Ahed-- The Association of Academic Arabs in the Negev -- is a non-governmental organization established in 2006 by a group of Negev Bedouin academics and university post-graduates. Among the founding group members are tenured professors, scholars, public servants, and graduate students. The most important project is the Ahed High School for Science, which was established in 2009 and is recognized by the Ministry of Education as a school for Excellence in Science. The school has developed and reached major achievements, which are presented in this 2016 Progress Report.

Annual Progress Report

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Ahed High School for Science

Introduction

The Ahed High School for Science began its first year in September 2009. Presently, the school is in its sixth year and has four grades: ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth, with a student body of 372 students from all over the Negev – from recognized and unrecognized villages and towns, who were accepted regardless of economic need. The school is located next to Shoqet Junction, near the Bedouin village of Hura. The students commute daily to school via dedicated school buses.

Ahed High School for Science is the single most important achievement that has been raising the overall level of the entire community. It provides hope for the future by enabling its students to pursue academic studies as fully achieving equals, and to move toward being fully participating members of Israeli society and an integral part of the global economy.

Students at Ahed School study scientific subjects at advanced levels. Their curriculum also includes programs that aim to develop an understanding of social issues and leadership skills. The school maintains relationships with counterpart schools, primarily Jewish schools in Israel, aiming at integrating its students into Israeli’s multi-cultural society.

Ahed School for Science is one of the main contributors to the recent improvement in the motivation to pursue academic studies, directly and indirectly. It directly inspires its students and their families, but also influences other schools by suggesting a successful model and setting high standards for competition. Over the last five years we witnessed an increased effort of high schools to address excellent students; some established a class for excellence in science. Some middle schools already measure their level based on the number of their students accepted into Ahed School for Science.

Ahed not only provides a model for excellence in science, but also a model to raise the level of social awareness and community involvement. The high degree of parent participation is another indicator of the success of the Ahed High School for Science model. In addition, it is the first school in Israel to perform annual self-evaluation taking students' input into account.

About this report

This annual report aims to bring the supporters of Ahed High School for Science up-to-date with its progress as well as major events. It summarizes the progress in three major topics: administration, academic, and extra-curricular activities.
Update | School Administration

This section explores major developments at the administrative level of the school, which includes the principal, the vice principal, and the coordinators of the four grade levels.

Students per class

The number of students per classroom is an important factor in providing adequate education. Toward this goal, we purchased two used mobile buildings to increase the number of class rooms, and split the ninth and tenth grades into four classrooms, instead of three, as in previous years. We observed an interesting improvement in the academic performance of the students in these grades, and we believe this to be one of the contributing factors.

Evaluation

To ensure that the school is moving in the right direction and fulfilling its role adequately, we carry out an annual internal evaluation and major external evaluation every two years. In April 2012 we organized the first external evaluation, where members of the evaluation committee included professionals in evaluation, education, and statistics. The last internal evaluation was completed in April 2015. The evaluations showed that the school has progressed very well, but also pointed to the need to improve some aspects of the school, including teaching staff, fostering communication with parents, updating the science labs, and logistics, particularly the transportation system. Anonymous online questionnaires were designed to evaluate the performance of the members of the administration and the teachers. The questionnaires were filled out online by the students and the teachers. The committee analyzed the data and compiled recommendations for the teachers, the administrative staff, and the association. These recommendations are taken into account when reviewing the teacher performance and designing teachers’ empowering programs. Some laboratories were improved, a new computer room was added, and a plan to set up a language laboratory was approved.

Extra Teaching Hours

Ahed School for Science attracts students from different middle schools at various academic levels, and works to bridge academic and social gaps among the students as early as possible. For this reason, the ninth grade was included in the school (typical high schools in Israel comprise of tenth-twelfth grades). The standard hour quota provided by the Education Ministry is not enough to bridge this gap and there is a need for extra funds to cover these activities. This year, we managed to include Ahed within the Atuda Madait (Science reserve/supply) project, which provides extra hours for ninth grade students.

