



Former day school teacher arrested in Israel

By [Ron Csillag](#) | September 24, 2009 6:55pm



TORONTO (JTA) — A former teacher at Canada's largest Jewish high school has been arrested in Israel on charges of sexual abuse.

Avichai Zehavi, a popular teacher at Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto from 2000 to 2005, was arrested earlier this month and charged with sexually abusing a 14-year-old male student at a religious boys' high school in Israel.

Ha'aretz reported on Sept. 14 that Zehavi, a 41-year-old married father of four, is accused of sodomizing the boy. Zehavi denied the charge, the article said.

Two other boys came forward to accuse Zehavi of sexual offenses, according to a Ynet report cited by the Canadian Jewish News. The alleged acts took place at the school during school hours and when a student was invited by Zehavi to a relative's house on Shabbat.

The Jewish Tribune, B'nai Brith Canada's newspaper, reported that Zehavi is under house arrest. It also quoted a spokesperson for police in the Israeli city of Rehovot as saying that four families have come forward with allegations.

In a statement e-mailed to Community Hebrew Academy of Toronto parents, students and alumni on erev Rosh Hashana, Paul Shaviv, director of education, said the high school takes "any such allegation very seriously" and is "undertaking a thorough investigation." Until recently, "we had no cause to doubt the integrity of this individual," Shaviv said.

The school's Web site lists Zehavi as a rabbi. He won the school's Teacher of Excellence Award in 2002 for instruction in Talmud and rabbinics.

Following his teaching stint, Zehavi spent nearly a year as a cantor at a local synagogue before returning to Israel. The synagogue, Shaarei Shomayim Congregation, also sent out an e-mail last Friday assuring members "that there are no allegations, information or knowledge that any misconduct occurred at Shaarei Shomayim, or with any children of Shaarei Shomayim families."

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