

The Top High School Network in Israel: Ministry of Education Rankings Revealed

The Ministry of Education compiled, for the first time, data on the achievements of students attending private education networks that operate hundreds of high schools and that are funded with billions of NIS per year

By: Lior Datal | April 24, 2017

The government channels billions of NIS to private education networks that operate high schools but until now has never known whether these large budgets are justified. Data compiled by the Ministry of Education for the first time on the achievements of the networks reveal that most networks find it difficult to reach achievements which justify their budgets.

Many in the education system believe that the new ranking will change the balance of powers in the high school system, and may result in a transfer of high schools in the networks - either amongst themselves or among local authorities. The Ministry of Education wishes to establish the new system in order to replace the schools' operators that are not functioning adequately or whose achievements are low.

A letter sent by Director General of the Ministry of Education

Shmuel Abuhav, to the heads of the local authorities states that a comprehensive review conducted by the Ministry of Education, whose results are published here for the first time, revealed “no significant advantage to private operation (education network) over operation by the local authority. We identify throughout the continuum ownership that performs well, alongside ownership with achievements that need improvement, and these issues must be reviewed on an individual basis”.

TheMarker analyzed the new Ministry of Education data, focusing on six of the largest educational networks in Israel - Ort, Amal, Amit, Bnei Akiva, Atid and Darca. These networks collectively operate 304 schools and are budgeted about 2.9 billion NIS per year, tens of millions of which are used for overhead for the network.

Private Education Networks in Israel Put to the Test

The standardized score based on Ministry of Education Model that compares education networks in Israel, without taking into account socioeconomic classes of students in the networks, in points (500 = average)

■ far above average
 ■ above average
 ■ near average
 ■ below average
 ■ far below average

	Eligibility for Matriculation	Excellence on Matriculation Exams	5-Unit Math	5-Unit English	Ethics (exams)	Dropout Prevention	Average*	Number of The Schools in the Network**	Annual Budget and its Sources
Darca	542	539	529	547	527	473	526	23	Approximately NIS 175 million (government ministries)
Amit	530	517	524	520	497	520	518	55	NIS 445 million (government ministries)
Ort	512	498	518	506	510	500	507	99	Approximately NIS 1.2 billion (government ministries)
Bnei Akiva	514	501	507	476	497	524	503	39	NIS 195 Million (government ministries)
Atid	468	528	525	503	471	494	498	36	Approximately NIS 370 Million (total revenues)
Amal	503	484	508	500	474	516	497	52	Approximately NIS 630 million (government ministries)

*The average of the indices presented

**According to the Ministry of Education

Source: Quality of Education Networks Model from the Ministry of Education, based on 2015 data, processed by TheMarker.

On the Road to New Tenders for High Schools Networks

The new Ministry of Education model is designed to allow local authorities to compare performances of the various networks, within the confines of a tender for selecting operators for schools. To date, there was no consensus on a basis for comparison, and financial proposals of the networks constituted a key consideration in the tenders.

The Ministry of Education instructed all local authorities to hold, within two years, new tenders for the operation of high schools in their jurisdiction that are managed by education networks. The authorities were also instructed to emphasize data on quality of the networks that are now being published. The data is based on eligibility for matriculation certificate, dropout rates, excellence in matriculation exams and other data, as well as the percentage of students in five-unit matriculation Math and English and school educational atmosphere. In Jewish schools, the Ministry of Education also examined IDF recruitment rates. The goal being to cause the local authorities to invest the budget they receive from the Ministry of Education in educational networks that were found to be top notch, and to replace school operators that are dysfunctional, or with poor performance.

In order to rank the networks, the Ministry of Education reviewed the accomplishments of every school operated by an educational network for at least three years, and weighed the achievements into a total score in each parameter. At the same time, the data is biased in some cases since they include a comparison between networks with diverse schools across Israel and schools from various economic classes and sectors. The Ministry of Education therefore developed a comparative model designed to be fair. In addition to the data published here, the local authorities have received access to the quality parameters that take into account the economic circumstances of the students' families, and comparison between similar schools.

