

Advisory Council

Key Insights & Recommendations

November 29 – December 3, 2020

Introduction

The Eddie and Jules Trump Family Foundation was founded in 2011 in order to help the Israeli education system expand the circle of excellence in the fields of mathematics and the sciences. The foundation invests in excellence because in the 21st century, strong abilities in the areas of mathematics and the sciences are “golden key” to technological innovation, economic growth, scientific breakthroughs, reducing social gaps, and personal success.

In a [first phase](#), the foundation worked together with many partners to increase the number of students studying in the five-unit mathematics and physics tracks in high school. In Israel, these tracks have proven to be fertile ground for the growth of excellence, while some of their graduates went on breaking new grounds in various areas and disciplines. Now, following the continuing joint efforts of tens of organizations, the negative trajectory and trend turned into a significant increase.

Therefore, starting in 2018, the foundation began a [second phase](#) – **to strengthen, expand and diversify the basis of excellence in middle school**. The aim is to generate a systemic momentum in order to enable many more students to study at levels of excellence, while building abilities and calibrating the educational practice upwards. During the past two years, we have focused on building capacity through developing challenging learning materials, professional development for teachers, and opening new excellence classes across the country.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 crisis erupted, which caused a slowing down of the education system. This change in circumstances required adaptation of content and processes to accommodate for self-learning that integrates technology. Development activities have continued while training and teaching have suffered from frequent fluctuations. The curriculum and the formal assessments have yet to open the door for the new content; therefore, the focus of implementation has been concentrated so far in supplemental frameworks.

In light of this and in preparation for the day after the crisis, the foundation convened its [International Advisory Council](#) for consultation. Ahead of the meetings, studies were conducted and conversations were held with teachers and policymakers in Israel and around the world. The [research results](#) were compiled and can be accessed by the professional community and the public

at large. On the basis of these materials, the foundation developed an [updated roadmap](#) which proposes future steps.

All this served as the foundation for the deliberations of the Advisory Council, which convened from November 29 to December 3, 2020. Members of the council are: Lee Shulman (chairman), Yossi Baidatz, Michal Beller, Peggy Brookins, Magdoleen Hizran, Marcia Linn, Zbigniew Marciniak, Fatena Marjie, Alik Palatnik, Kobi Shvarzbord, Niza Sion, Dalit Stauber and Anna Vaknin. The discussions, in which many educators participated, were held via Zoom during a one-week period.

All the participants received the background materials and the questions for discussion in advance, and were asked to provide feedback and offer critiques, ideas, and recommendations. The document below summarizes the main insights heard during the days of discussion. This is a welcome opportunity to thank all those who took the time to read, respond and participate in the meetings and to express gratitude to the members of the Advisory Council for their special efforts.

The Trump Foundation Staff

Weaving a network of partnerships

The day after COVID-19 poses significant challenges for education in Israel and along with these, exceptional opportunities for the foundation's roadmap. Mathematical models have penetrated our lives through our screens, and scientists have become the heroes of the day. The outstanding achievements of Israeli eighth grade students on the 2019 TIMSS test (ninth place, 15% at the excellence level), inspires confidence that their foundation of knowledge is solid, that their teachers are ready for the next step and that it would be possible to make the leap forward.

Significant educational dilemmas intensified during the past year and are now boiling as politicians call for a system reboot. They raise questions of quantity versus quality of learning materials, classroom learning, self-learning, centralized management and local autonomy – all these are on the table and can influence the foundation's operations. At the same time, it is important to note that once again, middle school has been pushed into a corner and is the last in line to reopen in-person classes.

Even prior to the outbreak, the foundation began to implement its roadmap in middle school. As a matter of course, the thrust of the effort was on the supply side, that is, in developing materials, opening classes and building pedagogical capabilities. These steps were necessary in order to prove feasibility and to demonstrate how to teach high order and applied mathematical thinking. Such development processes take time and cannot be omitted.

In its updated roadmap, the foundation's team recommended shifting into an implementation phase. However, council members believe that the necessary conditions for implementation at scale have yet to be realized. Now is the time to join hands and forge partnerships with the professional community, stakeholders, the government, and the public. These partnerships are needed in order to drive demand for excellence. Policy is the driver for wide implementation that will make it possible for the new materials and the trained teachers to systemically influence classroom practice.

Council members were all in agreement regarding the need for such partnerships but they are divided as to the way to achieve them in the short term. Some argued that the foundation should continue to strive for cooperation with the government as an essential cornerstone and necessary condition for its operations. Others believed that until the COVID-19 crisis ends and governmental and budgetary stability are achieved, the foundation should take significant, independent steps.

