



Transforming Education Summit - National Statement of Commitment

As in many other countries over the world, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted every aspect of our lives and had a profound impact on the education system in Israel. Social distancing measures that were taken during the past two years have taken a toll on pupils' well-being and achievements. Research conducted in Israel and worldwide has shown an increase in pupils' and teachers' emotional distress and risk behaviors. Yet despite the potential negative impact of the pandemic, this research has also shown that certain protective measures can affect the outcome for both individuals and education systems.

Accordingly, the Israel Ministry of Education has adopted a twofold approach: 1) identifying and addressing the negative impacts of the pandemic, with emphasis on vulnerable populations; 2) re-imagining and re-inventing education, by investigating the positive impacts of the pandemic, such as new teaching methods, and facilitating their development and enhancement. Within these two approaches, the Ministry of Education perceives the educational eco-system and the stakeholders within it as crucial partners in policy making and its' implementation. Therefore, national consultations are a key component implemented regularly. Both research and national consultations informed the insights presented and the policy steps. The present document aims to provide insight into the main policy steps taken by the Israel Ministry of Education in both of these directions.

A) Identifying and addressing the negative impacts of the pandemic, with emphasis on vulnerable populations:

1. **Developing and implementing a socio-emotional learning and violence prevention program.** Findings from a HBSC (Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children) survey conducted in Israel during the pandemic as well as national surveys of school counselors and teachers, provide insight regarding pupils and teachers. The main finding indicates that during the pandemic, pupils' sense of belonging and safety at school declined and that many experienced daily emotional symptoms such as depression and anxiety. In addition, the findings indicate that many teachers experienced high levels of psychopathology, demonstrating symptoms of



- depression, anxiety, and somatization. Our review revealed that this phenomenon is a global phenomenon that affects pupils and teachers worldwide. The SEL and violence prevention program emphasizes three main goals: 1) strengthening **educators'** sense of belonging, well-being, and resilience; 2) providing **pupils** with a supportive environment where they can rebuild and strengthen social and emotional skills, reconnect with peers and significant adults, and reengage with school routines; 3) strengthening the partnership between **parents** and **educators**.
2. **Addressing literacy achievement gaps.** In April 2022, research conducted by the Israel National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education highlighted literacy achievement gaps that emerged and deepened during the pandemic. Most worrying are the gaps increased by SES. According to the research findings, many of the pupils' performance level has declined to “low”. To address this outcome, the Ministry of Education has developed a new literacy program aimed at: 1) setting literacy as a priority for the education system; 2) improving the scientific foundation of literacy policy and practice; 3) adapting the program to the specific context and culture of each school to improve its effectiveness.
 3. **Addressing teacher shortages.** Israel, like many other countries, has been contending with a shortage of teachers for many years. There are indications that the stress of teaching during a pandemic has driven away even more teachers with a rise in teachers' leaving the system and decline in enrolment in teacher education programs. This trend is predicted to continue in the upcoming years. With the understanding that teacher shortages are a multi-dimensional problem, the Israel Ministry of Education is working to address this challenge on several levels: 1) increasing teacher salaries; 2) improving the physical and technological infrastructure for teachers' work; 3) forming personalized development opportunities (e.g., life-long-learning and unique training courses and professional development programs); 4) strengthening the relationship between the schools and the community and parents.

B) Re-imagining and re-inventing education, by investigating the positive impacts of the pandemic and facilitating their development and enhancement:



1. **Strengthening high-school social sciences and humanities studies.** In light of the challenges and changing reality the education system has faced in recent years, a **new reform has been implemented** to strengthen the social sciences and humanities studies in high school. In this respect, a national consultation process took place, involving educators (teachers and school leaders), parents and pupils' representatives, local authorities, academics and teachers' organizations. A refinement of educational goals and pedagogy is required to enable the provision of improved educational services across the entire education system (pupils and educational staff). The Israeli education system aims to cultivate pupils' knowledge, skills, and values and support them in shaping their identity, developing their independence and emotional and social resilience, and fulfilling their potential. This, in order for them to become contributing citizens to their community, society, and country. The noted reform is multifaceted in its focus: better integrating knowledge, skills, and values; better connecting between disciplines; developing and implementing comprehensive interdisciplinary studies; and reinforcing the relevance of learning to pupils' daily lives alongside ensuring a better fit to their future needs. This reform reinforces the status and importance of social sciences and humanities and allows teachers and learners greater pedagogical autonomy by combining disciplinary infrastructure studies with a multidisciplinary final project pupils must produce at the end of their studies, replacing the matriculation exams taken previously by every pupil. The reform's use of digital tools further enhances teachers' and learners' autonomy while maintaining clear and high standards with a national LMS system.
2. **School autonomy reform.** The Israeli school system reform will decentralize decision-making and provide the local and school levels expanded managerial and pedagogical responsibilities as well as flexibility in the organization of the learning. A process of National consultation was taken involving mainly school leaders, local authorities, academics and experts. The underlying assumption of this reform is that school leaders and district leaders have a better understanding of their community needs and the ability to allocate educational resources more efficiently. During the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, it was emphasized that local and school level decisions were more accurate, timely and precise than those made by others. In addition, research indicates that autonomy promotes and enhances the school community



resilience and well-being, a major priority of the Israeli education system post covid-19.

3. **Improving the education system's ability to identify dropout risk.** Over the years, the Israeli education system has improved its ability to identify pupils at risk of dropping out and has created many unique programs for such pupils. The current dropout rate stands at about only 0.5 percent. This notwithstanding, Covid-19 has created unique challenges with respect to pupils' engagement in learning, whether on-line or physically at schools. "Latent dropouts" refers to the large number of pupils who do not attend school regularly, have low achievements, and suffer from severe academic, emotional, personal, and social problems that make it difficult for them to maintain their studies and succeed at school. This past year, the Israel Ministry of Education have been developing a statistical measure that will assist schools to identify at-risk pupils in the early stages of dis-attachment and to create a customized intervention program.
4. **Climate change.** Extreme weather and climate events are increasing in frequency and intensity due to climate change. According to the IPCC 2022 report, human-caused greenhouse gas emissions are a major cause of climate change. Consequently, we experience extreme weather events and climate changes. The Israeli ministry of education recognizes the importance of developing pupils' skills and capabilities to cope with the consequences of climate change. A global crisis like the Covid-19 crisis highlights the need for pupils to be aware, emotionally resilient, and responsible. Taking action to reduce these rapid and extreme changes requires knowledge, values, and skills fit to cope with them. Taking into account those needs, The Israeli education system will introduce climate change studies, as a newly added curriculum, to all pupils starting next year. In this program, pupils will be involved in community projects and take part in pupil initiatives.