Psychometric Test Preparation

The psychometric test, generally taken as a higher education admission exam, is a major obstacle for Bedouin students. Ahed School takes responsibility in preparing its students for this exam at two levels: during school hours and during dedicated after-school hour courses. The ninth and tenth grades have two hours per week for psychometric techniques within their normal teaching hours, and the eleventh and twelfth grades participate in after-school courses.
Update | Academic

For the school year 2014-2015, we realized that as the number of student applicants increased, less time and money would be needed for advertising the school. From a pool of 246 students (121 boys and 125 girls) who applied for the year 2014-2015, the top 102 students (54 girls and 48 boys) were accepted. The criteria for acceptance are based on written exams, in which math skills are a major factor.

Science Activities and Projects

Ahed students study according to the curriculum of the Education Ministry, while emphasizing the five basic sciences – Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and Computer Science. In addition, they participate in various science projects, which aim to motivate and broaden their knowledge. These projects are geared towards ninth and tenth grade students, as the eleventh and twelfth grade students are typically busy with their Bagrut (Matriculation) exams and preparing for higher education.

- **QB50**

CubeSat is a miniaturized satellite (10x10x10 cm, weighing 1 kg) which offers all the standard functions of a normal satellite. A single CubeSat is simply too small to also carry sensors for significant scientific research. However, when combining a large number of CubeSats with identical sensors into a network, they can carry out sophisticated tasks.

The mission of the project is to perform first-class science in the largely unexplored lower thermosphere, at a low cost. It aims to demonstrate the possibility of launching a network of 50 CubeSats. The project is carried out by university teams around the world, except in Israel, where it is performed by five teams from five high schools; one of them is from Ahed School. The project is partially funded by the Chief Scientist's Office and The Israel Space Agency.

The project is of great educational value, as fundamental scientific questions can be addressed which are inaccessible otherwise.

- **Rokhem Olam**

This project is partially supported by Perrigo Pharmaceutical. It invites ninth grade students to experience the development of a pharmaceutical or chemical product, in a manner similar to the real industrial process, including an emphasis on innovation and novelty. The students work with researchers (from the industry), visit, and carry out experiments in industrial labs. Each group enjoys the supervision of an industry researcher.

The course motivates the students to study scientific subjects at the academic levels.

- **Ilan Ramon Youth for Physics Center**

The center provides advising for high school physics students to help them complete advanced projects in applied physics. The projects aim to expose the students to science and to motivate them to peruse academic studies in scientific
and technological fields. The center is located on the Ben Gurion University campus, and works in full cooperation with the Bet Yatsiv Astronomy Center.

The final project credits the student 5 units in physics. Until now, 37 students from Ahed have participated in the program and completed their research projects.

• **The Young Inventor**

During 2015, the nonprofit organization, SpaceIL, set a challenge to land the first Israeli spacecraft on the Moon and to inspire a generation along the way. Ta'asiyeda played a role in connecting students in the country to this national mission. Its contribution aims to increase the technological scientific curiosity of future generations.

In the Young Inventor “Sky is Not the Limit” course, students learn about the challenges that engineers face in landing a spacecraft on the moon. The students go through a gradual process to explore the existing physical conditions in space, as well as the various industrial components that are in space and at the International Space Station. The students are required to offer an original idea that either addresses the needs of the International Space Station’s astronauts or, alternatively, offers a solution for one of the challenges faced by the development team of the first Israeli spacecraft to the Moon.

• **Technological Leadership: Focus on Electricity**

The program exposes students to the challenges of meeting the national electricity demand, which exceeds the available supply; considerations such as environmental protection and energy independence of the state of Israel are also on the agenda.

The students design smart-green structures in the community, which combine innovative technologies that result in intelligent use of electricity. The involvement of students in the community contributes to the unique structure of both community and civic involvement, and raises awareness of environmentally viable – sustainable alternatives. The project involves in-class lectures and field visits.