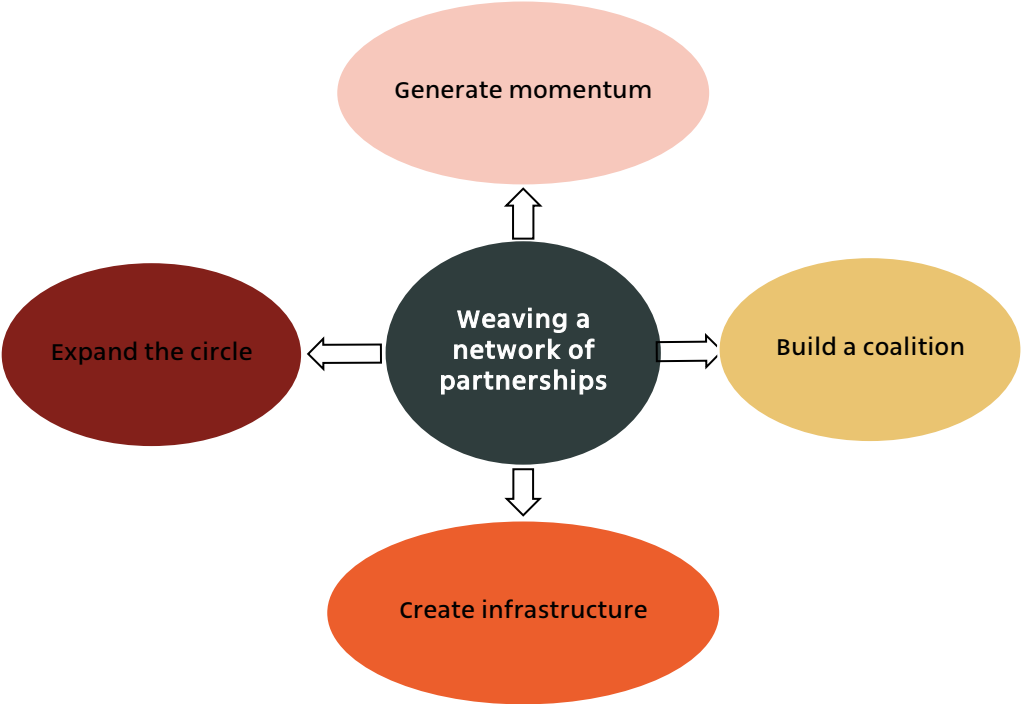
Proponents of independent action believed that the frequent changes of government and the lack of a budget create a continuing difficulty in cooperating with the government. They noted that the Ministry of Education is not enthusiastic about joining the foundation in the establishment of professional infrastructures and in leading the excellence goals in middle school. They discerned that the COVID-19 crisis was opening up space for student self-learning and for educational autonomy in local governments and called on the foundation to work directly with them.

Advocates of cooperation argued that collaboration with government has been the foundation’s modus operandi since its establishment. They stressed that teachers are committed to the formal curriculum and tests. They believe that only through this high way, and not through alternative enrichment routes, will it be possible to reach a “critical mass” and to achieve the foundation’s targets. They concluded that as a time limited foundation, it must rely on the government for long-term implementation.

Council members called on the foundation to take steps leading to a clear resolution of this dilemma. To this end, the foundation should act to build broad-based partnerships with stakeholders from government, academia, local government, industry and civil society. In doing so, it must expand and deepen cooperation with the professional community.

It was proposed to the foundation that it expand teacher training and build collaboration at the local level, which would drive the opening of additional excellence classes. It was recommended that it systematically examine the readiness to establish professional infrastructures for quality teaching while securing the partnerships needed for its long-term operation. Likewise, it was suggested that the foundation consider issuing a public call to parents, teachers and students to choose the excellence path in middle school.

The expectation is that within two years, the government will be at the forefront of the activity and will lead the way. The professional community will be prepared and ready, the stakeholders will act on the basis of deeply-held consensus and will support policy, the public will push the practice and the educational field will be prepared for implementation of the joint policy.



Build a coalition / professional community, stakeholders and government

In its high school strategy, the foundation already learned that setting change in motion takes place in three stages: developing abilities, building partnerships, and deploying policy. At present, the foundation is approaching the end of the development phase of its middle school roadmap and it must now advance to the second phase of coalition building. To this end, it is advisable for the foundation to operate within three partnership circles: the professional community, the wider ecosystem stakeholders, and the government.

A particularly challenging mission awaits the foundation staff in this realm. On the one hand, the team must resolutely strive towards the roadmap goals. On the other hand, team members must establish relationships built on trust, dialog and attentiveness. They must be aware of the tension between focus and flexibility and to balance between the two with wisdom and sensitivity. This equilibrium could be achieved by convening encounters and acquaintances, stimulating communication and discussion, and encouraging the partners to identify with the goals and to take ownership and lead.

In fact, during the COVID-19 crisis the foundation already began to encourage the convening of online seminars and professional meetings. Some were one-time events, others were for ongoing study groups. Some were conducted by the foundation staff and some were led by its partners. Participating in the meetings were foundation grant recipients, at times together with colleagues from abroad. It is recommended that the foundation expand, diversify and institute regular meetings and knowledge activities within the coming two years.

The foundation must also bring together the eco-system of stakeholders that includes teachers, researchers, principals, government officials, local government leaders, industry, military, academia and civil society. In order to establish a broad-based coalition around the roadmap for middle school, cooperating once again with “Sheatufim” should be considered. In this process, it is necessary to examine how the “consumers of excellence” in the IDF, the universities, and industry bring their needs to the table.

