

ORGANIZING FOR EXCELLENCE IN SCHOOLS

A meeting with school principals to discuss their role in expanding the circle of five-unit mathematics and science students

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“Without school support, even the most capable teachers can lose their way”. This is what we wrote in our “Roadmap” in 2011, when we were just starting out. Although in practice, the lion’s share of our effort was invested in teachers and teaching quality. Later on we expanded to help create support networks for teachers. We collaborated with local authorities, school networks, academia, government and the public at large. Thus, when a national program was announced, many were prepared for the mission, the teachers with approach and tools, the stakeholders with aims and programs, and parents with expectations and pressure. It was only school principals who did not have proper preparation. Many of them claimed they were surprised and other said they felt they were taken for granted. They said they felt like being treated as: “Just don’t disturb”.

During the past two years, following a focused discussion of this topic at the meeting of the Advisory Council in 2016 , we began to work together with school principals. Since then the national program has been providing coaching to some principals, municipal programs have established a forum for principals and intervention organizations include management and organizational consulting. Nonetheless, the foundation’s main activities still focus on teachers. We even formulated a “Compass for Quality Teaching” which summarizes the “wisdom of common practice” of teachers’ work in three circles: with the students, their class, and the teacher community. But, once again, the role of the principals was missing.

Today, the “compass” is used in diverse workshops around the country, and at the Advisory Council’s recommendation, we turned to Levinsky College in order to establish a database of case studies that demonstrate the principles of the compass and are based on video clips of teaching in classrooms. The feedback received from the field in meetings with educators is that the compass is indeed missing a fourth circle: the school. School principals stress that without stable leadership and rigorous management on their part, the increase in the number of five-unit students will dwindle. Some claim that when the government, philanthropic funding, and public campaign priorities change, it is the principals who are the keystone that can ensure continuity.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Are school principals really necessary for continuing the expansion in the number of students taking five-units, or rather, since these are fields where professional knowledge and specific expertise are needed, it is the teachers who must take on the leadership, with assistance from universities and professional bodies in the Ministry of Education?
2. Seen in this light, what exactly is the role of school principals in continuing to promote excellence? What are the necessary components of their role, what are the required practices, which of these already exist, which are missing, and which need to be

- reinforced? Are there differences between the role of the principal between large and small schools, in the center and in the periphery and, in different education streams?
3. Are principals interested in continuing this effort for the long-term, and if so, what do they need so that the expansion of excellence in the fields of mathematics and science will become an integral part of the school's activity, such that they would not be negatively impacted as a result of external changes? Which professional knowledge and content entities can help principals in this respect?

As **background** to the discussion, we recommend reading the following:

- A. [How School Principals Lead to Excellence in Mathematics and Science Studies](#) – Zion Regev
- B. School Principals' Perceptions Concerning the Management of Excellence – Haim Lapid and Leah Pass (will be published soon)

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