

Two Years In

Framing the 2026 International Advisory Council discussions

THE EDDIE & JULES
TRUMP FAMILY FOUNDATION
קרן טראמפ

The Foundation's 2024 roadmap was written at a point of transition. The first decade had shown that a national trajectory could be changed: the number of five-unit mathematics graduates rose sharply, reaching near gender parity, and new professional infrastructure was built in middle school. But it was already clear that the success of the previous decade would not be enough for the next. The war was eroding continuity of learning, artificial intelligence was beginning to reshape science and work at speed, and deep educational gaps remained.

We therefore set out a ten-year course, from 2025 to 2035, to rebuild and prepare Israel's next generation of excellence. We described its three movements as **expand, upgrade, and diversify**: high-tech matriculation as the platform for widening the circle of excellence; international standards and AI to update what students know and can do, and to raise the bar; and mental resilience to strengthen students' ability to enter excellence tracks, feel that they belong, and persist. Gender equity was defined as a cross-cutting lens for all efforts.

Those three movements – expand, upgrade, and diversify – took shape in several parallel strands, each starting from a different point and at a different stage of maturity, with distinct partners, goals, and measures. Each built on existing knowledge, infrastructure, and partnerships, and each had to break new ground. The 2024 International Advisory Council reinforced the direction, while reminding us that success at scale ultimately depends on the public system's ability to connect the strands and sustain the change.

Two years is not long in the life of an education system. It has nevertheless been enough to produce tangible progress, turn some assumptions into knowledge, and clarify where the next points of leverage may lie. This paper asks what we learned when the roadmap met schools, teachers, local authorities, and policy – and what that learning can tell us about how to build momentum in the next phase.

What we set in motion

High-tech matriculation. In two years, a broad implementation infrastructure has taken shape: school- and municipal-level indicators, dozens of grants, partnerships with local authorities, districts and networks, and training for hundreds of principals. The government has set a national target and established a dedicated implementation unit. The effort is now moving from infrastructure building to actual expansion, alongside a cross-sector Collective Impact coalition and a social media campaign to build awareness and demand.

International standards. After years of building from the field – some 20 university-based programs developing learning materials comprising roughly 600 learning tasks, thousands of teachers trained, and about 250 new excellence classes created with municipalities, networks, and districts – a substantial professional infrastructure is now in place. The direction is now reflected in policy; the test is whether it reaches every classroom.

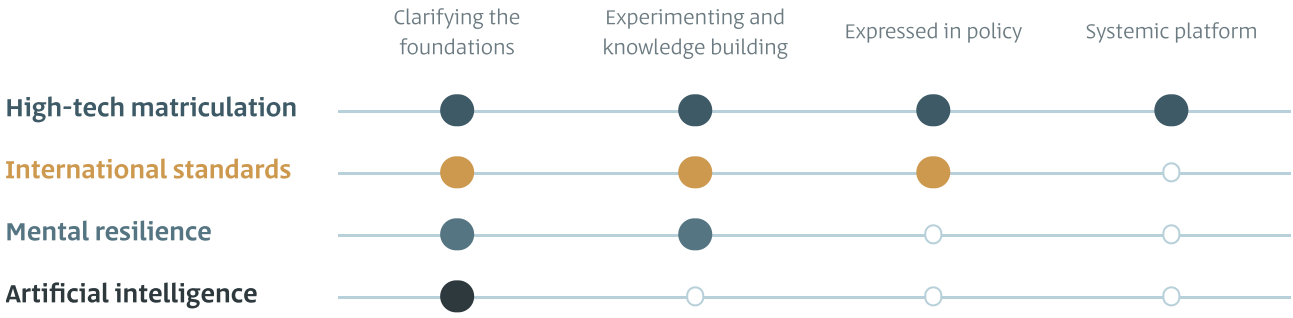
Mental resilience. The conceptual framework we developed is now being implemented at different stages across 12 pilot programs, expected to reach thousands of teachers in the coming years. The work is moving from a broad concept to practical routines for teachers and schools, while widening the lens from students and teachers to school leadership, routines, and procedures.



