



EVALUATION STUDY: THE TRUMP MASTER TEACHER AWARD

Yael Steimberg, Ronna Raphaeli-Hirsch, Anat Lahat

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Trump Master Teacher Award, for the sum of 100,000 NIS, is awarded to teachers from the fields of mathematics and the sciences who demonstrate quality teaching in practice. The award is based on five criteria defined by the Trump Foundation, reflecting optimum behavior inside and outside the classroom.

The key **evaluation questions** were:

- A. To what extent are the award and its goals familiar in the professional community and among the public?
- B. What influence, if any, has the Trump Master Teacher Award had on quality teaching, and what is its potential influence on the individual, professional community, and public levels?
- C. To what extent is the process for selecting the award winner efficient and to what extent does it help to promote excellence in education?

The evaluation focused on ten in-depth interviews held in May-June 2016 with award recipients (3), a “finalist” (1), members of the award committee (3), and representatives of the professional communities of mathematics and science teaching [3].

A survey was also held among a representative sample of Hebrew speakers in Israel (501 people, including 206 teachers) in order to assess the level of familiarity with the award and public attitudes toward teachers.

KEY CONCEPTS AND INSIGHTS

The following are the main concepts and insights raised by the interviewees, presented according to the evaluation questions.

To what extent are the award and its goals familiar in the professional communities and among the public?

1. Among the interviewees, the recipients reported that they were first exposed to the award when their own candidacy became an issue. The representatives of the professional communities were thoroughly familiar with the foundation’s activities and agenda, but found it difficult to distinguish between the Trump Award and other awards. The survey of the sample of teachers and sample of the (non-teaching) public found that only a handful of respondents (3 and 7 percent, respectively) were familiar with the award. The majority (78 and 57 percent) had not heard of it (high school teachers were slightly more familiar with the award than elementary teachers).
2. When asked to state what the Trump Foundation sees as the key goals of the award, the respondents mentioned the following three goals, and offered their assessment of the award’s benefit in each area:
 - A. **A role model for teachers in effective teaching** – the respondents felt that formulating and disseminating the criteria for the award help create and publicize

the standards, encouraging discussion and reflection on these criteria among teachers.

- B. **Advancing the status of mathematics and science teachers** – on the individual level, the respondents felt that the award reflects personal appreciation and admiration for excellent teachers. On the public level, it may help the positioning of the teaching profession.
- C. **Promoting and encouraging learning and teaching in mathematics and science** – the respondents felt that the award could play this role by improving the relatively poor image of these subjects, enhancing their attractiveness among students and parents, teachers, and decision makers.

Conversely, the respondents mentioned obstacles to securing these goals, including the fact that the impact of a **one-time and localized event** such as an award (any award) is limited. More specifically, it was noted that the impact of the Trump Award is limited due to **insufficient familiarity**. Accordingly, the main recommendations were to work to enhance the exposure to and familiarity with the award among the professional communities and the public, and to see the award as an integral component in the Trump Foundation’s activities (regular, ongoing projects addressing the substantive themes).

A further **reservation** raised by some respondents regarding the first goal (sharpening the definition of effective teaching) related to the **concept of a single model for effective teaching**, and to the **manner in which the selected criteria represent** this model. Some respondents also suggested that further examination is needed to determine whether the method of submission of candidacies and the selection and screening processes actually serve this goal.

What influence, if any, has the Trump Award had on quality teaching, and what is its potential influence on the individual, professional community, and public levels?

- 3. The main impact is on the individual level—on the **recipients**. Conversely, the impact on the level of the professional community and the public is limited (at best), due to the limited exposure of the Trump Award and the limited potential of any award to create impact. On the **individual level (the recipient)**, the impact is primarily one of perception and awareness. The recipient receives admiration from their surroundings and is empowered. Winning the award also serves as a kind of professional “quality mark.” At the same time, no change in practice (the quality of teaching or level of involvement) is observed or expected, and the recipient continues to play a prominent role in their school and community. In the long term, thanks to the award and the closer relationship with the Trump Foundation, the recipient expands their professional working interfaces, becomes more familiar with the field and receives professional exposure and recognition, consolidates their expert status in their field of knowledge, and receives a platform for promoting their professional agenda in decision-making forums. The professional community representatives suggested that this aspect should be reinforced.
- 4. Regarding the **professional community** sphere, the recipients tended to attach more importance to the impact in this sphere and to emphasize the opportunity for teachers in the field to learn and expand their understanding regarding the criteria for quality teaching and for their own practice. They were also more inclined to believe that there is potential for influence (that has not yet been sufficiently realized). Conversely, committee members and representatives of the professional communities assumed that any influence is confined to the recipient’s direct work interfaces (the role model function), and furthermore is solely one of perception, rather than practice.
- 5. On the **public level**, there is consensus that there is no influence at all. However, the recipients suggest that such influence could help advance the status and prestige of