Amal Network at the Bottom of the Table

The quality model developed by the Ministry of Education awards scores in every parameter. The average score being 500, and a score of 400 considered particularly low. The calculation of the average also includes high schools operated by local authorities. As is seen in the attached table, in most parameters, the education networks - with the exception of those excelling - do not pass the average and their performance is occasionally subpar.

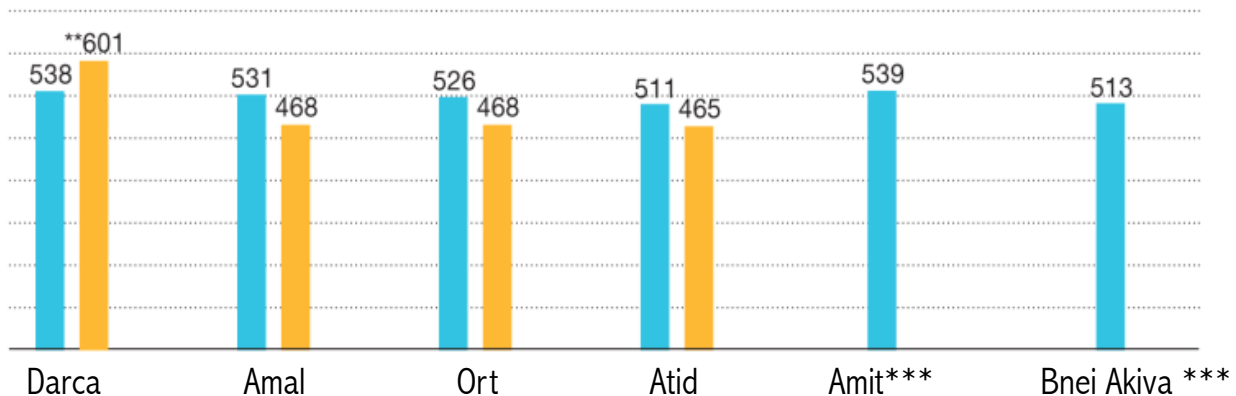
Of the six education networks we examined, the longest standing Amal network was ranked in last place, in the average score received from the Ministry of Education in the parameters that were examined - rate of eligibility for the matriculation among students, rate of students with excellence on the matriculation exams, percentage of students in 5-unit Math, percentage of students in 5-unit English, dropouts rate and ethics (cheating during matriculation exams). Atid education network was ranked just one point above Amal score.

Ort was ranked third, right after the religious Amit network, which ranked second. Ranking first in the averages of the parameters reviewed by the Ministry of Education is the Darca Network, the smallest of all networks examined - which also achieved the highest scores in most of the Ministry of Education individual parameters. The network, founded by the Rashi Foundation and supported by the American Youth Renewal Fund, YRF, operates approximately 25 schools across the country, with a budget of about NIS 175 million per year allocated by the Ministry of Education. Darca is the only network that does not collect overhead from the Ministry of Education budget, but rather operates on philanthropic support.

Severe Gaps between Arabs and Jews

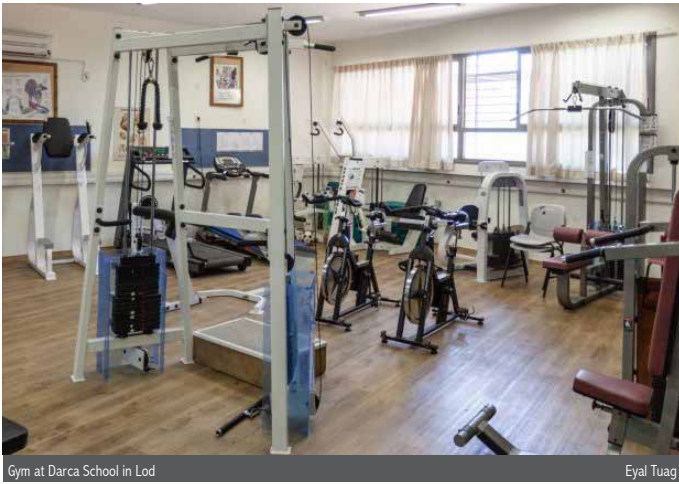
Average score of schools in the parameter for rate of eligibility for matriculation, in points*