Artificial intelligence. A portfolio of pioneering programs has been built, a professional community has formed, learning processes are underway, and Foundation partners are helping the Ministry of Education develop its advanced "AI Science" track. We deliberately began at the high end of the professional spectrum, first defining the standard and then working backward. The current work focuses on the deep foundations, the learning progression, and the teachers who can bring students to that level.

From separate efforts to a shared mission

The strands are converging – but each is at a different stage



Gender lens. We have reached near parity in five-unit mathematics, yet in 2024 female students were 53% of twelfth graders but only 39% of students eligible for high-tech matriculation. In PISA 2025, 6.4% of male students reached the top levels in mathematics, compared with 3.2% of female students. The largest untapped potential lies among female students already taking five-unit mathematics and English who do not add physics or computer science.

A mirror image: high-school record, middle-school low

The tension at the heart of our strategy can now be seen in two almost opposite results from the same year.

The first is a genuine achievement. In 2025, more than 15,000 students – 11.6% of the graduating cohort – became eligible for high-tech matriculation, the highest number on record. Five-unit mathematics also reached a new high, with about 22,000 eligible students. Our research identifies more than 10,000 twelfth graders who are only one subject short of the full combination. There is real momentum here, and real potential for further expansion.

Yet in the same year, the base beneath that growth looked weaker than we had hoped. In PISA 2025, only 4.8% of students reached the top levels in mathematics, down from 8.4% in 2022. In reading, mathematics, and science, Israel recorded its lowest results since joining PISA. TIMSS and the national Tenufa assessments also point, from different directions, to weaknesses in knowledge, skills, and continuity of learning through the middle-school years.



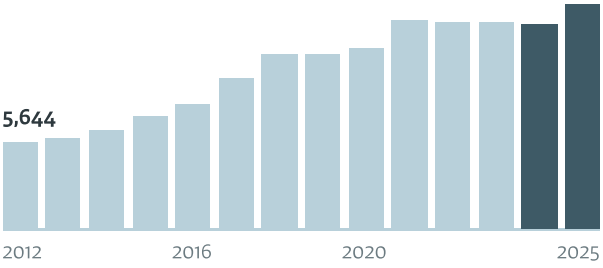
One system, two opposite signals

Record high-tech matriculation alongside a steep drop in mathematics excellence

Students eligible for high-tech matriculation, 2012-2025

15,088

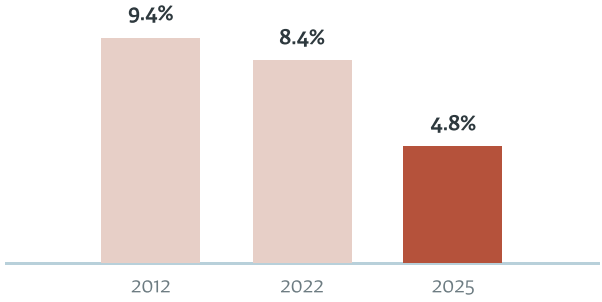
11.6% of the cohort – a record



Top performers in PISA mathematics (levels 5-6), Israel

-43%

in the share of top performers within three years



These results need to be read in context. Students took PISA 2025 in wartime, amid absences and exceptional disruption to learning, and before recent curriculum changes could reasonably have affected them. We do not know how much those conditions contributed. Even so, the two signals together force us to ask not only how many students reach the finish line, but what standard they reach and how strong the base is beneath them. They also sharpen the task before us: to strengthen the foundations without losing the momentum already built.

Holding the bar as we widen the gate

During the pandemic and the war, the education system rightly responded with flexibility. Syllabi were reduced, examinations adjusted, and additional accommodations provided to the groups hit hardest. Students and teachers were living through absences, overload, and staff shortages. Those adjustments were necessary to keep learning going and keep students connected to the system.