teachers, whereas the community representatives did not see the general public as a relevant target population.

6. In order to maximize and enhance the impact of the award on both levels – community and public – the respondents recommended **enhancing publicity relating to the existence of the award, the components of the process, and its significance and importance**. They also believe it is very important that the Foundation continue to invest in ongoing projects and process, with the full and active participation of large numbers of teachers.

To what extent is the process for selecting the award winner efficient and to what extent does it help to promote excellence in education?

7. This evaluation question requires examination of two key spheres. The first is the extent to which the **criteria** for the selection of the recipient, reflecting standards for effective teaching, advance the goals of the award. The second is the extent to which **the selection and screening process** and the response provided on various issues is efficient and serves the interest of promoting excellence in teaching.
8. Regarding familiarity with the **criteria**, the recipients and the committee members showed a high level of familiarity. The recipients showed an acceptance of and identification with these criteria, in part due to their admiration of the Trump Foundation and their commitment to it. The committee members understand and accept the rationale, but also raise reservations and issues for reflection regarding the claim to present a single optimum model and regarding the nature of the criteria. Conversely, the members of the professional community did not recall the award criteria, and instead described generic criteria consistent with the Foundation’s agenda, seeing the profile of successful teachers as standards.
9. Regarding the general quality of the criteria, there is a clear consensus among the respondents that those criteria that reflect conduct in the class are critical. However, variance was found regarding the importance attached to criteria reflecting behavior outside the class (and the content of these criteria was also subject to more diverse interpretation). The following are the respondents’ positions regarding the content of the five criteria in the optimum teaching model:
 - A. Giving individual attention to each student is perceived as reflecting the teacher’s attitude toward the students on the personal-emotional level and on the pedagogic level; the interpretation of this criterion is relatively uniform and is perceived as important.
 - B. Active learning is perceived as reflecting the ongoing use of unique and unconventional teaching practices (in contrast to frontal teaching). Variance can be seen regarding the desirable character of this unique approach, and opinions are also divided regarding its importance.
 - C. Expertise in teaching the field of knowledge represents a teacher who is thoroughly familiar with the study material, and this criterion is perceived as essential. However, this criterion was interpreted in diverse ways, according to the sources of indication reflecting the level of expertise.
 - D. Active participation in a professional community – this criterion reflects teachers’ professional investment beyond their work hours in the school. There is agreement that belonging to a professional community is vital, but opinions vary regarding the required level of involvement – from participation to leadership.
 - E. Helps the school to run a support network for quality teaching – the different groups of respondents interpreted this criterion in different ways. The award recipients perceived it as providing a response for students beyond the study hours in the

class, whereas the members of professional communities emphasized entrepreneurship, involvement, and leading of projects or processes. The latter group also attached greater importance to this criterion.

The respondents also discussed additional criteria that they felt should be used in the process of selecting the recipient and determining the standards.