■ Jewish schools ■ Arab Schools



*Average in each parameter = 500 points **Based on one school only, Yarca ***The Amit and Bnei Akiva networks operate Jewish schools only

Source: Quality of Education Networks Model from the Ministry of Education, based on 2015 data



Gym at Darca School in Lod

Eyal Tuag

The other networks, whose performances are lower, charge a certain percentage of the budget received by the local authority for every student as an overhead.

Darca network is ranked first among the six education networks in the parameter of eligibility for matriculation certificate, in the parameter of excellence in matriculation exams and in five-unit Math and English. The network's success is impressive in light of the fact that it only began operating in 2011 particularly in disadvantaged towns and neighborhoods. Its current eligibility rate for matriculation on average is about 85%, far higher than the national average. Darca is followed by Amit, whose percentage of eligibility for matriculation is higher than average - the network ranked second in the relevant parameter.

At the same time, Darca network is ranked last among the networks examined in the parameter for dropout rate. The network's score in this parameter may be attributed to re-registration of students who transferred from veteran institutions of the network to new institutions and not actual student dropout.

In accordance with the policy being spearheaded by Secretary of Education Naftali Bennet, the Ministry of Education also examined implementation of the program to increase the number of students studying 5-unit subjects of math and English. According to the ranking, the highest percentage of students in the subject belonged to Darca network. In the ranking of the number of students in 5-unit Math, Bnei Akiva network ranked last of the networks under review. The same holds true for the number of students studying 5-unit English. Amit network is ranked second in this parameter.

The schools' efforts to prevent students from dropping out was reviewed by the Ministry of Education in order to encourage them to invest in weaker students and to not cause them to leave the school in order to improve the percentage of students eligible for matriculation in the institutions. The network that excelled in this parameter was Bnei Akiva, followed by Amit network, with Amal coming in third.

The religious ulpanas network Zvia is ranked high in the Ministry

of Education parameters, but was not included in the review by TheMarker. Although it is a large network that operates about 50 high schools, it is difficult to compare the data to those of other networks, since only religious girls attend, and in some schools, students are screened before being admitted to the studies and pay high tuition.

Amal network is ranked last in the parameter of the percentage of students excelling on matriculation exams. The percentage of students eligible for the matriculation certificate is ranked fifth, followed by the Atid network. Amal received a relatively low score in the parameter of the percentage of students studying for five-unit math and English. Only the Bnei Akiva network ranked lower than Amal.

Atid network was given the penultimate ranking with the general average score. Despite its poor average, Atid is one of the leading networks in terms of percentage of students excelling on matriculation exams, ranking second in this parameter whereas Amal ranked last in the same parameter. Atid ranked second in this parameter as well as in the percentage of students in 5-unit Math. In contrast, Amal ranked third as one of the top networks in preventing student dropouts.

Ort, Israel's largest education network that operates about 100 schools, did not rank first in any of Ministry of Education parameter. The average score awarded to it for percentage of eligible students for matriculation was lower than the score awarded to the other three networks - top-ranked Darca, second-ranked Amit and Bnei Akiva. Ort was followed by Atid and in last place by Amal. Ort ranked fifth among the six networks reviewed by TheMarker in the parameter of students excelling on matriculation exams (where the number of units of study is high, and the grades are high - for example, students with matriculation diplomas with a minimum of 30 units of study, five units in English and minimum four units in Math, and an average score of 90). They were followed by Amal. The score of the number of students studying five-unit Math and English in the Ort network was lower than the other three networks. At the same time, the score awarded to Ort in maintaining exams' ethics was particularly high, and the network ranked second in this parameter.



