

EDUCATION ON HOLD

Israeli Government Policy and Civil Society
Initiatives to Improve Arab Education in Israel

YOUSEF T. JABAREEN

AYMAN AGBARIA



DIRASAT
The Arab Center for Law and Policy

THE ARAB MINORITY RIGHTS CLINIC
Faculty of Law, University of Haifa

November 2010



Dr. Yousef T. Jabareen is the founding director of Dirasat, the Arab Center for Law and Policy, and he co-founded and co-directs the Arab Minority Rights Clinic at the University of Haifa.

Dr. Ayman Agbaria is a lecturer in leadership and educational policy at the University of Haifa and Beit Berl Academic College. He serves as Dirasat's educational consultant.

DIRASAT:

The Arab Center for Law and Policy - Dirasat, established in 2006, is a non-profit, non-governmental and non-partisan organization. Founded by a group of young Arab policy leaders, academics and social activists, Dirasat ('Studies' in Arabic) works on behalf of the Arab-Palestinian minority in Israel - currently some 20% of the country's population.

Dirasat emphasizes applied research as the basis for development of innovative and pro-active policy recommendations and then promotes their adoption through advocacy campaigns and capacity-building. Accordingly, Dirasat strives to achieve national recognition and meaningful participation in key policy forums and within society at large in order to ensure substantive equality for this indigenous linguistic, cultural and national group.

Dirasat is grateful to the European Union, the New Israel Fund, the Ford Israel Fund, the Heinrich Boell Foundation and others for supporting its work.

THE ARAB MINORITY RIGHTS CLINIC:

The Arab Minority Rights Clinic, founded in 2007 and located at the University of Haifa Law Faculty, supports the work of human rights organizations which are engaged in protecting the rights of the Arab minority. As such, the clinic provides research support and legal consultation on a variety of important issues.

EDUCATION ON HOLD

Israeli Government Policy and Civil Society
Initiatives to Improve Arab Education in Israel

English Executive Summary

YOUSEF T. JABAREEN

AYMAN AGBARIA

DIRASAT

The Arab Center for Law and Policy

THE ARAB MINORITY RIGHTS CLINIC

Faculty of Law, University of Haifa

November 2010

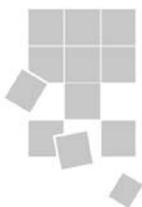
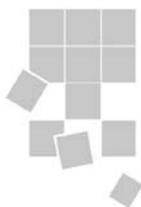


TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	7
<i>Overview of Recent Developments</i>	14
Chapter 1: The Joint Committees – Recommendations on Hold	14
Committee on Classroom Deficiencies	15
Committee on Arab Academic Achievement	15
Committee on Learning Disabilities in the Arab Sector	15
Committee on Curriculum in the Arab Education System	16
Chapter 2: "How to Live Together" – An Archived Report	17
Chapter 3: The Establishment of an Arab Pedagogic Council	18
Chapter 4: National Preference in Education? Not for Arab Students	19
<i>Conclusion</i>	21



FOREWORD*

Official data published by the Ministry of Education in 2009 regarding 2008 matriculation exam results revealed an already well-known fact: there is a substantial achievement gap between Jewish students and Arab students in Israel. For instance, the rate of matriculation certificates obtained by Jewish students (59.74%) is nearly double that of Arab students (31.94%). However, a comparison of these figures with those published in previous years reveals a lesser known fact: the gap between Jewish and Arab student achievement is not narrowing over time, rather it remains consistent or continues to widen.

Unfortunately, poor Arab student achievement is symptomatic of wider problems in the way the government treats Arab-Palestinian education. Many problems faced by the system, presumably, stem from unequal funding and resource allocations. However, there is a serious lack of transparency in everything related to funding on a per student and per sector basis. While statistics are readily available regarding achievement gaps, classroom standards, quality of instruction and so forth, it is difficult to find statistics on national expenditures in education divided by the two communities,

* The authors would like to thank Lisa Richlen for her assistance in preparing this English language executive summary.

Arab and Jewish. This lack of knowledge makes painting an accurate and nuanced picture of Arab education, and the development of appropriate strategies, challenging at best. The report recommends that the Ministry publish a statistical report each fiscal year on specific national education budget allocations made, with a comparison between the Jewish and Arab education systems, including the expenditure per individual Arab and Jewish student.