10. The interviewees (particularly the committee members, but also the representatives of the professional communities) mentioned bias and other issues relating to the selection process and the application of the criteria. Some respondents challenged the basic perception of a single optimal model for effective teaching, or even questioned whether the defined criteria represent this model. In addition, and as noted, differences were found in the importance attached to each of the criteria in the model. The committee members also noted that they apply “covert” criteria not included in the standards), including their personal impression and the “click” with the candidate and the candidate’s ability to market him/herself. They are also influenced by personal values in selecting the recipient. Other possible biases that were mentioned related to the subjective interpretation of the existing criteria, particularly when the information in the candidate’s file is limited; granting excessive weight to prominent items of information or to unique aspects of the candidate, even if these are not included in the criteria; and the difficulty in scoring the criteria and evaluating the candidates due to the lack of relevant information.
11. The respondents mentioned additional aspects that should be considered and discussed in order to enhance the process of selecting the recipient and improve its efficiency. Most of the respondents recommended **permitting the involvement of a third party as a referee** in order to present the candidacy, with the goal of increasing the pool of candidates and in order to be fairer to the teachers (a population which, they claim, often face various obstacles, particularly modesty, that prevent outstanding individuals from presenting their candidacy). This proposal would also increase the echo effect and involve additional individuals (preferably principals) in the award process.

