

Inequality in the Education System: Who Opposes It and Who Benefits from It?

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Abstract

As early as the 1960s, the struggle for equality and narrowing gaps in the education system has been one of the most widely discussed subjects in Israeli educational discourse. In recent years, the Ministry of Education has had to contend with issues that have had a direct or indirect impact on the realization of equality in education, and in all cases it has chosen to address them in ways that reflect a tendency to cancel, reduce or slow down equality-promoting policies that had been pursued in previous administrations. This chapter examines these developments and their consequences as test cases of the system's willingness to actually invest in reducing educational gaps. The measures that will be reviewed in this chapter are: (1) the return to the weighted pupil formula in primary and lower secondary schools; (2) implementation of the Compulsory Education Law for Ages 3-4 and the decision to add a second assistant in the preschools for these children; (3) implementation of the government decision to reduce class size; (4) the toughening of budgetary policy towards the recognized but unofficial schools, as reflected in the conflict involving the Hebrew Reali School in Haifa and the Christian schools.

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Introduction

Almost everyone in Israel, regardless of political and ethnic lines, agrees on the importance of equal opportunity in the education system and on finding ways to achieve it. In international tests, Israeli pupils frequently top the list in terms of large educational gaps between pupils from different classes and backgrounds, and, over the years, several committees have been established to discuss solutions to this problem. The heads of the education system use a variety of methods to combat inequality, primarily by changing the budgeting method, offering priority terms to educators working in the geographic periphery, unique curricula, and specially adapted frameworks for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

However, along with these considerable efforts, the picture behind the scenes appears to be somewhat different. In her book *Who's Afraid of Equality?* former Minister of Education Yuli Tamir writes about the difficulties she faced when she wanted to promote measures to reduce gaps between pupil populations from different socioeconomic backgrounds. These difficulties are apparently the fate of every education minister who has tried to do so in the past or who will try to do so in the future. Tamir points out that groups who usually speak out in support of equal opportunity act to undermine steps aimed to achieve that goal when they think their own interests are at risk (Tamir, 2015).

This chapter takes an in-depth look at several measures recently implemented in the education system and presents the history that preceded them and their impact on equality in education. The first section examines the changes in the budgeting methods over the years, with an emphasis on the most recent changes. The second section reviews the implementation of the Compulsory Education Law for Ages 3-4 and the budget for a second teaching assistant in preschools for these children. The third section takes a look at the issue of reducing class size in primary schools, and the fourth deals with the struggle of the Christian schools – as an example of institutions with the status of “recognized but unofficial” – to increase the government funding allocated to them. The

overall picture reveals that, even though everyone espouses the value of equality, in practice it is very difficult to promote changes that advance disempowered groups because policy decisions are most often made on the basis of the opinions and interests of the privileged groups that have a greater impact on the public discourse.

1. The School Budgeting System

The Israeli education system is budgeted in different ways at each level of education. In preschool and upper secondary school, the state has rarely applied a policy of affirmative action. However, in primary and lower secondary education, the state has used three main budgeting methods in recent years, each of which includes elements of affirmative action: (1) per class budget with the addition of “baskets” of supplements; (2) differential per pupil budget (pupil-weighted formula); and, (3) the combined budget method.¹

Per class budget with supplementary “baskets.” This method was used in primary education from the establishment of the state until 2004 and in lower secondary schools until 1994. Under this method, the bulk of the budget was allocated equally to all schools through a basic budget per class, which was supposed to cover the operation of a basic curriculum. Various additions were added to this standard budget (supplementary “baskets”), whose purpose was to address unique problems per school or to invest in agendas or programs the state wished to promote.

The system was convenient to operate administratively, easy to explain to the public, and contained elements of basic fairness and equality that prevented discrimination against schools that served small populations – whether due to their location or their philosophy (mostly their religious orientation). It also made it possible to encourage and incentivize programs in specific subjects relatively easily. However, the

¹ Parallel to these, there are different budgeting methods for Haredi education and for the recognized but unofficial education.

method had several shortcomings: first, it created a clear preference (at least in terms of allocation of resources per pupil) for small schools or institutions with small classes regardless of the reasons for those small classes (for example, due to separating boys and girls).² Second, the system left an opening for decisions based on ideological and political motives of the heads of the system, and enabled them to give preferential treatment to schools and populations that they wanted to advance. Third, the proliferation of “baskets,” which at certain times reached the level of over 20 percent of the entire teaching budget – some with hazy allocation criteria – also created an unjust distribution of resources. In this way, schools headed by enterprising principals (which usually serve already strong populations) managed to raise more resources than other schools.