Minister of Education, Naftali Bennet

Olivier Pitussi

A Rethinking in the Arab Authorities is Required

The re-examination by the Ministry of Education will require a rethinking by the local Arab authorities regarding the operation of high schools in their jurisdiction. Many Arab schools are operated by education networks due to the authorities' inability to cope with operating them, and due to a desire to improve achievements by selecting an outside operator. At the same time, the data compiled by the Ministry of Education reveals that not all private education networks are successful in positively impacting schools in the Arab sector. In his letter to the authorities, Ahuvab wrote: "We notice that there are some owners that are weaker in their work with certain populations and in specific parameters".

The average data is significantly affected by a geographical spread of the schools in each network. The accomplishments of Jewish schools of Amal are significantly higher than the 24 schools in the network of the Arab, Druze and Circassian towns (gap of about 140 points). In a review of Jewish schools only, Amal ranked third in eligibility for matriculation - since the achievements of Jewish schools are significantly higher than the Arab schools. In the ranking of Jewish schools only, Amit network (which does not operate Arab schools) leads, followed by Darca network, behind by only one point, which operates only one high school for non-Jewish students - an excellent Druze high school in Yarca. They are followed by Amal and then Ort. Ranked fifth is Bnei Akiva (513 points) - which is bypassed by several networks, when only the Jewish schools of each network are ranked. Bnei Akiva is followed closely by Atid network (511 points in Jewish schools only; Bnei Akiva also does not operate Arab schools).

In total, the differences in scores given in the parameter of eligibility for matriculation among Arab and Jewish schools, in accordance with the Ministry of Education review, is 100 points higher. These figures correspond with the existing gap in Israel's education system, in which the eligibility for matriculation exams in Arab society among 17-year-olds totaled 48.4% in 2015. For the same age group in the Jewish population, the percentage of students eligible for matriculation in that year amounted to 75.6%. The accomplishments of Arab schools in the Ort, Amal and Atid networks are similar - and significantly lower than the accomplishments of students attending schools operated by these networks in Jewish towns.

One of the networks included in the Ministry of Education review is Sakhnin Education Network, which operates 20 schools in Arab towns. In some areas, the accomplishments of the network were higher than the accomplishments of the large networks. The score awarded for percentage of students eligible for matriculation in the Sakhnin authority is 501 - 40 points higher than the score received by Arab schools in the large networks. Here, too, the accomplishments of Sakhnin network is compared to general achievements (including Jewish students), and in

some cases, the Sakhnin network outperformed some of the Jewish networks. If the Sakhnin network was included in the general average ranking (it was excluded because the Ministry of Education model addressed only some of its schools), its average score in each parameter (507) was higher than the score for Amal, Atid and Bnei Akiva.

Affluent Towns Receive Large Budgets

One of the explanations of the gaps that are revealed between the networks can be attributed to the Ministry of Education's budgeting method. The Ministry of Education provides larger budgets to high schools in more affluent towns. The reason being that the budgeting method incentivizes the matriculation exams, allows for services provided to students, such as libraries and laboratories, averages teacher seniority and inclusion, and encourages studies in more prestigious study tracks, e.g. Science and Computers. As a result, schools with greater resources - particularly in affluent towns - earn relatively large budgets whereas high schools in weaker towns, particularly Arab towns, are negatively affected. The Ministry of Education is currently sending larger budgets to students in religious high schools than to Arab students.

The Ministry of Finance recently tried to spearhead a differential budgeting initiative for high schools, since there is no budgeting mechanism that offers affirmative action in budgeting for weaker schools. The initiative was halted by the Ministry of Education.

At the same time, the budgeting mechanism is not the only reason for the gaps revealed in the education system. The results of the Ministry of Education review charge the local authorities and education networks, which are budgeted by the government, to examine the level and quality of studies offered by the schools, and to ask themselves what is their responsibility for the state of students attending their schools.