroom building.[19] Kohelet Yeshiva High School purchased the mansion in 2010 and has since renovated it and the adjoining buildings.[20] For several years, Akiba was looking to move to a new location to help facilitate the school's growing enrollment and to ensure their facilities remained up to par with other private schools in the area.[21] In July 2007, the Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia announced the purchase of the campus of American College in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. The American College site is 35 acres (140,000 m2) on Bryn Mawr Avenue in Radnor Township and contains six buildings, walking trails and an arboretum.[22][21] The school inaugurated the new building with a "Hanukat HaBayit" on September 14, 2008 at which U.S. Congressman Joe Sestak addressed the crowd.[23][24] In 2013, the Robert Saligman Middle School, which was located in Melrose Park, Pennsylvania and a part of the Schechter Day School Network, was integrated into Barrack.[25] Barrack opened a STEM lab in 2015 featuring 3D printers, laser cutters and a solar energy research center.[9][25] Barrack dedicated a new multipurpose, artificial turf athletic field with high school soccer and lacrosse lines in September 2018.[26] Following stints with the Philadelphia 76ers and Portland Trail Blazers as an executive, the school hired Ben Falk to serve as Barrack's boy's varsity basketball coach. He coached the team from 2018 to 2021. Mrs. Sharon P. Levin served as the Head of School from 2011 to 2021.[27] In 2021, she was replaced by Rabbi Marshall Lesack, a Barrack graduate, as the new Head of School.[28][25] Barrack Hebrew Academy is accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and is a member of the National Association of Independent Schools.[29] Barrack students in 11th grade have the option to study abroad for the first semester of school at Alexander Muss High School in Israel.[30] Barrack students have studied at Muss since 1994. From the introduction of the Israel study option in the 1980s through 1993, students had attended Tichon Ramah Yerusalayim (T.R.Y.) in Jerusalem.[31] Barrack men's and women's sports teams, the Cougars, play in the Friends' Schools League. The school has 15 male and female varsity sports teams. Rabbi Marshall Lesack is the current head of school. He was preceded by Mr. Oscar Divinsky, Dr. Irving Agus, Mr. Lou Newman, Dr. Diana Reisman, Dr. Steven Lorch, Rabbi Marc Rosenstein, Rabbi Phillip Field, Dr. Steven Brown, and Mrs. Sharon P. Levin. Josh Shapiro, Governor of Pennsylvania Jake Tapper, Lead Washington anchor for CNN David Agus - physician and New York Times bestselling author Mitch Albom - author, journalist, radio talk show host[32] Leonard Barrack - attorney and former National Finance Chairman of the Democratic National Committee (1999–2004) David Bedein - investigative journalist Chaim Bloom - Advisor to the President of Baseball Operations of the St. Louis Cardinals Dan Bricklin - computer scientist Uri Caine - pianist Rob Charry - sports talk host for 94 WIP David Diamond - screenwriter and producer Jamie Geller - cookbook author Gideon Glick - Broadway performer known for his role in To Kill a Mockingbird Goldman - clinical neuroscientist Jonathan Hoffman - investment banker Alison Klayman - filmmaker and journalist Aaron Krause - founder and CEO of Scrub Daddy Eli Lake - journalist Ivan Levingson - journalist at Bloomberg News Deborah Pellow - anthropologist Fred Raskin - film editor Barnett Rubin - political scientist, author and director of the Center on International Cooperation at New York University Josh Shapiro - Governor of Pennsylvania (2023–present) and Pennsylvania Attorney General (2017–2023) Lori Shapiro - First Lady of Pennsylvania (2023–present) Michael Stern - anthropologist, primatologist, conservationist, and zookeeper at the Philadelphia Zoo Jacob Sullum - Editor, Reason magazine Jake Tapper - Anchor of CNN weekday television news show The Lead with Jake Tapper and the Sunday morning affairs program State of the Union David Weissman - screenwriter and producer David Wolpe - rabbi and author Paul Root Wolpe - sociologist, bioethicist, and professor at Emory University Jeremiah Zagar - filmmaker of films including We the Animals, In a Dream and Hustle Joe Bryant - girls' basketball coach Ben Falk - boys' basketball coach Simon Greenberg - rabbi, scholar and co-founder of Barrack Hershel Matt - rabbi ^ "Tuition & Affordability". jbha.org. 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"Muss Israel Program Replaces T.R.Y.". The Cougar Chronicle. Merion Station, Pennsylvania. pp. 1 and 7. ^ Elkin, Michael (September 3, 2009). "Stars of David". The Jewish Exponent. Retrieved September 10, 2009. - Official school website Retrieved from " A Jewish education has always been important to Yoella Epstein and Jeremy Kriger. So much so that they moved back to Philadelphia knowing that they would send their future children to Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy. Why did Jeremy and Yoella long for the Barrack experience before they even had children? The reasons are plentiful. As a pluralistic Jewish day school for grades 6 – 12, Barrack has been serving a growing number of families since its founding as Akiba Hebrew Academy in 1946. Over the past few years, Barrack’s reach has grown significantly. It currently serves families in the entire tri-state area – students travel to the school from 72 different zip codes. With low class ratios, highly educated teachers, and a 100% college acceptance rate, academics at Barrack are unparalleled. But there’s much more to it than just academics; Barrack is a whole experience for its students. “This school has been and continues to be a place where it’s trying to help children find their voices