But the emergency stretched on, raising a different question: did the necessary flexibility also erode some of the academic rigor and habits that excellence requires – high expectations, hard work, practice, learning discipline, and the ability to tolerate frustration? We do not have national evidence that the high-school bar has fallen. Yet conversations with professionals in the scientific disciplines reveal unease about whether the same credential today still signifies the same depth of knowledge. That is field evidence, not a national conclusion, but it warrants examination.

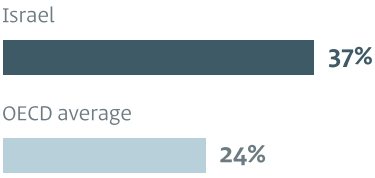
Beneath the achievement question lies a challenge of motivation and commitment. In PISA 2025, 37% of Israeli students said that school had been a "waste of time" for them; rates of absence and lateness are also high. After years of lockdowns, war, and accommodations, the task may now be to recharge the system with the energy of learning and teaching: raise expectations, rekindle the willingness to work and persist, and restore pride in achievement earned through hard work – among students, teachers, and parents.



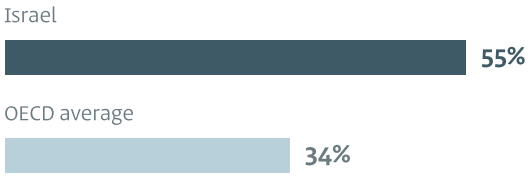
Beneath achievement: a challenge of learning culture

Years of lockdowns, war, absences, accommodations and teacher shortages eroded routines and habits

"School has been a waste of time" – agree



Missed a whole day or some classes in the past two weeks



In this sense, the question of the bar now brings the knowledge base and mental resilience together. Our work in resilience is moving us from the broad concept to a more precise question: what enables a student to arrive ready for the demands of excellence, remain in the track, cope with difficulty, recover from failure, ask for help, and keep working toward a high bar? If this erosion extends to teachers, parents, and system norms, the response cannot be mental tools for students alone; it must also strengthen the knowledge base and a culture of expectations, effort, and support.

Middle school: the long road from policy to practice

The decline in middle school brings us back to an effort the Foundation and its partners have been advancing for years. When the Ministry of Education was not pursuing a shift in the mathematics curriculum toward international standards, we chose to prepare the ground and build capacity from the field upward. As the work expanded, a critical mass of professional practice formed; when the work reached roughly 25% of middle schools, the Ministry approached us in 2022, asked to take the lead itself, and sought to turn the bottom-up experience into a national effort.

PISA 2022 offered another cautious signal that progress might be possible. The share of top performers fell from 2018, but Israel rose from 31st to 22nd in the ranking by share of top performers because many other countries fell further during the pandemic. We read this, at most, as a sign of relative resilience, not evidence of improvement. The direction then became formal policy, as the Ministry decided to align the curriculum with international standards and build on the materials and experience already developed.

Then the government changed, implementation stalled, and the war in 2023 reset priorities again. In 2024, Council members heard Ministry officials say that the change was not on their near-term agenda and that they did not support moving forward with it. Subsequent TIMSS results put the issue back on the table; the government changed course and launched "Realistic Israel." In May 2026, a new mathematics curriculum was published, literacy-based tasks were introduced into national learning platforms, and a seventh-grade Ministry assessment began incorporating them.

The policy shift itself is a significant achievement after years of persistent work. It also makes clear how long the



road is from curriculum to classroom. A curriculum, aligned assessment, professional buy-in from teachers, knowledge and tools, supportive leadership, and strong learning materials all matter – and none is sufficient on its own to overcome teaching habits and routines built over years, especially amid signs of system-wide erosion in foundational knowledge and expectations.

Research we commissioned this year shows how deep the change must go. Real-world tasks generate greater curiosity and more varied solution paths, but many students struggle to identify for themselves what mathematics a new situation calls for. The research identified difficulties in mathematization, spatial reasoning, estimation, and scale. The shift is not simply to a different type of task; it is a different conception of what it means to know mathematics.

We documented these years of experience in a new book, *Foundations of Excellence*, prepared for the Council's discussions. The next questions are which conditions will determine whether the change reaches the classroom, how far the Foundation should support implementation, and what evidence would tell us that the public system can sustain it on its own.