The pupil-weighted formula. Using this method, which was used between 2004 and 2007, budgeting was based on only two criteria: the number of pupils in the school and the pupils’ socioeconomic profiles. The major beneficiaries from this system were the large schools whose pupils came from disadvantaged population groups, which were mainly the Arab Israeli schools and some of the Haredi (Jewish ultra-Orthodox) schools.³ The main losers from this system were small schools whose pupils came from more affluent socioeconomic backgrounds. Most of the schools fell in the middle. Some of them were large enough to receive a budget that sufficed to support the full curriculum, even though they served stronger populations. Others that were small could not receive an

² The state-religious education system has many small classes, both because of being a minority in many localities and because of the separation of boys and girls. In agrarian communities, many of the classes are small because of the low population density.

³ The Haredi schools in the Independent Education and Maayan Hinuch Torani networks enjoyed the transition to this budgeting method because, for the first time since the establishment of the state, the “Deprivation Index” was applied to them. Thus, they could enjoy a higher budget per pupil since their pupil population was socioeconomically weaker.

adequate budget according to the criteria, and were compensated by a supplement that enabled them to teach the prescribed curriculum.

The combined-budget method. Under this method, which has been used in lower secondary schools since 1995 and in primary schools since 2008, the budget allocated to each class is comprised of two parts. The first and main part is the basic budget, which is given to each class and school uniformly and equally.⁴ The second part is comprised of two main supplements to the teaching-hour budget: (1) a supplement derived from the class size, given on the basis of the number of pupils over 20 per class, regardless of the pupil socioeconomic profiles; and, (2) a supplement derived from the school's socioeconomic profile. There are additional supplements for prayer time in the state-religious schools and teaching weekly work hours⁵ for long school days in relevant schools.

From the perspective of affirmative action, the results of this budgeting method depend on the relative size of the basic budget compared to the supplements, and, of even more significance, is the amount of budget that is left for nurturing affirmative action after the basic budget and its supplements are allocated. The reality is that, since 2009, the teaching budget that is left for nurturing affirmative action has been only around 6 percent of the total teaching budget. As a

⁴ Since 2009-2010, a change was made in the formula. In the new formula, the class size for the purpose of budget calculations changes according to the school's Deprivation Index. This means that if the most affluent school has 80 pupils per grade level it will be permitted to have two 40-pupil classes, and each class will receive the basic budget and the additional supplements according to the number of its pupils. In the case of the weakest school with 80 pupils in the grade, two 27-pupil classes and one 26-pupil class will be approved, and then the school will receive three basic budget allocations plus supplements.

⁵ "Teaching weekly working hours" is a budgetary term that denotes the price of "one yearly working hour of a teacher." It does not relate necessarily to the number of hours that the pupils receive in the classroom or the number of lessons that the teacher teaches.

consequence, this system mainly benefits schools where the classes are very large or schools with very small classes (because of the guarantee of a minimum of teaching hours, which is divided between fewer pupils). Most of the institutions in these categories are: state-religious schools, which divide classes into boys and girls; some of the schools in regional councils; Jewish state schools in the big cities; and, schools in the Arab Israeli sector.

The major advantage of this system is that it provides significant compensation for large classes. Its major disadvantage is that when the portion of the total budget devoted to affirmative action is small, it cannot possibly be sufficient to enable real change.

Changes in the Budgeting Methods over the Years

As noted previously, since the founding of Israel and until 1994, the per class budget with the supplementary “baskets” method was used in lower secondary schools, and in primary education until 2004. The pupil-weighted formula was tried in lower secondary schools for only one year, but the experiment was stopped prematurely,⁶ and instead the combined per class budget method was introduced.

In primary education, the development was a little different. In response to a demand by the Supreme Court (HCJ 1614/00, 1994), then-Education Minister Limor Livnat appointed a committee headed by Dr. Shimshon Shoshani (the Shoshani Committee) at the end of 2001 to review the existing budgeting method in the three kinds of institutions in primary education: official institutions, recognized but unofficial institutions and exempt institutions. After extensive deliberations, the Committee submitted its recommendations to the Minister of Education in August 2002. Its main recommendation was to change the budgeting method fundamentally, and to adopt instead the pupil-weighted formula.