Regarding the selection and screening processes, the impression is that on the whole the respondents accept the processes and feel that they enable the identification of the best candidates. However, some respondents suggested a need **to obtain more information** using the existing tools, or to **add new tools** (particularly in the second screening stage, but also in selecting the recipient), in order to enable a more comprehensive examination and a better-informed decision. The committee members raised issues concerning the precision of the criteria and the need to improve the screening process – aspects which, they state, require further clarification and refinement.

Although the award is intended for mathematics and science teachers, all the recipients have come from the sciences (particularly physics). The Foundation asked that the evaluation **examine the fairness of the process toward these two populations**. All the respondents agreed that candidates from the sciences have a certain advantage. However, their answers regarding the need for change in the process of selecting the recipient were equivocal. The criteria seem to be perceived as appropriate for examining the functioning of teachers from both subjects. However, some respondents (particularly committee members) noted that the current selection process and tools do not enable both populations to manifest their activities and teaching practices in an analogous way. The main recommendation was to award two parallel awards.

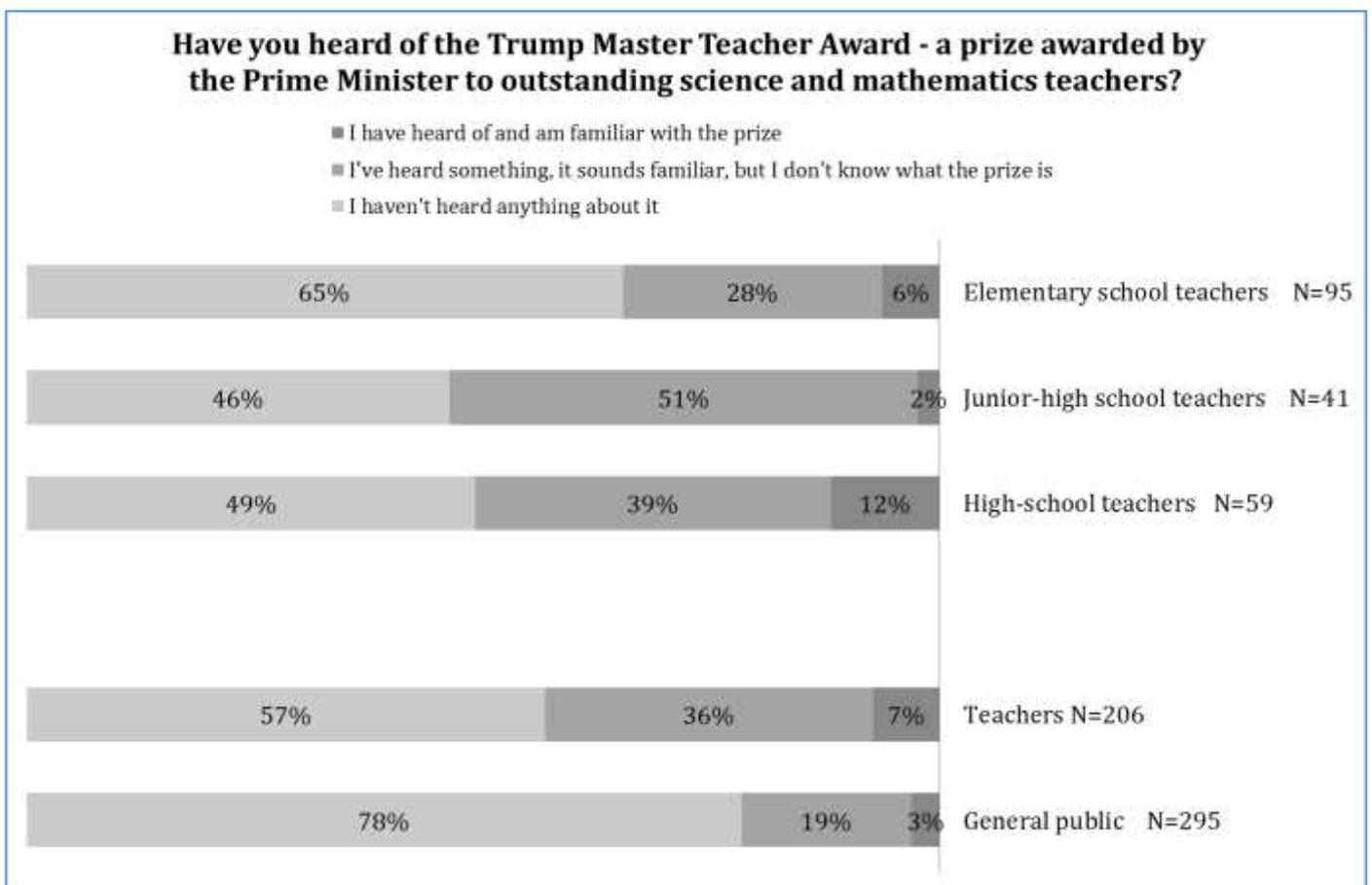
Regarding the stage of awarding the award, the **sum of the award and the dignified ceremony** (the award is given by the Prime Minister) are perceived as factors that enhance the exposure and prestige of the award, and thereby contribute (or have the potential to contribute) to the award’s influence and to securing the award’s goals. The recipients were grateful for the generous award, and for the fact that they can use it as they see fit. The