Against the backdrop of on-going achievement and funding challenges, this report attempts to provide an overview of recent major developments and initiatives in Arab education in Israel. It examines the pressing needs and strategic interests of the Arab education system along with policies and procedures required to reform its deteriorating institutions and working conditions. The report demonstrates that through discriminatory budgetary allocations, denial of Arab-Palestinian young people's cultural and linguistic needs, marginalization of Arab participation in policy making, and by overlooking recommendations made by various professional and public committees formed to improve Arab education, the Israeli government perpetuates the inferior status of Arab education.

This publication is timely given the current political and social climate in Israel. In August 2009, the new Minister of Education, Gideon Saar, introduced the current government's policy. The plan included comprehensive steps intended to strengthen values education and improve academic achievement within the Israeli education system. The policy statement he introduced, entitled "The Government of Israel Believes in Education," barely addressed the needs of Arab education: while noting the deteriorating performance of Arab-Palestinian students in national and international tests, it does not call for special programs to bolster achievement levels. In fact, in a number of areas, the goals established for Arab students are lower than those for Jewish students. In the

best case, the plan's unwillingness to provide Arab-Palestinian students with remedies appropriate to their situation reflects an acceptance of a state of permanent disparities.

Minister Saar's plan also aims to strengthen education in the area of Zionist, democratic and civic values, including reinforcing students' connection to Jewish heritage through academic studies, visits to historical sites, promoting enlistment in the Israeli army and bolstering the overall connection between society and the education system. At the same time, the plan neglects Arab-Palestinian heritage and historical sites and makes no attempt to reinforce social bonds between Arab students, teachers, and communities. This dulls the national consciousness of students, erodes their attachment to each other and their sense of mutual responsibility and weakens their desire to work together to achieve common interests. In other words, the plan not only sets no specific goals or objectives for the Arab education system, but it also fails to recognize the community's own need for values education in line with Arab-Palestinian culture, history and social realities.

This failure is the culmination of the unrelenting attempts to marginalize expressions of a collective Palestinian identity within the Israeli public sphere and delegitimize Palestinian endeavors to reshape the content and boundaries of their citizenship in Israel. Such attempts have been widespread and particularly strident since 2009. They reflect the current far right influences within Benjamin Netanyahu's government. The right's renewed rise to power has brought with it a number of bills which propose a wide range of infringements of Arab-Palestinian civil rights. These bills take aim at everything from citizenship status to the right of recognition of Palestinians' historical experience and collective memory.

Such influences have found expression in practical recommendations posed by the Ministry of Education. Upon the opening of the most recent academic year, Dr. Zvi Zameret,

Chairman of the Pedagogical Secretariat of the Ministry of Education mandated the re-writing of the widely-used civics textbook 'To be a Citizen in Israel.' He objected to current version of the text because "is too critical of the state" and was particularly disturbed by a sentence which read: "Since its establishment, the State of Israel has engaged in a policy of discrimination against its Arab citizens."¹ A report released by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel in August 2010 addresses such disturbing trends in education. The authors note that militaristic values are more pronounced within school culture and comment that freedom of expression enjoyed by teachers and academic researchers is now at risk.²

Given the current political challenges, Arab-Palestinian educational leaders in Israel are compelled to address the strategic interests of the system as a whole. This includes advocating for Arab education which reflects the values, identities and cultures of Arab-Palestinian citizens in Israel. This will enable true educational equality and prepare the next generation for academic and economic success. Accordingly, the report recommends the following:³

- Full equality – and even affirmative action – in resource allocation, in order to close gaps in infrastructure, budgeting and human resources, as well as to realize pedagogic needs, such as curriculum development and the drafting of original textbooks in the Arabic language;
- Meaningful recognition of both the historical-cultural narrative and the social narrative of the Arab minority in Israel. The education system must recognize and address not only the collective identity of Palestinian-Arabs – in terms of their shared and diverse values, cultures and collective memory –

1 <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/education-ministry-revising-textbook-for-being-too-critical-of-israel-1.310751>

2 See also: <http://democracy-project.org.il/en/wp-content/uploads/201010//democracy-minorities.pdf>

3 The full Hebrew version of the report can be downloaded here: http://www.dirasat-aclp.org/arabic/files/Education-On-Hold_Dirasat_2010.pdf

but also the distinctive and shared social problems of the Arab population, such as chronic poverty, domestic violence and environmental hazards. It is important to note that this recognition should not gloss over the plurality of voices cultures, attitudes, religious groups, gender-based identities and more which exist within the community. True recognition of these aspects of the Arab community's experience in Israel requires policy reforms and structural adjustments which are outlined in more detail in the full report.