⁶ Full disclosure: the author of this chapter also authored the document that was the basis for this short attempt to change the budgeting system in the lower secondary schools.

The Committee was guided by the principle that primary education institutions in Israel should be budgeted according to equal, fair, effective, applicable, transparent, and uniform criteria for all pupils.

The Shoshani Committee's recommendations bore significant resemblance to the budgeting method that had been tried in lower secondary schools,⁷ but it included two important components that did not exist in the initial experiment:

- A. The Ministry of Finance promised supplemental funding in the amount of 80,000 teaching weekly work hours.⁸
- B. A new socioeconomic "Deprivation Index" was developed.⁹ The new index differed significantly from the previous one in several aspects. It related to the entire pupil population (non-Haredi Jews, Arab Israelis and Haredim) and included several elements that had not appeared in previous indexes, such as the school's location in a national priority area, the pupils' or parents' status as immigrants, and the pupils' or

⁷ Possibly, inter alia, because the author of this chapter was also one of the committee's economic advisors, as well as being involved in the attempted reform in lower secondary schools.

⁸ The consultants demanded a supplement of 120,000 teaching weekly work hours so that it would not be necessary to reduce hours in the schools, particularly in state-religious schools and some of the Jewish state schools with relatively small classes (mainly in the periphery and regional councils).

⁹ In light of the frequent confusion between the terms, it is important to emphasize the essential difference between the Deprivation Index and the budgeting method. The Deprivation Index is a statistical tool to measure the relative ability of the pupil, a group of pupils or the school to achieve scholastic achievements compared to others. A budgeting method is the formula according to which the ministry's budgetary resources are allocated. It is possible to have a defective Deprivation Index in service of a progressive and good budgeting method (such as the Deprivation Index developed by the Shoshani Committee, which applied to the pupil-weighted formula), and, alternatively, an excellent Deprivation Index combined with a regressive budgeting method (as in the case of the Strauss Index and the combined per pupil budgeting method).

parents' place of birth being in a developing country. These elements were included in the index in order to prevent the likely possibility that, should the new budgeting method be adopted, it would be implemented by reassigning massive resources from the state sector – especially state-religious – to the Arab Israeli sector and Haredi schools and, if any new resources were budgetted, they would almost all be allocated to those sectors as well.

Even before the new method was introduced, it was criticized by various public groups. Members of the state-religious education system claimed the sector's education system, which has small classes, would be harmed.¹⁰ On the other hand, people from the left side of the political spectrum pointed to the discrimination embodied in the new socioeconomic index in the form of the disproportionate weight given to the components of national priority area and country of origin for immigrants – indexes that are irrelevant to the Arab Israeli population.¹¹

Contrary to the criticism leveled at the pupil-weighted formula method before its implementation, studies of its outcomes found that it actually led to a substantial reduction in educational gaps (Blass 2007; Blass, Zussman and Tsur, 2010; Klinov, 2010).¹² Furthermore, these studies indicated a clear success in achieving the main goal of this

¹⁰ Chairperson of the Knesset Education Committee Zevulun Hammer was quoted by Arutz 7 as saying: "The National Religious Party rejects the report whose implementation will reduce the religious-Zionist education system by 20,000 teaching weekly work hours, estimated at NIS 100 million" (August 27 2002), <http://www.inn.co.il/News/Flash.aspx/33195>.

¹¹ See for example MK Yuli Tamir at the Knesset Education Committee: "I think that the Shoshani Report is terribly unfair towards the Arabs because in its socioeconomic index it gives tremendous weight to immigration. Up to 40 percent is taken from the Arabs in the absence of indexes they can meet [...] We cannot accept the Shoshani Report as is because of the Deprivation Index" (Knesset, 2003).

¹² To maintain full disclosure, the author of this chapter, who participated in those studies, was also one of the Shoshani Committee's consultants.

budgeting method: creating a situation in which schools serving disempowered pupil populations would benefit from higher budgets than schools serving stronger populations.

Despite the proven success of the pupil-weighted formula in promoting an affirmative action policy (or perhaps because of it), the combination of all of the forces opposing this method led Minister of Education Yuli Tamir to decide four years later to cancel it. The cancellation was pursuant to conditions created after a Supreme Court decision on a completely different subject,¹³ based on the argument that the pupil-weighted formula did not allow many schools to maintain an adequate education program. Pursuant to this, the combined per class budget method was introduced.