The high-tech promise is changing

As we build pathways and prepare students for a future we thought we understood, the destination is moving too. Israeli high-tech remains very strong in output, exports, capital raised, and exits, but employment growth has slowed and the number of R&D employees in Israel has declined after years of growth. AI is not the sole explanation, but it is already influencing hiring decisions, entry-level roles, and the composition of the workforce.

For students choosing their high-school subjects and their parents, public perception also matters. They see layoffs, hear that roles are changing, and watch AI write code. In a Foundation survey of five-unit mathematics and English students in grades 10-11 who are not pursuing high-tech matriculation, 53% said the subjects that make up the track would become less relevant in the age of AI (15% said more relevant). Foundation research also shows that many students are still unfamiliar with the term "high-tech matriculation," do not see a future for themselves in high-tech, and view the track as too difficult.



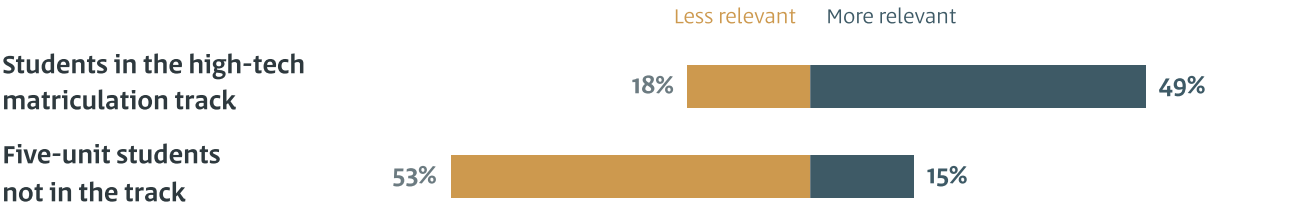
Survey of five-unit students, May 2026

Most students see clear value – but AI is reshaping perceptions of relevance

85%
agree: high-tech matriculation gives a real advantage for a career in high-tech

79%
agree: it will give them stronger capabilities in any career they choose

Will the track's subjects be more or less relevant in the age of artificial intelligence?



27% consult AI when choosing tracks; for 11%, it was a major factor

47% say their parents' advice shaped their choice – but only 33% of parents think so

57% of parents are unfamiliar with the term "high-tech matriculation"

Source: Trump Foundation and Geocartography, May 2026: 408 students in grades 10-11 studying five-unit mathematics and English; 405 parents

High-tech matriculation was built on a strong evidence base linking advanced high-school study with later integration into high-tech. The relationship still matters, but we increasingly believe the public case cannot rest on an employment promise alone. The faster the labor market changes, the broader and more durable the track's value must become: deep mathematical and scientific foundations, high-level English, the capacity to learn new technologies, and access to high-quality pathways in academia, the military, research, and industry. The changes in high-tech may therefore call for recasting rather than weakening the promise of the track – less as a promise of one profession and more as rigorous preparation for a scientific and technological world changing at speed.

Excellence in the age of AI

In a world where knowledge and tools change quickly, we deliberately chose to start at the top. Starting with broad, basic use makes it easy to settle for the lowest common denominator – and difficult to raise the bar later. So we started at the professional frontier: what must someone know and understand if they are to research, develop, and build the next generation of systems? We are testing that standard through pioneering programs, outstanding students and teachers, and experts from academia and high-tech; from there, we are working backward to identify the knowledge students need and the learning progression that must begin earlier.



Expert learning groups are mapping the foundations beneath the changing technology – foundations meant to be deeper and more durable than the tools themselves. In mathematics: probability and statistics, data-based reasoning, and multidimensional representation; in computer science: algorithmic and systems thinking, data science, and an understanding of machine-learning systems; in physics: modeling, data analysis, simulation, and computational approaches to complex problems. Research we commissioned on the needs of the high-tech sector also points to the importance of critical thinking, cognitive flexibility, and the ability to operate under uncertainty.