- Full and meaningful participation of Arab professionals and public leaders in the formulation of pedagogic and curricular policies and in the administration of Arab education. This change calls not only for incorporating more Arab academics into the Ministry of Education's administrative ranks, but also for the inclusion of Arab representatives in policy and decision-making processes.
- Improvement in the quality of instruction within the Arab education system in order to elevate academic achievement and social advancement. To this end, improvements are required in the following areas: the physical, social and emotional learning environment in Arab schools; instructional methodology (i.e. improving Arabic language proficiency of both educators and pupils); the curriculum and quality of textbooks provided to Arab students (i.e. the production of original and up-to-date textbooks in Arabic); the quality and quantity of communication between Arab schools, parents and the community; the involvement of local authorities and Arab civil society organizations in Arab education; and the improved training and professional development of Arab teachers.

As this report demonstrates, the dismal state of Arab-Palestinian education is no secret, and recommended solutions and reforms are known to all. The system is ready and waiting for the Ministry of Education to implement critical changes. What is needed now is just one thing: action.

DISPARITIES IN EDUCATION^I

The chart below highlights various and significant disparities between Jewish and Arab education - in terms of achievement levels and resource allocation - from a statistical perspective. It presents, in a consolidated way, leading examples of the impact of current policy on the Arab educational system. Indeed, discriminatory policy impacts every aspect of education from pre-school through higher education. The information presented here is gleaned from official government sources.

Issue	Jewish population	Arab population
Number of children under the age of 17 ^{II}	1,699,273	678,000
Rate of daycare registration for two year olds ^{III}	61.3%	13.7%
Rate of pre-school registration for three year olds ^{IV}	87.6%	74.9%
Rate of pre-school registration for four year olds ^V	93.9%	82.8%
Rate of pre-school registration for five year olds ^{VI}	97.5%	94.5%
Average class size in elementary school ^{VII}	24.54	28.81
Rate of special needs children failing to get appropriate medical services ^{VIII}	39%	71%
Drop-out rate of elementary school students (2007-2008) ^{IX}	0.6%	0.7%
Drop-out rate, students in 9th-12th grades (2007-2008) ^X	13.5%	21.3%
Rate of qualification for matriculation certificate (of the type needed to receive university admission or commensurate employment) ^{XI}	75.9%	30.8%

Issue		Jewish population	Arab population
Number of children under the age of 17 ^{II}		1,699,273	678,000
Average score (approximate) on the Psychometric Exam, the standardized exam that is decisive in university admission (out of 800) ^{XII}	Men	585	479
	Women	548	445
Rate of rejected applicants for university studies towards a first degree ^{XIII}		21.9%	38%
Rate of people aged 18-39 studying for a first degree in university. ^{XIV}		3.6%	1.8%
Rate of people aged 18-39 studying in any institute of higher education (colleges and universities) ^{XV}		7.9%	3.9%
Rate of people aged 18-39 studying for a second degree ^{XVI}		1.9%	0.5%
Of all university students working towards first, second or third degrees (similar to B.A., M.A. and Ph.D), the percentages of Arabs and Jews are: ^{XVII}	B.A.	87.6%	13.3%
	M.A.	93.5%	4.9%
	Ph. D	94.5%	2.8%

I Prepared in September 2010. All of the statistics here are based on government sources and updated as of October 31st, 2009.

II The Central Bureau of Statistics, based on international date of birth from November 20th, 2009.

III Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2009, table 8.4.

IV Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2009, table 8.4.

V Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2009, table 8.4.

VI Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2009, table 8.4.

VII Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2009, table 8.7.

VIII State Comptrollers Report, 2002, 52 (b), page 557.

IX The Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2009, Table 8.15.

X The Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2009, Table 8.32.

XI The Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2009, Table 8.28.

XII The statistics relate to 2008, see the graph on the site of the National Center for Testing and Evaluation: https://www.nite.org.il/files/statistics/graphs2008/08a_06.pdf

XIII Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2009, table 8.45.

XIV Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2009, table 8.47.

XV Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2009, table 8.47.

XVI Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2009, table 8.47.