In 2015, the Ministry of Education published figures about resource allocation in the education system. The data indicate that in 2014, affirmative action in the form of per pupil compensation for a pupil from the weakest background compared to a pupil from the most affluent background, as reflected in the cost of teaching hours per pupil, was 23 percent higher for pupils from a weak background. Per class compensation in a school with the weakest background profile was only 5 percent higher than in classes with affluent background profiles (Ministry of Education, 2015a). In contrast, at the height of the implementation of the Shoshani Report in 2008 – which was ended before its full implementation – affirmative action compensation was 25 percent higher per pupil from a weaker background and 19 percent per class from weaker populations (Blass, Zussman and Tsur, 2010). Since the only significant change at that time was in the budgeting method, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the worsening was due to the transition from the pupil-weighted formula to the current budgeting method.

¹³ The Supreme Court ruling in H CJ 11163/03, given in a petition by the Adalah organization to prevent discrimination against the Arab Israeli sector on the basis of its non-inclusion in the definitions of national priority areas in 2003.

The Budgeting Method Planned for the Coming Years

In 2013, a new government was elected and a new Minister of Education took office – Shai Piron, educator par excellence. Piron was a member of the Dovrat Committee, which, among other things, recommended introducing the pupil-weighted formula into the entire education system, and extending it to all education expenditures by establishing a “pupil expenditure basket” (Ministry of Education, Dovrat Committee Report, 2005). Therefore, it is no wonder that immediately upon his appointment he established a committee that was to develop a proposal to re-adopt the pupil-weighted formula. The committee purposely worked under a full cover of secrecy.¹⁴ In one of the first hearings of the Knesset Transparency Committee, Piron addressed this issue, saying:

To the Ministry of Education there is no real way to publicize the data, because the education budget has tremendous political implications. Ministers of Education through the ages have not wanted to display the problematic data. Publication of the data containing evidence of the educational gaps might even lead to the dissolution of the government (Knesset, 2015).

At the same hearing, Piron also admitted that he had personally withheld the publication of the Ministry of Education budget for political reasons (Yosef, 2015).

A Ministry of Education press release (2014) indicated that once the planned process of implementing the pupil-weighted formula budget in primary education was complete, there would be three impact levels. Among schools in the strongest third in socioeconomic terms there would be no significant change in budgeting teaching hours per class (meaning no pupil would be harmed relative to the current situation); in the middle third, the supplement would constitute an addition of about three teaching weekly work hours per class; while in schools from the

¹⁴ Thus, for instance, the composition of the committee, what its letter of appointment included, with whom it met and who was consulted, and on exactly what data it based its findings were not publicized.

socioeconomically weakest third, there would be a supplement of seven teaching weekly work hours. Lower secondary schools in the strongest socioeconomic third would receive a supplement of 1.5 hours, the middle third would receive 3 hours, and the weakest third would receive 14 hours.

Assuming that the change of government in 2015 and other future developments will not undermine the implementation process (which requires a few years), the new use of the pupil-weighted formula should be examined closely to see what it includes and what it does not. The most important positive element of this process is adding a substantial number of teaching weekly work hours to the deprivation basket in primary education. Although the very announcement of returning to the pupil-weighted formula is positive, the process is still partial and limited in scope and does not apply to all of the country's preschools and upper secondary schools, or to other expenses that are not allocated in terms of teaching weekly work hours.

Furthermore, the main shortcoming of this process is that the new program does not change the existing budgeting method – the combined budget method – and the proposed supplement is not big enough. After five years, the number of hours allocated for affirmative action is supposed to be 240,000 hours, which is an addition of 140,000 to the current quota of 100,000 hours. Out of this supplement, 70,000 hours will be funded by the Ministry of Education's current budget and the Ministry of Finance will only pay for an additional 70,000 hours.

To understand the significance of these data, this must be viewed in the context of the fact that in the year 2000 (before the transition to a pupil-weighted formula) the number of teaching hours in the deprivation basket was 91,000, and another 19,000 hours were allocated as part of the national priority basket (a total of 110,000 hours). At that time, the number of pupils was 25 percent less than their number today and 30 percent less than the number of pupils expected in five years. Therefore, it appears that to merely maintain the level of compensation from the year 2000 there should have been an addition of 40,000 teaching weekly work hours (10,000 to cover the difference between the current budget which is

100,000 hours and the budgeting of 110,000 hours in 2000, plus another 30,000 hours for natural growth).