professional community representatives focused mainly on the opportunity the award provides for the Trump Foundation to strengthen and promote its agenda and status. The committee members warned that the high sum of the award may actually be a deterrent, due to the clash of values between education and teaching, on the one hand, and material rewards, on the other. The main recommendation was to allocate part of the award to the recipient's school (they also mentioned other advantages in this context).

12. In addition to the respondents' positions regarding the Trump Master Teacher Award, comments were also made regarding the foundation itself. Most of the comments reflect a high level of appreciation for all aspects of the foundation's activities and for its contribution to promoting the status of teachers and of teaching, alongside a willingness to continue the partnership. However, some doubts were raised regarding the role of a philanthropic foundation in setting national policy and agendas.

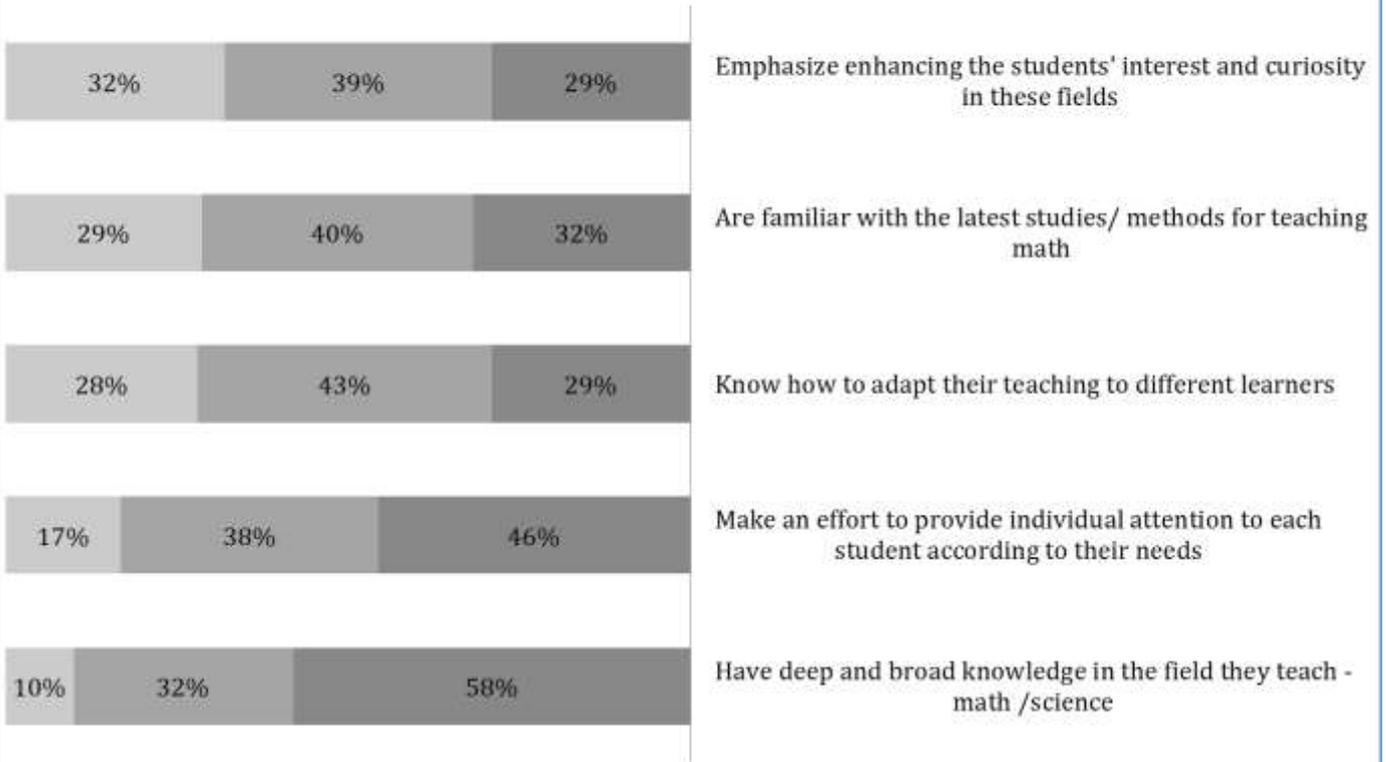
SURVEY FINDINGS

[A survey was held among a representative sample of Hebrew speakers in Israel (501 people, including 206 teachers) in order to assess the level of familiarity with the award and public attitudes toward teachers.]



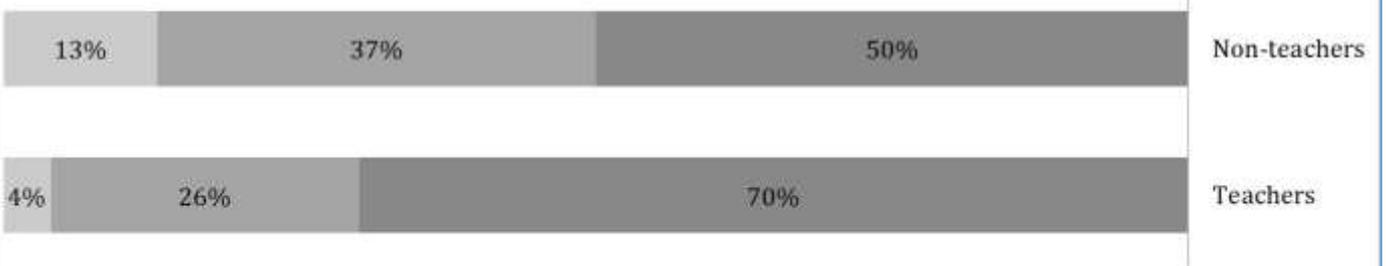
Most science/mathematics teachers...