XVII Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2009, table 8.57

OVERVIEW OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

The report is organized into four chapters, each dealing with recent and significant policy developments or initiatives which have the potential to positively influence Arab-Palestinian education. The first two are government-driven initiatives while the last two focus on action taken by civil society groups representing the interests of the Arab minority in Israel. Following is a summary of each of the four chapters included in the report.

1 CHAPTER 1: THE JOINT COMMITTEES – RECOMMENDATIONS ON HOLD

In August 2007, former Minister of Education, Yuli Tamir came to an agreement with representatives of the Committee of the Heads of Local Arab Councils and the Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education. They decided to establish four committees. These were under the joint supervision of the Ministry and the Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education with final oversight provided by Ministry of Education. The committees were tasked with assessing the needs of the Arab education system and providing recommendations to the Minister of Education. They concluded their work and presented their recommendations in 2008; the Minister and the professional ranks of the Ministry subsequently adopted them.

Since then, there has been a change of government. Despite appeals to the current Minister of Education, Gideon Saar, the committees' recommendations were not implemented. Nevertheless, the work of the committees is regarded as highly significant; it represented the first joint endeavor between these two bodies, as well as the first time that a set of information and figures acceptable to both sides was generated. The committees dealt with four central issues and

their findings included important data and conclusions as follows:

Committee on Classroom Deficiencies: This committee's main conclusion was that the Ministry must ensure the building of no less than 8,600 classrooms in the Arab sector by the year 2012. The overall cost of construction was estimated to reach 3.6 billion shekels, which the committee proposed be spread out over five years, such that 720 million shekels would be expended each year. While then Education Minister Tamir and the Chief Education Officer adopted the findings of this report, implementation has yet to begin.

Committee on Arab Academic Achievement: This committee's findings, which were based on the results of both internal Israeli exams and international exams in which Israel participated, determined that Arab student achievement is far below that of their Jewish peers. In addition to the gap in the rate of obtaining matriculation certificates, the committee found that gaps exist between Arab and Jewish students in terms of the quality of their matriculation certificates – 20.4% of Arab students (versus only 11.1% of Jewish students) hold matriculation certificates which do not enable them to continue on to university studies.

The committee's report contains over 100 recommendations (which are detailed in the full report) including improving instruction of core subjects, the quality of teacher training, and filling unstaffed education positions (such as guidance counselors and field supervision officers). It further called on the Ministry of Education to establish a work plan in conjunction with the Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education, which would include a "budget structure and timeline" for implementation of its recommendations. This report was also adopted but not implemented.

Committee on Learning Disabilities in the Arab Sector: This committee, too, sketched a harsh picture of the situation

of Arab-Palestinian education: the Arab education system lacks information regarding the number of Arab students with learning disabilities, does not have sufficient certified professionals who speak Arabic and work in the field of learning disabilities, and has a severe shortage of Arabic-speaking psychologists with a background in learning disabilities. According to the committee, the deficiencies, taken together, amount to an enormous shortage - some 3,270 counseling hours in the Arab education system. Furthermore, the committee found that most Arab-Palestinian teachers lack training and knowledge on the difference between students with learning disabilities and students with difficulty learning for other reasons. Given that professionals are not provided with any systematic intervention or other necessary tools, their ability to assist students with learning disabilities is extremely limited.

The committee submitted a long list of recommendations designed to increase awareness of the phenomenon and to introduce remedies. Their suggestions included hiring of qualified professionals and provision of necessary intervention programs. Specifically, they recommended that a school psychologist be placed in every Arab school along with an array of Arab-Palestinian professionals including doctors and advisors. As with the other committees, these recommendations were adopted by the Ministry of Education yet, to date, are gathering dust.

Committee on Curriculum in the Arab Education System: Of the four committees, only this one was unable to formulate a joint document. A "fundamental disagreement" existed between the representatives of the Ministry of Education and those of the Follow-Up Committee, in terms of goal-setting in the Arab education system and defining the values upon which Arab-Palestinian schools should educate its children. They also disagreed regarding the organizational structures necessary to carry out these goals. In light of their disagreements, committee members drafted two separate

documents. The document prepared by representatives of the Ministry of Education felt that "improvement in scholastic achievement in Arabic language" was the highest priority and also recommended improving performance in mathematics.

