

Middle Schools Where 40 Percent of the Students Study in an Excellence Class

Abstract based on an interim report by Ruthy Tendler and Amira Rom

The Trump Foundation roadmap for middle school features a performance measure: to enable 40% of middle school graduates to study mathematics and science at an excellence level. Despite this being an ambitious goal, there are a number of schools in Israel where this aim has already been achieved. Therefore, in order to learn from practice and understand how these schools operate, a series of case studies have been prepared by Ruthy Tendler and Amira Rom.

Four schools were chosen for documentation (Comprehensive 9 in Ashdod, Municipal 1 in Ashkelon, Mahmoud Darwish in Majd al-Krum, and Comprehensive 6 in Ashdod). The documentation process is underway and so far, it included interviews with principals, teaching faculty and students. Interim findings are presented here, while in the next stage once the pandemic is over, the documentation will include filmed videos of practice as well.

Main findings

1. **The principal is the school's instructional leader.** In these schools, a clear and coherent instructional system is in place, led by the principal. The principal is focused and present, knowledgeable about the details and involved in the daily pedagogic practice. The principal encourages working with data, keeping a focus on learning and promoting collaboration. In most schools, the second excellence class, whose students need a push and support in order to succeed, is titled (in the school's own language): 'the principal's class'.
2. **School's routines and procedures focus on achieving excellence goals.** Everyone knows the pedagogic goals, data around them is regularly collected in order to check for progress and pinpoint difficulties. Progress of each individual student is closely monitored and discussed among the staff so as to enable quick response in real time. Support systems are set up throughout all the years of study, while paying special attention to potentially sensitive transitions.
3. **Immediate support is provided to struggling students.** Once a learning difficulty has been identified with one of the students, they are surrounded by a system of encouragement, support and care. Individual contact with the student is maintained continuously, as well as communications with the parents. The discourse with students and parents is very straightforward, stating the intention to push students to higher goals and to persevere with their learning effort.
4. **Ongoing professional collaboration is practiced.** Most of the mathematics teachers teach in both middle school and high school. They work together as a team, within a community of practice that is focused on achieving the pedagogic goals for every student, and as a learning community that concentrate on improving instructional practice. They analyze together the data that comes out from the classrooms and assist each other in confronting difficulties.