



State Comptroller of Israel | Local Government Audit | 2022

Social Audit

Local authorities' activities to identify dropout students and prevent and manage school dropout



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Background

Similar to educational systems around the world, one of the complex phenomena the Israeli educational system contends with is school dropouts. Dropout rates are an accepted measure for assessing students' academic success and the educational system ability to hold on to its students.

Regular, consistent students' attendance at school and their integration within the academic, educational and social sphere (regular attendance) are a basic condition to proper school functioning and academic success. Mandatory attendance in a recognized educational institute where students are exposed to basic curriculum is intended to provide students with basic knowledge, education, learning skills, life skills and shared life values.

The outbreak of COVID-19 around the world in late 2019 and the shift to e-learning intensified the phenomenon of covert dropout amongst students.

Based on the Compulsory Education Law and its regulations, the Ministry of Education has established the Regular Attendance and Prevention of Dropout Department. The department operates through attendance officers and its role is to ensure an appropriate institute for all students and optimal support at school and within the community for maintaining educational continuity and persistence. In addition, the department is in charge of transferring students from one educational institute to another as necessary.



Key figures

2,356,000

number of Israeli students in educational system (ages 3–18) in 2019–2020

5.17%

the rate of high school students not registered in any educational institute in Israel in 2018, compared with 7.65% in OECD states

628.7

number of attendance officers vacancies in Israel in 2019–2020. 622 of them are manned

approx. 90,000

number of students in Israel educational system treated by attendance officers in 2020–2021

100

the desired number of students to be treated by an attendance officer according to the Ministry of Education

114–169

the average number of students treated by an attendance officer in 4 out of 11 audited local authorities

12

number of local authorities for which the Ministry of Education did not allocate attendance officers' positions in 2020–2021

1.7% & 2.2%

the dropout rate in Al-Kasom Regional Council and Bnei-Brak, respectively, in 2019–2020, compared with a national average of 0.5%

Audit actions



From May 2021 to November 2021, the Office of the State Comptroller examined the local authorities' activities to identify school dropouts and to prevent and manage dropouts. In addition, it examined the entities responsible for dropout identification and prevention, the primary responses to dropouts, and the means of supervision and control used by attendance officers. These aspects were also examined across the ultra-orthodox sector and the Bedouin society in the south of Israel.

The audit was carried out in 11 local authorities (Bnei-Brak, Lod, Ness Ziona, Nazareth, and Kiryat Shmona municipalities; Local Councils of Kfar Manda, Rekhasim, and Shlomi; Regional Councils of Al-Kasom, Mateh Yehuda and Menashe)¹. Supplementary audits

¹ The local authorities that were audited were selected based on the following parameters: the administrative districts the local authorities were part of; their municipal status; the socio-economic cluster; their peripheral measure; the sector they were part of; the sector most of their residents were part of and the number of residents.



were conducted in Department A – Education of Children and Youth at Risk in the ministry of Education, the ministry's districts, the ministry of Economy and Industry, the Directorate General of Labor, and the Department of Vocational Training and Manpower Development.

Key findings



Entities supervising regular attendance – by the audit end, the ministry of Education had not defined the characteristics of covert dropouts in students' records.



Attendance Officers positions – despite the 8% increase in the number of students in educational systems from 2015–2016 to 2019–2020, the number of allocated positions for attendance officers increased only by about 0.8%. It was further found that in four audited local authorities, the average number of students treated by attendance officers was over 100 – the desired average (in Lod – 8 attendance officer positions with an average of 169 students per officer; in Mateh Yehuda – 4 attendance officer positions with 114 students per officer; in Menashe 3.25 attendance officer positions with 167 students per officer and in Rekhasim 1 attendance officer position who handles 126 students).



Persistence Committees – the persistence committees in Nazareth and Kiryat Shmona, which help educational institutes handle students throughout the dropout process, did not discuss students treated by attendance officers who were transferred to external frameworks. It was further found that there were no persistence committees in the regional council of Al-Kasom and the local council of Rekhasim; the persistence committee in the local council of Kfar Manda convened appropriately in 2019 and 2021, but did not convene in 2020; Kiryat Shmona convened its persistence committee appropriately in 2019, but in 2020 it was convened only once and in 2021 it was not convened at all; in Bnei-Brak, persistence committees convened only in some of the schools.



Attendance Officers' activity in Ultra-Orthodox and Bedouin authorities – in Bnei-Brak, Local Council of Rekhasim, and Regional Council of Al-Kasom, the school dropout rate in 2019–2020 was 2.2%, 0.6%, and 1.7% respectively. In some schools in the above three authorities, attendance officers were not part of the inter-professional team, and the details of students who were frequently unjustified absent were not shared with them.



Identification of students who are at risk of dropping out – the attendance officers work reactively – they rely on reports sent by school staff of students who do not attend school regularly and of covert dropouts. The attendance officers in Bnei-Brak,



Lod, and Ness Ziona, the Local Councils of Kfar Manda, Rekhasim, and Shlomi, and the Regional Councils of Al-Kasom, Mateh Yehuda, and Menashe do not initiate visits to identify students, except for visits along the way to schools or at schoolyards. Moreover, they do not actively identify youth at risk of dropping out even in the arenas where they are present – the authority's streets and the virtual environment.



Entry permits to the attendance officers network for departments of education directors – the ministry of Education does not grant departments of education directors privileges to review the information on the Attendance Officers Network, although they receive reports from school principals of irregular attendance and various dropouts and actively participate in finding appropriate solutions for students who are at risk of dropping out.



The Attendance Officers Network – although in all local authorities in most schools, students' attendance is managed through computerized systems (approved by the Ministry of Education), including student attendance documentation, the Attendance Officer Network does not have any direct interfaces with these systems. It was further raised that the Ministry of Education has not implemented a new computerized system and has not made the necessary improvements in the existing one, despite repetitive malfunctions that undermine the attendance officers' ability to document the process of treating the students.



