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WOOLING STUDENTS Rabbi Azriel Rosner of the Tiferet Center, a school for women, speaks to yeshiva high school students at the Ramaz School yesterday about the opportunity to study in Israel for one year before going on to college.

Rising Number of Students Head to Israel Before College

By **DEBORAH KOLBEN**
Staff Reporter of the Sun

Heather Lande is on the fence: The senior at the Ramaz School on the Upper East Side is among the thousands of students who will likely make a year-long pit stop in Israel before starting college, but she isn't sure which program to attend next year.

She might get a better idea over the next two weeks, as the recruiting season kicks into high gear. Representatives from hundreds of schools across Israel will be traveling to America to woo students from local Jewish day schools.

In a growing trend, more students than ever are attending religious study programs before college. At Ramaz, 68% of last year's graduating seniors enrolled in such programs, a number that has been growing by about 10% a year.

To accommodate the increasing interest, Ramaz now has an office that rivals its college guidance center, with four special Israel advisers and plenty of colorful brochures.

The competition to attract students to the more than 100 programs in Israel has become fierce.

"Schools are still calling to see if they can come to our Israel night," the Israel coordinator at Ramaz, Rabbi Shlomo Stochel, said. The schools charge upward of \$15,000 a year for the programs, intended to give students a greater connection to Israel and Judaism.

Yesterday, Ms. Lande was among the

more than a dozen young women crammed into a second-floor classroom with lunch in hand to learn more about the Tiferet Center for Advanced Torah Studies for Women, located outside of Jerusalem. The new school started last year with just about 50 slots and more than 200 applicants.

"This is a time for you to go out on your own. It's a time for you to figure out how to take the Torah and integrate it into your life," the dean of the program, Rabbi Azriel Rosner, told the girls.

After the presentation, hands shot up and questions rained down: What is a typical day like? Are we allowed to leave? Do we go on trips?

Rabbi Rosner, who arrived from Israel on Sunday, probably will hear such queries often in the upcoming weeks as he visits hundreds of students in more than a dozen cities including Philadelphia, Boston, and Memphis, with additional stops in Toronto and London.

"It's intense for us as well as for them," Rabbi Rosner said after the presentation. The 33-year-old from Brooklyn founded Tiferet last year and describes the school as a "Zionist women's learning program."

Tonight, parents and students will head to Ramaz to hear about more than

25 of the programs, which have all received the coveted seal of approval from the school's administration.

Jewish leaders attribute the growing popularity of these Israeli schools to a number of factors, including a renewed commitment to the state of Israel, a desire to strengthen religious ties, and more familiarity with the country.

A more secular factor might also come into play. Rabbi Stochel said he shows students a letter of admittance from Harvard University that speaks positively about a "gap year."

Students are not as afraid as they once were of missing out if they don't go straight to college, Rabbi Stochel said yesterday during an interview in the Israel guidance office.

"This trend has been ongoing for 30 years now," the director of the Department of Yeshivot and Day Schools at the Board of Jewish Education, Rabbi Ellis Bloch, said. "It has become something of a right of passage."

For now, Ms. Lande said she is finishing up college applications to schools like New York University. If she decides to go to Israel, she will have to complete those applications by December 1. "I'm unsure still," she said. "But I can see a lot of perks."