The document drafted by the representatives of the Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education, on the other hand, created a detailed plan for complete overhaul. They suggested a system which would operate based on full equality and would provide "meaningful recognition" of the historical-cultural narrative of the Arab-Palestinian population. They also proposed engendering "full and meaningful partnership" with Arab-Palestinian professionals in establishing pedagogic policies and procedures for the system. In 2008, then Minister of Education Tamir decided that this committee would continue its work until it could produce a single, joint document. However, the committee has not met once since the Minister's decision.

2 CHAPTER 2: "HOW TO LIVE TOGETHER" – AN ARCHIVED REPORT

In August 2008, as the joint committees' work was in its concluding stages, the Minister of Education established an additional committee. They were asked to propose "comprehensive education policy to advance shared life between Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel." The role of committee chair was shared by Dr. Mohammed Issawiye, Director of Alkasmi College in Baka Al-Gharabiya and Prof. Gaby Solomon, recipient of the Israel Prize for Education and Founding Director of the Center for Research on Peace Education at Haifa University.

The "Issawiye-Solomon Committee" submitted a report of over 60 pages which outlined its vision for the education system in Israel; it included specific goals and policies along with

recommendations for their realization. Significantly, the report called on the Ministry to place education for shared life at the center of the curriculum for Jewish and Arab students from kindergarten to 12th grade and to make shared life education an integral part of all curricula in all relevant subject areas (including history, geography, citizenship, literature and sociology). They further recommended an annual allocation of 10 million shekels (approximately 2.6 million USD) to fund the program. While Minister of Education Tamir accepted the report in the closing days of her term and adopted all of its recommendations, her successor, Gideon Saar, decided to freeze its implementation.

3

CHAPTER 3: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ARAB PEDAGOGIC COUNCIL

In 2008, the Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education announced their intention to establish a professional pedagogic council for the Arab education system. They anticipated that such a council would be comprised of leaders in the field of Arab-Palestinian educational leadership and would be tasked with taking a more proactive role in guiding and supervising the quality of curricular policies and practices in Arab schools in Israel. In fact, in July 2010, such a council was established. The council hopes to achieve government recognition which will enable it to become genuinely involved in setting pedagogic and curricular policies for the Arab education system.

This initiative represents the first concrete attempt in years to realize the Arab minority's education rights, specifically in the areas of content delivery, language of instruction and pedagogy practiced. Despite its official establishment, the work of the Council will be on-going. Initially, it will address three central problems: the absence of updated and consensual goals and priorities for Arab education; the lack of formal status

and a legal framework for Arab education; and the absence of a special professional, representative and autonomous body empowered to formulate pedagogic and curricular policies for Arab education.

4

CHAPTER 4: NATIONAL PREFERENCE IN EDUCATION? NOT FOR ARAB STUDENTS

Over a decade ago, the Israeli government decided to classify every town in Israel according to one of three categories: towns in "National Priority A" areas, towns in "National Priority B" areas, and towns without national priority. This official government decision stipulated that the towns classified under the first two categories would be entitled to a long list of benefits and incentives in the field of education, which would not be granted to towns in the third category. The number of towns included in the first two categories was 535; only four of them were Arab towns, all of which are small in size and nearly insignificant in population. Some three months later, the Supreme Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education filed a petition to the Supreme Court (sitting as the High Court of Justice) demanding the cancellation of the government decision on the grounds that it was based on improper considerations and formulated with the intention of discriminating against the Arab population.

Petition hearings were drawn out for nearly eight years, during which time the classification system remained in place. In February 2006, the Supreme Court rendered a principled judgment accepting the majority of the Follow-Up Committee's claims and holding that the government decision was "illegal" because of its "discriminatory" character and because "it cannot be reconciled with the principle of equality." The court ordered the cancellation of the decision within a year of rendering the judgment. Nevertheless, the process moved very slowly and, while the Supreme Court criticized the State's

lack of effort to implement the judgment, time and time again, the court continued to grant the government extensions in the development of a new and more equitable set of criteria.

In December 2009, the government adopted a new map of national priority areas. It includes some 1.164 million Jews and 882,000 Arabs (some 43% of the people who reside in national priority areas and 72% of all Arabs in Israel). Nevertheless, receipt of more equitable services is far from guaranteed. A gaping loophole written into the law leaves final authority for distribution of the monies to the relevant ministries responsible for any given budgetary allocation. Thus, implementation depends on, to a certain extent, the ‘good-will’ of these same ministers and will require constant monitoring. Even worse, the decision includes the disclaimer that “considerations for the granting of specified benefits can be differentially divided within areas, towns or regions, in accordance with their relevant characteristics and the professional considerations under which the Ministry operates.” This represents a convenient escape clause for those less-inclined to support the spirit or the letter of the ruling.