and their passions,” Yoella explains, “and have those things carry them through as they enter into their next stages of life. And be a community for that individual and their family forever.” Before Barrack, twins Nell and Neima (12) benefitted from their education at Perelman Jewish Day School, where Jeremy was a student years ago and the twins’ sisters (Adel, age 8, and Kassia, age 5) are currently students. The Perelman emphasis on excellent education along with the core values of the Jewish faith allowed the twins to transition smoothly to Barrack, the Alma Mater of both Jeremy and Yoella, who started dating their senior year. Values Despite the name change and a different campus, Yoella and Jeremy knew that Barrack was the only choice for them. “We have very, very fond memories of our school,” says Yoella. “Our friends from our school were then, and still are now, some of our closest friends.” Beyond the opportunity for deep, personal connections, Yoella and Jeremy sought a specific educational environment for their twins. “We really appreciated the learning that we received there, and in particular, the dedication to critical thinking... the Jewish education and Jewish perspective, as well as the connection to Israel,” Yoella says. From the unique perspective of alumni, Yoella and Jeremy have observed that those Barrack core values of Derech Eretz, and the identity of the school as a whole, have remained in place over time. “It has still preserved the identity of what it was when we were there,” Jeremy says. From a challenging college preparatory curriculum to an emphasis on critical thinking and inclusivity, much about the school is unchanged. In other ways, Barrack has evolved to meet the needs of a modern student body. “Both in traditional academic ways and in non-traditional academic ways, the school has really advanced such that it is looking to find a way to support every child that comes, that child’s interests, and help them shine in those interests. The school is also trying to figure out how Jewish identity fits into those wants and aspirations,” says Yoella. “I think that the school has come a long way from when we were there, and I really like the direction that [Head of School, Rabbi Marshall Lesack] is taking with it.” Jeremy says. “And that community aspect – being all about the students and letting them showcase their abilities. Being a community for the kids is really still there.” Inclusive Community Yoella notes of the twins, “They’re very excited about both continuing with the strong friend-group they had [at Perelman], as well as the new kids that have come since that time.” Inside the classroom and out, students have chances to bond with each other and grow as a community. For example, at the start of the pandemic, when everyone was sent home, Barrack seniors offered complimentary tutoring to Perelman students. Not only did this strengthen the sense of togetherness, it allowed parents to see first-hand how creative, capable, and kind the seniors were in regard to the K-5th-graders, after having endured so much themselves. “I would encourage people to visit the school, look at the school, and assess whether or not it’s right for them.” As an inclusive, welcoming community, Barrack doesn’t want finances to be an obstacle. Yoella points out, “The school really does try to set the value of the education...and also not ever close its doors as a result of that price tag.” Education, like many things, is an investment. To Yoella and Jeremy, it was an easy decision to send their younger girls, Adel and Kassia to the Perelman Jewish Day School, and to transition Nell and Neima from there to the Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy. While Jewish day school is an expense, Jeremy and Yoella also view it as an irreplaceable endowment in Jewish education. “To our family, [Perelman and] Barrack [are] a gift intended to help shape who our children are as people in this world and as Jews in this world,” Yoella says. “This is the biggest gift we can give our children, and it’s absolutely worth it.” See Why Barrack Students Love Where They Learn Open House events provide an opportunity for you to tour the campus, meet their senior administrators, hear personal testimonials from current students, and gain a fuller understanding of the Barrack school community. Attend a Fall Open House, information here. This Sponsored Story for the Main Line Parent and the Philadelphia Family Communities was written by Kristin Walker. Photography was supplied by Ann Marie Casey, AMC Photography Studios. We’ve detected that JavaScript is disabled in this browser. Please enable JavaScript or switch to a supported browser to continue using x.com. You can see a list of supported browsers in our Help Center. Help Center Barrack competes in the Friends School League, a premier athletic conference in southeastern Pennsylvania. Membership in the FSL provides our teams with top-flight competition, limited travel to away games, and alignment with schools of similar academic profiles and values. An artificial turf multipurpose field for our soccer and lacrosse programs Five all-weather tennis courts A cross country course A gymnasium A modern fitness center with athletic training room Access to off-site competition and practice venues, including: Haverford CREC basketball courts Haverford Reserve turf baseball field Radnor Township & Kaiserman JCC softball fields Bryn Mawr College Schwartz Pool Green Valley Country Club golf course MIKE ACQUAVIVA Assistant Director of Athletics 610.922.2450 macquavia@jbha.org All Private Schools Let this school know you found them on Philadelphia magazine's Find It Philly. Is this your business? Click here to learn how you can enhance your listing.

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