Finding a Formula for Teen Learning

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AFTER BEN STERN became a Bar Mitzvah at Temple Sinai in Dresher, his parents gave him little choice: He'd be continuing his Jewish education at the Jewish Community High School of Gratz College.

Stern wasn't happy about it, at least at first. But now, two years later, the sophomore at Upper Dublin High School said he wouldn't have it any other way.

"I'm pretty sure as long as I am in high school, I will continue," said the 14-year-old Stern, who added that going to class once a week doesn't wreak too much havoc with his schedule as a two-sport athlete.

Stern said he appreciates being able to choose his classes and stressed that they touch on subjects that he sees as relevant to his life.

"They are not your basic Hebrew school classes," he said. "It is more classes that help you with your Jewish identity, Jewish values, Israel and the problems it faces."

As students prepare to return to school, this week's issue examines some of the transitions taking place on the local Jewish educational landscape.

The issue, say educators at Gratz, isn't getting students to stay with the program once they've started. The challenge is getting them through the door in the first place.

Keeping teenagers engaged in Jewish learning post-Bar and Bat Mitzvah during critical identity-