The extent to which information is updated and "Closing of students' records" in the Attendance Officers Network – in Nazareth, the Local Authorities of Rekhasim and Shlomi, and the Regional Councils of Al-Kasom, Mateh Yehuda and Menashe, no interventions or reports on students' condition were documented for over six months or over a year of over 10% of the students. It was further found that in 50% of the students sampled in Mateh Yehuda, Nazareth, Menashe, Al-Kasom, and Bnei-Brak, the reports were unclear and did not help to understand the student's condition.



Interfaces and collaboration between departments of education and departments of welfare – collaboration and information exchange regarding covert or overt dropouts took place in the audited local authorities; however, it was not regulated under the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Welfare guidelines, not anchored in procedures nor documented.



Budgeting of the Dropout Prevention Program – in 2020, the Ministry of Education did not grant the budget above to any local authority since the state budget was not approved that year. However, there was an increased need for such a program because of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021 the authorities were given a budget of NIS 40,000–100,000 per authority, but no budget was granted to Bnei-Brak Municipality.



The ministry of Economy and Industry's Vocational Training Institutes – in 2019–2020, the average rate of overt dropout from vocational training institutes under the responsibility of the Ministry of Economy was 9.73% (there was a 20% dropout rate in three schools and no dropout whatsoever in four schools). This rate is relatively high for technological institutions supervised by the Ministry of Education, where the dropout rate used to be 2.6%. The audit found that, unlike the attendance officers' involvement in Ministry of Education schools regulated under the Ministry circular, the interface with the educational staff in vocational training institutes is not officially regulated.



Training and professional development of Attendance Officers – the Ministry of Education has established a professional development program for the training of attendance officers, which includes, among other things, courses, seminars, and study days that focus on relevant topics. It was found that all attendance officers participate in the professional development program.

Key recommendations



It is recommended that the Ministry of Education examine the 7% gap between the growth rate in the number of students and the growth rate in the number of attendance officers from 2014 to 2020 and its effect on the burden imposed on the officers and the effectiveness of their work. If needed, it is recommended that the Ministry increase the number of attendance officer positions in local authorities.



It is recommended that the Ministry of Education upgrade the Attendance Officers Network and enable interfaces between the schools' computerised attendance systems and the Attendance Officers Network for a better tracking and identification of covert dropout.



It is recommended that attendance officers in the audited local authorities actively attempt to identify youth at risk of dropping out in the environments where they are present – schools, streets and virtual environment. Moreover that the Ministry of Education consider updating the circular's guidelines and the attendance officers' regulations of reaching out strategies, and provide up-to-date tools, such as, social network monitoring by attendance officers.



It is recommended that the Ministry of Education and ultra-orthodox local authorities (including Bnei-Brak and the Local Authority of Rekhasim) form a methodology and modus operandi to identify students who study in ultra-orthodox schools and are at risk of dropping out; provide them with suitable solutions; and regulate attendance officers'

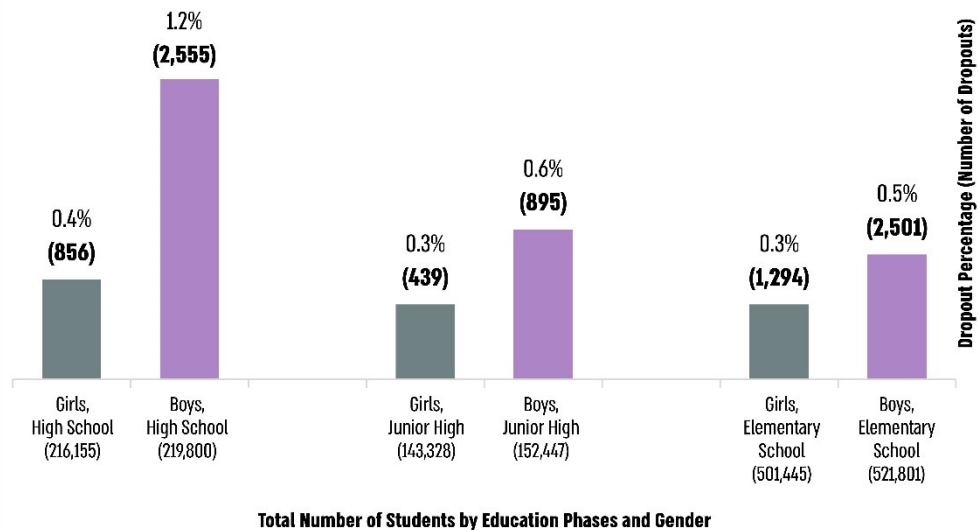


activity and entry to all educational institutes and religious schools (Yeshivas – for 13–18-year-old students) in particular.



It is recommended that the Ministry of Education, and the local authorities that handle the Bedouin population in the Negev, form designated plans for identification and treatment of covert dropouts amongst Bedouin students in the Negev. It is further recommended to identify students who are at risk of dropping out and students who are not registered in any educational institute and try to integrate them into suitable institutions.

Distribution of Dropout Rate by Educational Phases and Gender, 2019–2020.



According to the Ministry of Education data processed by the State Comptroller Office.



Summary

Education is a right to which all children living in Israel are entitled, and it is a significant milestone in every student's life. Dropping out of school is considered a significant cause of social gaps; it is a risky behavior and has a negative effect on dropouts and society, the economy, and employment in general. The state should ensure all students have access to educational institutes, that they can study in an institute that enables them to meet their potential and that they are provided with the optimal support they need from the school and the community. Enabling optimal access and better solutions and services to students at risk of dropping out would increase their likelihood of integrating into society and living normative life as grownups.

