



SOLOMON SCHECHTER

SCHOOL OF WESTCHESTER

Toward a brilliant future לעבר עתיד מזהיר

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"Suspects are innocent until proven guilty." "Everyone is entitled to a fair trial." "Our system ensures that criminal defendants receive a zealous defense." These basic tenets of our criminal justice system are taught in most high school civics courses around the country. Yet the story of Jeffrey Deskovic challenges this notion of justice for all and forces us to confront critical questions about our system.

I first learned of Mr. Deskovic's story from a student who had heard him speak at a Martin Luther King, Jr. symposium. She urged me to ask Mr. Deskovic to come tell his compelling story to our high school seniors. I was eager to do so, touched by the account I read online of a man who spent more than 16 years in prison for a horrific crime he didn't commit. At Solomon Schechter, we also feel it is important to help open our students' eyes wider to the world around them, and seek opportunities to expose them to important issues they probably have not yet seriously considered.

Nothing could have prepared me though for the presentation Mr. Deskovic delivered to our senior class. In all my years of teaching, I have rarely seen a class of seniors so thoroughly engrossed by a speaker. You could have heard a pin drop in the room. Our students were absolutely mesmerized; as they listened to his story, they were clearly touched, shocked, disturbed, and outraged at the injustice suffered by the man standing right in front of them. At 33 years old, Mr. Deskovic had just experienced a 16-year nightmare one could barely imagine. Mr. Deskovic spoke eloquently and passionately, clearly speaking from his heart. After telling his personal story, he offered several suggestions for legislative change to mitigate the chance that others will ever face the same type of injustice he had faced. He also took time to answer questions from our students, and did so beautifully.

I urge all high school and college administrators to invite Mr. Deskovic to speak on campus to their students. Having him speak directly to our students enabled him to personalize for them some of the major "imperfections" of our criminal justice system. Ultimately, it will help students become more aware, more active, and more responsible citizens. This is one presentation they will never forget.

Sincerely,  
Eric Bassin  
*High School Dean of Students*