• **Advanced Mathematics**

This project aims to provide advanced mathematics for a small set of talented ninth and tenth grade students. They enjoy extra teaching hours with internal and external instructors.
Languages: Hebrew and English

Ahed School for Science emphasizes languages, social involvement and work towards shaping the leadership of the future generation of the community. The students study three languages: Arabic, Hebrew, and English. The Hebrew and English level of the students are below that required by Israeli universities.

• Practical Language hours

To overcome language limitations, Ahed School for Science decided to add two extra practical hours for each class, one in English and one in Hebrew. These hours are taught by native speakers and aim to engage the students in interesting and interactive conversations.

• Access

This program, which is partially funded by the US Embassy in Israel, aims at increasing the number of students learning English at 4 and 5-credit levels. It advances students' achievements in English through comprehensive enrichment programs. English skills are essential for academic study in most of the fields in Israel.

• Debate in English

High school students from all sectors in Israel participate in an English debate competition, funded by the US Embassy in Israel and initiated by the Amal Network of Educational Institutions. The project aims to foster greater tolerance for the viewpoints of others, to develop logical and critical thinking, and to improve students’ overall English skills, as well as their ability to communicate in general. During the year, students participate in workshops, which provide various debate skills. The competition this year included teams from fourteen schools. The students were required to discuss topics related to youth living in Israel, in front of an audience of approximately 300 people. Students from Ahed School took first place in the southern district, and second place nationwide.

• Negotiation

This project brings together more than 150 Jewish and Arab teenagers to learn how to communicate and negotiate with one another over several workshops, which are organized by Amal Network and the Program on Negotiation, Harvard Law School. The workshops are conducted in English and are specifically tailored to Arab and Jewish high school students. The program focused on generic negotiation techniques and communication skills, which can be applied to practical real-life situations.

• Face-to-Faith

Provided and partially supported by The Tony Blair Faith Foundation, Face-to-Faith is a program that connects students worldwide via a secure website, where they may interact and exchange ideas. The program aims to develop the ability to communicate issues related to religion and belief, and sharpen the skills for cooperative learning, communication, and critical thinking.
Academic Performance

Ahed School for Science has gained a reputation as a school for excellence, and in recent years it managed to attract a good portion of excellent students in the Negev. The acceptance committee has refined its exams over the years, and in the last two years, we observed a large body of pupils with excellent performance, as shown in the figures below

Matriculation and Psychometric Exams

The matriculation (Bagrut) exams summarize the achievement of each student in high school. The load of each subject is quantified by units, with 5 as the highest possible load.

The table presents the final Matriculation results of the year 2014-2015 in comparison to other Bedouin schools in the region, to quantify the change. Each row shows the percentage of students who satisfy this item, compared to the average in other Bedouin schools; e.g., 18% of Ahed students completed 5 units in Math compared to 2% in other schools.

We expect better achievements in the coming years, as the level of the students entering Ahed School improves, and as the school acquires a high reputation within the community.

During the academic year 2014-2015, approximately 64% of Ahed graduates took the psychometric exam, with the average grade being 553, compared to the 455 average among Arab students in Israel and the 370 among Bedouin students in Israel. About 12% were in the range of 600-700, 75% between 500 and 600, and 13% below 500.

Exposure to academic career options
People Behind the Project | Partial List

**Dr. Muhammad Abu-Naja** has been the principal of Ahed High School for Excellence in Science, since 2014. He received his Ph.D. in mathematics from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, in 2006. He worked as a lecturer and pedagogical instructor for prospective mathematics teachers at Kaye Academic College, and headed the program for gifted students in the Negev. Abu-Naja also worked as a high school teacher and chaired the Department of Mathematics at Kaye College for 14 years. His research interests include: the use of modern technology for teaching mathematics, the development of mathematical thinking, and teaching geometry.

