



Evaluation of the New Horizon Reform in Elementary and Junior High Education at the End of Three Years of Implementation

Summary of Findings

During the 2007/8 school year, the Israeli government decided to implement the Ofek Chadash (New Horizon) reform – a national program to advance education in Israel in elementary and junior high schools.¹ The reform included four main, complementary, targets: boosting the status of teachers and raising their salaries; providing equal opportunities to every student and raising student achievements; improving the school climate, and empowering and expanding the authority of the school principal.

The reform includes the following:

- **An increase in full-time teacher's work week to 36 hours (instead of 24 hours)** according to the following division:
 - 26 *frontal teaching hours* in elementary schools and 23 in junior high schools (instead of the 24 prior to the implementation of the New Horizon reform was implemented),
 - 5 *non-teaching hours* in elementary schools and 9 in junior high schools. These hours did not previously exist in the teacher's schedule before the New Horizon reform, and they are intended mainly to transfer work usually done by the teacher at home to the school,
 - 5 *individual hours with students* in elementary schools and 4 in junior high schools. These hours did not previously exist in the teacher's schedule before the New Horizon reform, and are intended mainly for working with groups of up to five students; the specific content is determined by the school, according to Ministry of Education guidelines.

¹ Decision 4083 of the Government of Israel from 14 September 2008. See the Prime Minister's Office website: <http://www.pmo.gov.il/PMO/Archive/Decisions/2008/09/des4083.htm>.

- **An increase in teachers' salaries**
- **A change in teachers' professional development and how they are promoted**
- **Institutionalization of a standard system for evaluating educational staff (teachers, vice-principals, principals)**
- **Improvement of teachers' physical work environment, in particular the construction of suitable work areas for them**

During the years 2008-2010, 1,268 schools joined the reform (75% of the all relevant schools). Three years after its implementation, 75% of elementary schools and 68% of the independent junior high schools were participating (in the 2011/12 school year, all elementary schools and two-thirds of the independent junior high schools had joined the New Horizon reform). The National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation in Education (RAMA) accompanied the New Horizon reform with an evaluation study during 2008-10.

The Evaluation of the New Horizon reform full report presents perspectives, evaluations and positions of those involved in the reform regarding its implementation, integration and consequences after three years of implementation (2009/10 school year). The purpose of the report was to learn about the processes and changes which had taken place in schools which had been participating in New Horizon for a long time.

The evaluation questions were:

- How is the reform perceived by the teachers and principals? How satisfied are they with the reform and how interested are they in continuing to implement it?
- How well is the reform implemented in the third year of its operation from the two main aspects of its integration – the individual hours with students and the physical conditions within the school?
- What is the work environment for teachers and principals in New Horizon? Which processes and changes has their school work environment undergone following the reform, and how do they perceive these changes?
- What are the perceived results of the reform on the students, teachers and principals and on life in the school?

Here are the main findings which emerged from the evaluation study of the New Horizon reform, which took place during the 2009/10 school year in the elementary schools and junior high schools, in comparison to the findings from the 2008/9 school year in elementary schools. The findings are based

on a) designated telephone interviews conducted from January to March 2009 and from January to March 2010 among broad representative samples² of teachers and principals in elementary schools and junior high schools; b) qualitative in-depth interviews conducted in 2011 in 12 schools participating in the reform, 6 of which were elementary schools and 6 junior high.

General: The reform as part of school activity

- In general, it is clear that **the reform has become integrated into the daily routine of the schools**. The discussion regarding “do we need the reform?” is almost non-existent, and it is clear that the principals and teachers perceive it as an integral and significant part of school activity. **The vast majority of teachers and principals in 2008/9 and 2009/10 expressed a wish to continue implementing the reform** (88% of the teachers in elementary schools in 2008/9; 91% of the teachers in elementary schools in 2009/10 and 90% of the junior high school teachers in 2009/10; 99% of the elementary school principals in 2008/9 and in 2009/10, and 100% of the principals in junior high schools in 2009/10).
- **The reform was perceived by teachers and principals in both 2008/9 and 2009/10 as positively affecting school activity** (71% of the elementary school teachers in 2008/9; 76% of the elementary school teachers in 2009/10 and 72% of the junior high school teachers in 2009/10, as well as 93% of the elementary school principals in 2008/9, 95% of the elementary school principals in 2009/10, and 91% of the junior high school principals in 2009/10). The main aspects understood to have been affected positively by the reform are: relationships between teachers and students; student scholastic achievements; staff team work, and the school climate. At the same time, there are mixed opinions about the reform’s effects on violence levels in the school, the relationship between teachers and parents, and the public image of the teaching profession. The teachers’ workload in school and at home is noted to have been negatively affected as a result of the reform.

²In 2010, the rate of response among the teachers was 84% (5,173 teachers in elementary schools participating in New Horizon: 724 in junior high schools participating in New Horizon and 716 teachers in non-participating junior high schools). The rate of response among the principals was 96% (1,089 principals in elementary schools participating in New Horizon; 57 in junior high schools which were participating in the reform, and 82 that hadn’t joined). In 2009, the rate of response among the teachers participating in the reform was 78% (3,121 teachers in elementary schools). The rate of response among teachers not participating in New Horizon was 76% (1,596 teachers in elementary schools). The rate of response among the principals participating in the reform was 90% (649 principals in elementary schools); the rate of response among principals not participating in the reform was 88% (254 elementary school principals).