■ Strongly agree + agree ■ Unsure ■ Strongly disagree + disagree



Most Science/Mathematics teachers have deep and broad knowledge in their field

■ Strongly agree + agree ■ Unsure ■ Strongly disagree + disagree



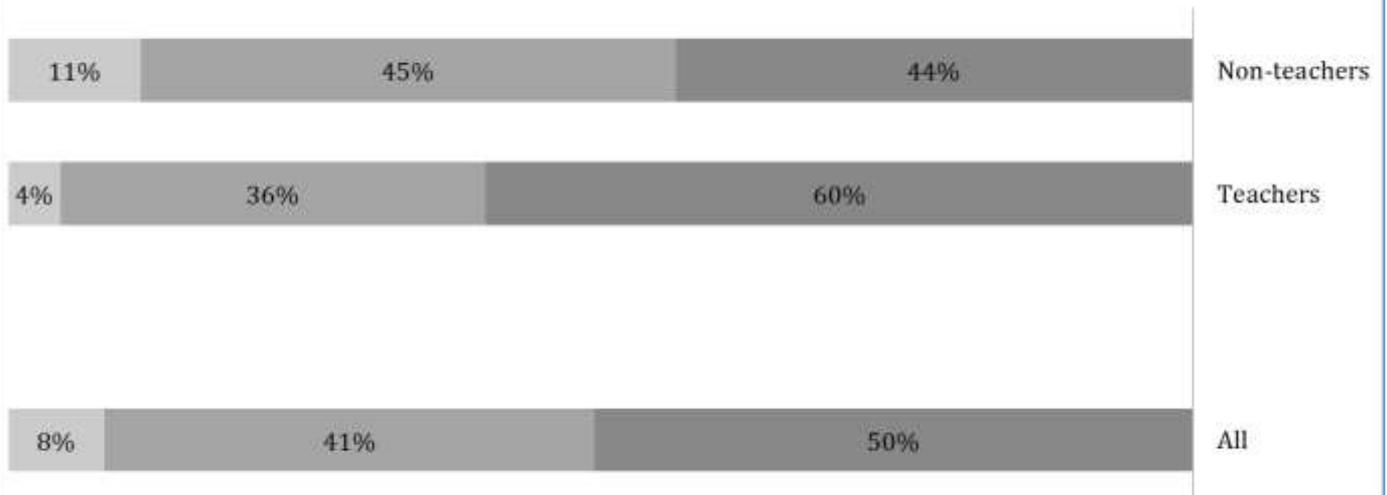
Most Science/Mathematics teachers make an effort to provide individual attention to each student according to their needs

■ Strongly agree + agree ■ Unsure ■ Strongly disagree + disagree



How do you rate the professional prestige of high school Science/Mathematics teachers compared to teachers of other subjects?

■ Higher prestige relative to other subjects ■ The same level of prestige as other subjects ■ Lower prestige than other subjects



RECOMMENDATIONS AND POINTS FOR REFLECTION

1. The research and evaluation team gained the impression that **the Trump Master Teacher Award is one of the means that can be used to help the foundation advance its agenda, particularly as a way to express appreciation and admiration for teachers and enhance their professional prestige.**
2. However, as an event that takes place just once a year and focuses on a single recipient, **the potential effect is limited** and the award does not seem to promote long-term or profound change in teachers' behavior or status. Accordingly, **it is recommended that the award be seen as one of the foundation's tools, and as a modest component in its overall efforts** that can have greater significance and ramifications in securing the defined goals. **In this context, it is worth considering the cost-versus-benefit ratio in deciding on the continued awarding of the award.**
3. If it is decided to continue to award the Trump Master Teacher Award, and in order to maximize its potential, it will firstly be worth defining **the target population for the award, and investing resources for its exposure accordingly.** If the assumption is that the public is not familiar with awards in general (since the public is often unaware of the existence or the identity of the recipients of many Israeli Awards), **it is possible that the general public is not a target population**, and that efforts (resources of time and money) should focus on exposing the character and standards of the Trump Foundation to the relevant population – high-school teachers of mathematics and science at the level of 4-5 units. However, this will incur a **price in terms of securing goals focusing on the advancement of the status of teachers and the public attractiveness of these professions.**
4. In any case, it is worth **considering additional ways to enhance the visibility of the award and the principles it reflects** among the **professional community.** One possibility is to integrate the standards in other contexts. It is also recommended that **the process of submitting candidacies and selecting the recipient be changed** in order to encourage greater involvement among school principals and other elements in the professional community. This could be achieved, for example, by requiring recommendations of candidates for the purpose of submitting their candidacy; collecting references from members of the professional community as part of the required information in the screening and selection stages; or dividing the award between the recipient and their school.
5. If the professional community is the main target population, then in addition to publicizing and marketing the idea of the award at the "starting line," it is also worth thinking of ways **to reflect and publicize the standards and strategies for good teaching** so that teachers in the community can draw inspiration, learn and develop, and assess themselves by reference to the criteria. One possibility is to invest more in exposing the "finalists" (in video clips and interviews), and particularly to highlight the ways in which they meet the criteria.
6. Regarding the **standards**, discussions with the Trump Foundation suggest that **clinical specialization** is a key concept in quality teaching. However, it neither appears in the criteria, nor was it mentioned in any of the interviews (in contrast, for example, to the research undertaken with the network clusters, where it was more dominant). It would be worth considering how this standard is reflected in the existing criteria, and to fine tune the conceptualization of this aspect in discourse regarding the quality teaching model. Moreover, it is recommended that the model and the criteria for selecting the recipient of the award be synchronized with the quality teaching compass recently developed by the Trump Foundation, in order to ensure that the foundation speaks a uniform language.