**Mr. Salah Abu Rashid** is the project coordinator at Ahed Association (part time), and the director of the Hotam program in the Bedouin society in the Negev. He has a Master's in Administration from Ben-Gurion University and worked in various organizations as a project manager and community organizer, where he obtained gained extensive experience in community-organizing and group facilitation. Mr. Abu Rashid is a member of the administrative committee of Ahed Association, and is in charge of the alumni unit, which aims to follow and guide graduates of Ahed School for Science.

**Prof. Jihad El-Sana** is the head of Ahed Association and the head of the Department of Computer Science at Ben Gurion University of the Negev. He received his B.Sc. and M.Sc. in Computer Science from BGU. In 1995, he won a Fulbright Scholarship for doctoral studies in the US. He earned a PhD in Computer Science from the State University of New York, Stony Brook in 1999. El-Sana’s research interests include computer graphics, image processing, augmented reality, and document image analysis.

**Dr. Chalil Abu-Gnim** is a member of the administrative committee of Ahed Association. He is a senior director of the Analytical Research and Development Laboratory at Agis/Perrigo Israel Pharmaceuticals Ltd. Dr. Abu-Gnim received his B.Sc. and M.Sc. in Chemistry from the Hebrew University, Jerusalem in 1984 and 1988, respectively, and earned his Ph.D. from Ben-Gurion University in Chemistry, in 1990. He spent two years of post-doctorate research at the Department of Chemistry in British Columbia, Vancouver. Dr. Abu-Gnim has rich experience in analytical research and development for the pharmaceutical industry.
Update | Visibility and Recognition

Ahed High School for Science, with its vision as a model for social change, has been recognized at the local, national, and international levels.

- **Parent involvement**
  From the early days of Ahed School for Science, parent involvement was high on its agenda. The Parents' Committee has a representative in the Pedagogical Committee, and each parent meets the teachers of his daughter/son at least three times during the year. In addition, the parents take an active role in the logistic development of the school through donations and volunteer days.

- **Judges Visit**
  A delegation from the southern district court, including the head of the court, Judge Avira Shkeloni, visited Ahed to learn about Bedouin society and to observe the effort to reshape the structure of the society via education. The visit to Ahed School for Science falls within the policy of the court to adhere to local communities. The choice of Ahed Association was due to its neutrality with respect to local politics, and the fact that it was established and run by local academics, who work to promote education and civil society within the Bedouin community.

- **Visitors from abroad**
  Many groups (from Israel and abroad) come to learn about the Bedouin community and visit Ahed School for Science. The model not only aims to educate students towards academic study, but to also put in considerable effort to raise social awareness and community involvement.
  
  We invite visitors from neighboring cities and towns to visit Ahed School in order to develop academic and social leadership projects.

- **President of Ben-Gurion University**
  Ben Gurion University of the Negev, as an institute, has shown a great interest in Ahed School for Science, as it falls within the agenda of the university for the development of the Bedouin society, and works to provide the university with competent students. Prof. Rivka Carmi gave the commencement speech to the first graduating class, a step which has had a great influence on the students and their parents. We believe the appearance of the administration of Ben-Gurion University at Ahed graduation ceremonies brings a very positive message to the community.
Update | Graduates

Ahed School has imposed a new standard for high schools in the Negev, based on the number of graduates who attend higher education. Many of the students take a year off after high school to explore academic options. Approximately 65% of the June 2015 graduates have already joined academia, and the rest are taking a break year to decide what to study. As can be seen in Appendix I, the average percentage of students who are studying in a university or college, two years after graduation, approaches 88%.

Many of the students in the first two graduating classes are attending medical school, but over the last two years, we have observed a shift toward science and engineering. The preference for medicine reflects the high need for medical professionals in the Bedouin community, but is also derived from the parents and the community. We expose the students to more hi-tech industry in Israel to increase the number of students who enter science and engineering departments. We have also designed an annual parents' workshop that aims to bring to their attention the diverse employment prospects for their sons and daughters.