- At the same time there are **low rates of teachers expressing high-level satisfaction from the way the reform has been implemented** (47% of the teachers in elementary schools in 2009/10, and 44% of the junior high school teachers in 2009/10), with **the main complaints being against the teachers' heavy workload**, and against what are seen to **be a lack of suitable physical conditions for the teachers working** in the school. There were higher rates of high satisfaction among principals (79% of the principals in elementary schools in 2009/10, and 76% of the principals in junior high schools in 2009/10).
- **Concerning everything connected with the reform's effectivity – in a study which took place in 2009, the reform was found to have contributed in Hebrew-speaking State schools regarding everything connected with the students' 5th grade math achievements, and several school climate parameters.** The findings were not similar for Arabic-speaking schools or Hebrew-speaking schools belonging to the State Religious inspectorate. Since most of the schools joined the reform in 2009/10, this examination could not be repeated. However, the generally observed rise in the 2010/11 school year, which includes an improvement in the entire system in 5th grade achievements in the Meitzav achievement tests and the school climate as reported by students, and the rise in the demand for teaching, as reported by the Administration for Teacher Training, indicates a long-term trend of improvement which can be ascribed, among other things, to the reform (although we cannot indicate a causative link).

The individual hours with students

- **It was found in the in-depth interviews that the individual hours with students were perceived by teachers and principals as the main advantage of the reform. At the same time, the timing for the individual hours with students is seen as problematic: about half the teachers in 2009/10 (55%) report that the individual hours with students take place during the school day**, rather than at the end of the day as per the guidelines, both in elementary schools and junior high schools. Additionally, in elementary schools there is a decline in the reported hours in comparison with the 2008/9 statistics (66%), meaning that, as time has passed, more individual hours with students take place in elementary schools as “marginal hours” (at the beginning or end of the day). When the individual hours with students take place during the school day, the students are taken out of their class, **and in many cases study a different subject** (around 50% in elementary school in 2008/9 and 2009/10 and 40% in junior high schools in 2009/10).

The school work environment for teachers and principals following the implementation of New Horizon

- **In general, the teachers express a high level of satisfaction from their teaching work,** both in elementary schools (82% in 2008/9 and 85% in 2009/10) and in the junior high schools which have joined the reform (83% in 2009/10). There were also high levels of satisfaction from teaching work among junior high school teachers who had not joined the reform (85% in 2009/10).
- **In 2009/10, 40% of elementary school teachers report high satisfaction from their professional status.** A comparison with parallel figures in 2008/9 (34%) indicates a rise in teacher satisfaction rates from their professional status. Among junior high school teachers who joined the reform (2009/10), the figures are 39% as compared to 30% of junior high school teachers who did not join.
- **The majority of the teachers report being heavily overworked at home.** Between 2008/9 and 2009/10, there was a rise in the rate of reporting of this aspect among elementary school teachers (55% in 2008/9 as compared to 62% in 2009/10). In comparison, junior high school teachers who joined the reform report at relatively lower rates (57% in 2009/10) of overwork at home, in comparison to the junior high school teachers who had not joined (62% in 2009/10). It can be seen from the in-depth interviews that **the teachers' feeling of being overworked does not necessarily emanate from the implementation of New Horizon, but from the general rise in the schools' demands,** following the implementation of various system-wide programs.
- **Many teachers expressed the need for professional development which will supply them with pedagogic tools for the best possible implementation of the individual hours with students** (53% of the elementary school teachers in 2009/10 and 58% of junior high school teachers in 2009/10). In comparison with the data for elementary school teachers in 2008/9 (28%), there was a rise in the rate of teachers requesting professional development on the topic.
- **According to the principals' reports, the physical conditions in the schools are unsatisfactory** (71% of the principals in elementary schools and 76% in junior high schools in 2009/10), mainly due to the lack of a suitable place for eating, a lack of computer workstations and teleprocessing equipment, and a lack of a suitable place for teachers to work in and hold meetings.

- **Approximately half the elementary school teachers in 2009/10 (51%) report on high levels of satisfaction regarding their salary conditions.** The figures indicate a rise in teacher satisfaction as compared with the rates measured in 2008/9 which stood at 38%. It was seen in junior high schools (2009/10) that teachers in the reform were more satisfied with their salary conditions (52%) as compared with teachers not in the reform (33%). The in-depth interviews show that despite the teachers' satisfaction from their salary, the salary level is still not perceived as appropriate the additional work.
- **In 2009/10, 53% of the principals in elementary schools and 40% of junior high school principals noted that they are satisfied with how much authority and autonomy they possess.** It emerges from the in-depth interviews that those who are not satisfied mainly explain it by the lack of authority regarding everything connected with hiring new teachers, firing teachers, managing the school hours and constructing the school timetable.

In summary:

At the end of three years of the implementation of the reform, it is clear that it is implemented well in the schools, and perceived as effective by teachers and principals from various aspects of the school activity. In particular – it seems that the individual hours with students are perceived as a significant tool in the students' scholastic advancement. Most of those participating in the reform are interested in continuing its implementation, but it seems that there are still difficulties in implementing the reform: approximately half the teachers report that the individual hours with students are held during the school day, and the students who go to them miss class study material. The teachers report a feeling of overwork and it does not seem that the non-teaching hours provide a solution to this problem. In addition, teachers and principals report that the physical conditions in schools still do not suit the teachers' work requirements, and the principals report that they have insufficient authority and autonomy.