Irrespective, implementation has yet to take place. The clear and dismal bottom line is that nearly a dozen years after this illegal and discriminatory government decision, and despite the fact that the highest court in Israel ordered its cancellation, the Israeli government continues to allocate its budget and provide incentives to schools according to unequal and discriminatory criteria. What is more, the very same body that designed the joint committees – the Ministry of Education – is the body which continues to refuse to uphold the Supreme Court decision on national priority classification and its related budgetary allocations and incentives.

The issue of educational discrimination against Arabs requires a comprehensive and system-wide solution and the courts have the ability to fill this important role. In order to provide

such a solution, and to grant full protection to excluded and discriminated minority groups, the Supreme Court must take more active approach in promoting an immediate and effective outcome and in serving as a watchdog for recalcitrant government authorities.

CONCLUSION

For over six decades, Arab education in Israel has been ‘on hold.’ This report demonstrates that the government’s approach throughout the years – largely characterized by inaction – has yet to undergo any meaningful change. In light of this inaction, and given the on-going decline of the Arab education system, Arab civil society is increasingly taking initiative on its own behalf. These two simultaneous trends, to a large degree, characterize the situation over the past decade.

After years of – in the best case – ignoring Arab education and in the worst case actively working to weaken it, the government is increasingly admitting openly that there are problems in need of solutions. On the face of it, well-meaning initiatives are being proposed and national authorities are consulting with communal leaders. But, when it comes to approval of changes, allocation of budgets, initiation of new and more egalitarian policy, and transfer of authority to the Arab-Palestinian minority, the facts on the ground tell a different story. Rather, the response is foot-dragging, the rejection (or indefinite shelving) of seemingly promising initiatives, the initiation of new programs which further sideline or disenfranchise Arab education and political changes which roll back advancements made. While ideas come and go, central government policy which leaves Arab education ‘on hold’ has been consistent over the last six decades.

Until recently, Arab education has also been waiting for more

thorough treatment by local Arab authorities, along with civil society actors. It is important to note that this extended situation of waiting, as experienced by the Arab minority, should not be confused with passivity. Rather it has been an active protest which has included opposition to problematic proposals and the initiation of new ideas. Such activism has gained significant force over the past decade. Years of broken promises, neglect, and dialogue which only goes in one direction, have communicated to Arab educational leaders that the government regards the Arab minority as minor players which can be disregarded at whim. This is the politics of contempt. Those who have, and continue to dedicate their time, talents and energy to this issue are no longer willing to accept the status quo.

While working with the Ministry of Education to the greatest extent possible, Arab-Palestinians are increasingly taking a pro-active stand. Recently, there have been a substantial number of new community-initiated projects. Simultaneously, leading Arab-Palestinian organizations in Israel such as the Follow-Up Committee on Arab Education and Dirasat – the Arab Center for Law and Policy, have begun working together to create a clearer vision of where Arab education needs to go in the coming years. This vision includes recognition of the collective identity of this distinct national and indigenous group, with special emphasis on educational self-steering. Arab education consistent with this vision would reflect the unique culture, identities, language and history of those who receive it.

In the short term, such ideas are unlikely to reap concrete results. However, the issue is increasingly garnering the attention of decision-makers nationally and within the Arab community. While ideas for change often generate contradictory and conflicting reactions, hopes and plans of action, constructive discussion of this topic has the potential to ultimately pave the way for better academic and social outcomes.

The authors of this report, Arab-Palestinian academics and activists, have been involved in many of the initiatives described here and care deeply about the state of Arab education. This report is an attempt to both present an accurate accounting of developments in the field, while, at the same time introducing a critical analysis of the situation on the ground. As such, the report reflects both our hope for change and disappointments along the way. We believe that that the information here can serve as a platform for all those for whom decency and fairness are fundamental principles, and for all who see the advancement of Arab education as an essential ingredient in the realization of democracy and equality in Israel. Simultaneously, the report's release has the potential to increase awareness of the topics discussed here and strengthen civic activism around the issue of minority rights, thus bringing us one step closer to actualizing improvements crucial for this generation and those that follow.