In these activities and in general, the foundation must be in close conversation with the Ministry of Education in all divisions and levels, despite the change in governments and governance difficulties. The foundation must continue to act with transparency and deep cooperation with the government and to tirelessly strive to identify opportunities for joint activity. The objective is to achieve alignment between the foundation's roadmap and the policy of the Ministry of Education, since only in this way will the task be made easier for teachers and for the government to lead.

Expanding the circle / instructional materials, teachers and classrooms

During the past two years, the foundation invested in the development of a rich portfolio of new instructional content. The development projects are now at midpoint and the foundation should be hands on in interacting with them. Teachers must be assured of easy and useful access to content which has been confirmed as being in line with the high level thinking and application that is part of the curriculum, and with the PISA conceptual framework.

The main task is to help teachers develop the appropriate pedagogy. The teachers and teaching are the heart of the matter. The foundation must realize that this is not simply a matter of handing out assignments in the classroom but rather of understanding the context and thoroughly adapting the pedagogical approach that strives to develop high-level thinking. Experience from around the world shows that exposure to assignments that is not accompanied by a systematic and profound pedagogical process does not lead to development of modeling and reasoning skills.

The foundation has yet to come to an agreement with the Ministry of Education concerning the place of these skills in the high levels of learning. Are they necessary only for the applied track studied in enrichment frameworks, or also for the mainstream curricular track? As long as there is no clear agreement, it will be hard for teachers to fully commit to this process and it will be difficult to reach a critical mass of educational practice.

The foundation must pave a path that will help teachers work systematically and comprehensively. In the research commissioned ahead of the meeting, it was found that there are teachers who participated in the professional development courses but were later not placed in the appropriate classes or did not find the time to teach the new content. Another study identified teachers of existing excellence classes as having particularly high education and motivation, although it has not yet been clarified who will be the teachers to teach the new classes.

Moreover, teachers need a significant amount of time to prepare and teach the new materials. In order to facilitate this, the foundation must expand its partnerships with the local operators of middle schools so that they open additional excellence classes. Reports from the local authorities, networks and districts attest to their determination and commitment to the topic, although difficulties have been brought up especially during the COVID-19 period.

There is, therefore, now a need and the time is ripe for the foundation to arrange terms with the Ministry of Education in order for it to join the local partnership and guarantee teaching hours, a position for an excellence coordinator, and alignment between the central and local policy.

Driving momentum / parents, students and the public

In the meetings of the council, it became clear that studies in an Israeli middle school distance the students from the need to invest, persevere and excel. In middle school they are preoccupied with the here and now of surviving socially. They find it hard to imagine their future and to strive towards it in a way that will fulfill their dreams and ambitions. They do not see the connection between what they learn in school and their future lives.

The foundation must acknowledge that it is not able to change that. Changing these circumstances would require a profound reform that is beyond its capabilities. The foundation's leverage lies in the excellence classes and making them accessible to anyone willing to take on the challenge. Currently, only students who stood out in primary school and whose parents are aware of the importance of excellence and of the entrance exams are those who study in such classes. Those who realize this too late "miss the train". They are not aware that by middle school, it has already "left the station".

The foundation must see middle school as it is. Children are at a complicated age but nonetheless, during this period, they build their independent identity. They ask themselves what is important to them and in what they are willing to invest. They seek out the things that interest them and which are relevant for them. They are at a very social age in which choices are made as part of a group, in competition and in collaboration with friends.

Appealing to parents must also be carried out by understanding their circumstances. Whether Israel succeeds on the PISA tests is not what will motivate them. They are anxious about disparities and want their children to get on the path to success in their studies. They are less directly involved in their children's learning, and they place significant emphasis on the social aspect. Most are not aware of the variety of choices available or that in middle school choosing excellence is already an option.

Creating infrastructure / strengthening quality teaching

The foundation has set a goal, to halt the decline, change course and reverse a negative trajectory towards significant growth in the levels of excellence. It stated to do so while raising the bar for all regardless of gender, ethnicity or place of residence. However, the foundation has even a deeper aspiration which is for this remarkable change not to fade once its direct involvement comes to a close.

To this end, the foundation declared that it intends to leave behind professional infrastructure of quality teaching. Already in its initial years of operation, it began to establish this type of infrastructure with initiatives such as the Virtual High School, Teacher's Day, It's Time for Education, the 5X2 Initiative, the Trump Master Teacher Award and a series of translations to Hebrew of books and articles.

As the foundation approached the completion of its goals in high school, it sought to create partnerships to establish intermediary organizations for each of its main lines of activities. This was the framework in which the High Teach Initiative and the Cities of Excellence network were established. The significant efforts invested in planning the establishment of the Institute for Advanced Teaching as well as contacts for establishing a center for high-leveraged teaching praxis and a center for online instructional coaching for teachers, have not yet led to concrete results.

Council members call upon the foundation not to wait for the end of its middle school activity phase but to consistently examine the opportunity to establish professional infrastructures. Some members even implored the foundation not to wait for a stable government and governmental partnerships but to take independent steps towards their establishment. Others stressed the need for governmental partnerships in order to pave the way for wide-ranging, long-term activity.