Two layers of excellence are beginning to emerge. At the upper end, a small group can study AI as an advanced scientific and technological discipline, at a level that prepares them for research and development. Around it is a broader layer of high-tech matriculation students, and the subjects they study – mathematics, physics, and computer science – will all need updating for a world in which AI is part of scientific and technological work. The frontier sets the bar; the core subjects build the steps toward it.

This will be a central direction for us in the coming years. We want graduates who lead the tools rather than being led by them – who understand the systems deeply enough to question, change, and build them. When an AI tool performs for a student the very operation the student is supposed to be learning – analyzing data, formulating a solution, or writing code – there is a risk that the underlying capability never develops. We therefore need to deepen the stable core, update the layer of tools and applications quickly, and move with enough speed and scale not to miss the opportunity.

What two years have taught us about building the next generation of excellence

Two years in, we understand more clearly that excellence is not built only through advanced programs or by increasing the number of students in excellence tracks. It rests on strong foundations of knowledge; a culture of learning, effort, and persistence; teachers able to maintain a high bar; and deep content that keeps pace with the world without losing the fundamentals.

We have also learned that not every age group or part of the system starts from the same place. In high school, we see room to move forward, expand, and build on existing infrastructure. In middle school, the government is preparing for broad implementation, but declining outcomes are a reminder of how early the conditions that determine who later reaches excellence take shape.

AI adds another layer. It is not simply another content domain; it forces us to ask again what students must know for themselves, what genuine depth means when machines can do more, and what Israel's platform for scientific and technological excellence should look like in the years ahead.

Across all of this, the same enabling conditions keep returning: teachers and teaching, content and learning materials, student learning habits, implementation capacity, and data and measurement.

This may point to an additional movement alongside the three we defined in 2024: not only to expand, upgrade, and diversify the circle of excellence, but also to **strengthen the base** on which it rests – the knowledge, the bar, the habits of learning, and the system's ability to sustain high expectations over time.

We set out two years ago on a ten-year course, and its central direction is clear. Infrastructure has been built,



partnerships have formed, the government has adopted parts of the agenda, and in high school we can already see progress. After years of crisis, the challenge now is to move from recovery to rebuilding: connect the strengths already in place; reinforce knowledge, standards, and trust; and prepare the next generation for the world opening before them.

That is the context for the questions we bring to the Council, to help us sharpen priorities and emphasis, test what is realistic in the current environment, and identify where philanthropy has a distinctive role in connecting actors, adding capacity, and turning recovery into momentum.

Five questions for the road ahead

1. **Raising the Bar:** What should Israel's platform for scientific and technological excellence look like in the age of AI?

   Is high-tech matriculation still the right framework to build on, or do changes in high-tech, the persistent gender gap, and the rise of AI require us to rethink the core – mathematics, English, physics and/or computer science and AI – and the relationships among them?

2. **The Human Advantage:** As machines become capable of doing more, what do we want to remain distinctly human?

   International standards and AI converge on the same question: what knowledge and depth of understanding students must retain, which thinking capacities must remain their own, and what needs to change in content, teaching, and assessment to hold a high bar?

3. **Philanthropic Impact:** Where can philanthropy make a meaningful difference in advancing excellence today?

   High school now has a target, a metric, and infrastructure already producing results; in middle school, government is preparing for broad implementation, and that is where the conditions that determine who will later reach excellence take shape. Where should philanthropy now place its weight – on realizing existing potential, or on building the potential itself?

4. **Reigniting Motivation:** What will restore the education system's willingness and capacity to strive for excellence?

   Weakness in the knowledge base now meets erosion in learning and teaching discipline, expectations, trust, and a sense of shared purpose. Can excellence pull the system upward, or does the system first require stronger foundations, renewed energy, and higher expectations and trust?

5. **Levers for Excellence:** What levers can philanthropy build to help advance excellence?

   Teachers and teaching, content and learning materials, student learning habits, implementation, and data and measurement recur across every strand of the roadmap. Which are essential conditions for advancing excellence, and where does philanthropy have a comparative advantage in building capacity and enabling the public system to take ownership?