7. **The main influence of the Award** is currently confined to the recipient, who is the main “winner” in the process, both in the short term and in the long term, due to exposure to mutual exposure to additional projects and decision makers involved in the foundation’s activities. **It is worth reinforcing the connection with the recipients, since they are faithful ambassadors who identify with the foundation’s goals and agenda; the foundation has been successful in turning them into partners.**
8. Regarding **process** aspects, our recommendation is **to work to increase the pool of candidates**. This will enhance the exposure of the Trump Award and publicity within the professional community, increase the level of familiarity with the standards, and encourage additional teachers to engage in reflection on their teaching (despite the expected pressure this will create for the Award Committee).
9. It would seem to be **appropriate to improve the selection process** (perhaps in consultation with expert professionals in the field): refining the criteria and fine tuning their definitions (in order to reduce the room for diverse interpretations); adapting the information gathered and the tools used to ensure that the information is relevant in scoring the criteria (ensuring sufficient information, on the one hand, while avoiding irrelevant information that may influence decisions, on the other); discussing possible biases and taking decisions accordingly (e.g. how to relate to the influence of context, what personal values motivate the judges, and how these influence their choices).
10. We should recall that **the demand for exposure** encourages candidates who are self-confident, extroverted, and have good self-marketing capabilities – all factors that are irrelevant to the quality of their teaching, but which are liable to deter outstanding teachers who lack these qualities from presenting their candidacy. The committee members, in their capacity as judges, have internalized this message, and take it into account in determining the recipient.
11. We do not have an unequivocal recommendation regarding the need to change the process for the selection of candidates in order to ensure that it is fairer to both mathematics and science teachers. However, **it would appear that if the current format is maintained, the chance of a mathematics teacher winning the award is slight**. Assuming that this may **influence the sense of pride in the professional community** and the **prestige** attached to teachers of this subject, **it is worth considering ways to enable recipients to emerge from the mathematics community**, perhaps by introducing **two parallel channels for selecting recipients**, or by applying distinct criteria to the two populations.
12. **The sum of the award and the dignified ceremony contribute to its perceived prestige**. Accordingly, it would seem to be **desirable to maintain these aspects**. However, **it is appropriate to consider changing, or partially changing, the earmarking of the award money**. For example, **part of the award could be allocated for the teacher’s own professional development, or the award could be divided between the recipient and their school according to a predetermined calculation**. Such changes could lessen the reticence to submit candidacies due to considerations of modesty, while also encouraging the involvement of the principal and/or other functions in the school, thereby enhancing the exposure of the Trump Master Teacher Award during the award process. In addition, it may be possible during this process to expand the opportunity to secure influence in practical ways, since the earmarked allocation of the award may help to encourage actual activity in the educational and professional field by the school or the professional communities.
13. Lastly, regarding the concept itself: The Trump Master Teacher Award appears to offer an opportunity to express appreciation and admiration for mathematics and science teachers. However, the formulation of **criteria or standards** for quality teaching, and the “declaration” of a **single model** for optimum teaching (defined by the selected criteria), as well as the fact that entire process is **led** (initiative, funding, definition of criteria, and

overall responsibility for the process) by a philanthropic foundation **have ramifications that go beyond these narrow confines**. It is worth being aware of this, and perhaps reconsidering the heavy responsibility and the position the Trump Foundation wishes to take within this complex framework. It might even be worth considering ways to involve other partners – on the national and other levels – in the responsibility for all aspects of the concept and the process – including heterogeneous representation on the committee.