

# Blue Ribbon Schools: SSDS Raritan Valley

*by Matt Brown on October 28th, 2009*



Current 1st graders with a banner announcing SSDSRV as a Blue Ribbon finalist  
Last week, I interviewed the heads of school at each of the 2009 [Blue Ribbon](#)-winning Jewish day schools. Below is the (lightly edited) transcript of my interview with Dr. Howard Rosenblatt of [Solomon Schechter Day School of Raritan Valley](#) in East Brunswick, NJ. Check out yesterday's post for my [interview](#) with Rabbi Avram Skurowitz of Brauser Maimonides Academy.

**Q: Tell me about your school – let's say I'm a prospective parent.**

A: We're an interesting school. We were founded in 1981. Everyone who's here is very excited about our school; we have outstanding Jewish and general studies programs. We have 120 kids in K-8. Over the last four years we have really reviewed every area of curriculum in our school, and have made a lot of updates and revisions so that our school is really in sync with what we feel is most appropriate based on research and the latest work in education. That's the start of it. We have a brand-new science lab, it's the equivalent of the best middle school science labs that you could have. We are enthusiastic about an interdisciplinary, thematic program for grades 7 and 8 that our teachers developed, which integrates social studies, language arts, Jewish values, rabbinics, and Bible. Our parents are committed to enabling us to travel to New York, Boston, Philadelphia... wherever there are relevant programs. And now there's the Blue Ribbon award, one of 50 private schools to receive it this year.

**Q: What was the application process like?**

A: We applied to [the Council for American Private Education, the organization which selects private schools for nomination]. We answered a variety of questions and sent in supporting information. We began the process last fall, and they got back to us later in the year for some clarification. Then we were

told in April that we were a finalist, and received word, unofficially, in June that we were going to be recognized, but we couldn't announce it until the Secretary of Education announced it in September.

**Q: That must have been hard, sitting on that news all summer.**

A: We're very excited, because we face some challenges. We're a small school, we've had an excellent reputation, but we've had our ups and downs. That's partially why we had this curriculum revision, and we've established an ongoing review – every year we're going to do one area in Jewish studies and one area in general studies, so we don't fall behind. We want to always stay ahead of the curve because our children deserve the very best.

**Q: Was this the first year you applied?**

A: We applied the year before, and there were some issues that needed clarification. So we're very pleased that on the second try we were accepted.

**Q: So you applied...**

A: Every school who wants it applies for it. We got it because most of the public schools in our community, many of them are Blue Ribbon schools, and it's something that's highly valued in New Jersey. We're hoping of course that people will say "wow, I want a Jewish education but I really want the best in general education for my child, and I can get both at Solomon Schechter." And that's really why we did it.

**Q: You mentioned that a few years ago was when you started concentrating on the curriculum...**

A: I've been here for four years now. My general studies principal and I came on board together.

**Q: So that was something the two of you brought in when you started?**

A: Right, this was part of what people wanted us to do. We did both general studies and Jewish studies curriculum reviews. It's an ongoing process that should never stop in a school.

**Q: Are you going to the ceremony\*?**

A: Our general studies principal is going and one of our outstanding teachers to the ceremony and the accompanying workshops.

*\*ed. note: An administrator and a teacher from each Blue Ribbon school are invited by the Department of Education to a special ceremony in early November to receive the award and a special flag to display.*