Supporters

We would like to thank our supporters for their generous contributions. The Bedouin community is a determining contributor to the success of Ahed High School for Science; they send their children, provide personal support with funds (including in-kind and volunteering), and promote the school within various Israeli organizations and institutes. The Education Ministry finances most of the teaching hours and student transportation. Ben-Gurion University provides generous assistance, and we have developed early working relationships with the Technion and the Davidson Institute of the Weizmann Institute. We particularly would like to thank:

- Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Foundation
- UJA Federation of New York
- The Gimprich Family Foundation
- The Henry and Marilyn Taub Foundation

And the following individuals:

- Claude Ghez
Appendix I.

The distribution of Ahed graduates according to the fields of study and institutes/countries for the each year.

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Appendix II

Ahed High School for Science International Advisory Committee

The goal of the committee is to draw on the knowledge and experience of its members to advance the school’s curricula and student progress.

Dr. Daoud Bshouty is a professor of Mathematics at the Technion - Israel Institute of Technology, who just completed his term as Undergraduate Dean of the Technion. His main field of research is in complex analysis and its application in mathematical statistics, as well as in mathematical education. He serves as the Head of the Student and Faculty Committee and is the Academic Director of the Landa Program: The Absorption of Arab Students at the Technion.

Dr. Cathleen Cohen is the Creative Director of ArtWell and the founder and director of Poets in Philadelphia. Dr. Cohen has led poetry workshops in a variety of secular and parochial schools of all faiths throughout Philadelphia since 1989. She is a poet, exhibiting painter, and maker of artists' books. She received the Public Service Award from the National Association of Poetry Therapy, and the Interfaith Relations Award from the Pennsylvania Human Rights Commission.

Dr. Claude P. Ghez, MD is a Professor of Physiology and Cellular Biophysics, and Neurology at Columbia University Medical School. His area of research is Cognitive/Systems Neuroscience. His specialization is in the control and learning of limb movement kinematics and dynamics in humans, using psychophysics and neuroimaging, and the underlying neural processing in animals.

Dr. Joel Moses is an Institute Professor, Professor of Computer Science and Engineering, and Professor of Engineering Systems at MIT. He served as Provost of MIT. He is a member of the National Academy of Engineering and of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He is also a Fellow of the ACM and a Fellow of the IEEE and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Dr. Stephen D. Shapiro, Chair, held a leading professorship and served as Chair of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Stony Brook University. He was a member of the International Board of Governors and Academic/Scientific Committee of the Technion. He is a Technion Honorary Fellow and served as President of the NY Region of the American Technion Society. He has also been an investor and held operating positions in various companies, as well as having been a member of the Board of Directors of UJA Federation of NY.

Dr. Jeffrey R. Solomon is President of the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies, a group of foundations operating in Canada, Israel and the United States. He is an author of over 70 publications and is a founding trustee of the World Bank's World Faiths Development Dialogue. Dr. Solomon is a member of the Board of the Council of Foundations and serves on the Executive Committee and the International Committee. He is the co-author, with Charles Bronfman, of "The Art of Giving: Where the Soul Meets the Business Plan."

Dr. Edriss S. Titi has been at the University of California, Irvine, since 1988, where he holds a joint appointment in the Department of Mathematics and the Department of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering. He has also been a Professor of Computer Science and Applied Mathematics at the Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel since 2003. His research in applied and computational mathematics lies at the interface between rigorous applied analysis and physical applications.

Dr. Jimmy Weinblatt served as Rector of Ben Gurion University of the Negev. He served as Chairman of the Department of Economics, Director of the Monaster Center for Economic Research, and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. He has been a visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania and at several other universities in the US and Europe. Since 1997, he has been the incumbent of the Marsha and Kenneth Tucker Chair in Economic Development at Ben Gurion University.