In light of these figures, it is quite clear that the supplement included in the new budget method is smaller than the amount required to reduce achievement gaps between population groups in any serious way. If the current theoretical outline of the pupil-weighted formula is compared to the theoretical outline of differential budgeting according to the Shoshani Report, it is clear that the previous outline provided a much larger compensation to the schools serving weak populations. Appendix Table 1A and 1B show unequivocally that, assuming that Piron's proposed outline is carried out in full, it is better than the Shoshani Report outline (had it been carried out in full) for schools that serve affluent populations but is much less beneficial for weak populations. Table 1 illustrates the main differences between the budgeting formulas in a class selected as an example: a third grade class in a state school.

Table 1. **Comparison between weekly budgeted teaching hours according to the new formula of pupil-weighted formula and the Shoshani Committee method**

for third grade pupils in state education

Number of pupils per class	Number of teaching hours per class, new method		Number of teaching hours per class, Shoshani method		Ratio of weakest pupils to strongest pupils	
	Pupils from strong background	Pupils from weak background	Pupils from strong background	Pupils from weak background	Current method	Shoshani method
20	31.00	38.00	36	40	1.23	1.1
25	32.00	39.00	36	50	1.22	1.4
30	33.00	40.00	38	60	1.21	1.6
35	34.00	46.40	44	70	1.36	1.6
40	39.00	56.40	50	80	1.45	1.6

Source: Nachum Blass, Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel

Data: Ministry of Education

Ultimately, it can be said that the committee's recommendations, and the subsequent decisions made, were a disappointment to anyone who was hoping for an announcement of the return to the pupil-weighted formula and its expansion to additional education and spending levels.

However, it may be important to note that if a decision is made to make a more concerted effort to promote differential budgeting, the work agreements in the Ofek Hadash (New Horizon) and Oz Letmura (Courage to Change) reforms, which include, among other things, an increase in work hours per teacher, make it possible to redistribute the resources with little to no harm to the affluent schools since the current budgeting per class provides 61.2 teaching weekly work hours – the equivalent of 1.7 full-time teacher positions (FTEs) – which is enough to pursue a meaningful pupil-weighted formula (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015). As an illustration, we will compare hypothetical schools with 10 classes: the first has a Deprivation Index of 10, the highest (weakest socioeconomic background), and the second has an index of 1 (the strongest population). Table 2 presents the teaching weekly work hours that will be allocated to each institution in three situations: without affirmative action compensation, after a compensatory supplement of 27 percent of all budgeted hours for institutions with a high Deprivation Index, and after a supplement of 42 percent in budgeted hours. As can be seen, even in the case of compensation by 42 percent, normal teaching of the curriculum can continue to be provided even in the strongest schools – meaning without additional teaching costs and classes – because each class will receive 36.5 frontal teaching hours (this is more than the required allotment for the curriculum which is 32 hours) and an additional 14 teaching weekly work hours.¹⁵

¹⁵ The levels of affirmative action compensation are for demonstration only, in order to use 10 FTEs.

Table 2. **Comparison of budgeted resources allocated to schools at different affirmative action levels**

according to the school Deprivation Index, on the basis of the current allocation method, 2015

School Deprivation Index score (10=the weakest)	School teaching hours			Full-time teachers
	Total teaching working hours	Hours of frontal teaching	Other teaching hours	
No affirmative action				
10	612	442	170	17
1	612	442	170	17
Addition of 27 percent in teaching hours				
10	684	494	190	19
1	540	390	150	15
Addition of 42 percent in teaching hours				
10	720	520	200	20
1	504	364	140	14

Source: Nachum Blass, Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel

Data: Ministry of Education

2. Implementation of the Compulsory Education Law for Ages 3-4 and the Addition of a Second Teaching Assistant in Compulsory Preschools

One of the prominent outcomes of the social protests that swept Israel in 2011 was the decision to implement immediately and fully the Compulsory Education Law for Ages 3-4. The full implementation of the

law had been postponed repeatedly due to budgetary difficulties. Instead of fulfilling the requirements of the law, the Ministries of Education and Finance agreed between themselves to implement the law gradually, beginning with socioeconomically weak communities and neighborhoods. As a result of these decisions, most of the population of the socioeconomically weak communities and neighborhoods did not pay tuition for preschool in 2011, including for ages 3-4. The social protests, which won broad public support and primarily expressed the distress of the middle class, led to a decision to fully implement the law beginning in 2013, which meant applying it to the population of children of the more affluent communities and neighborhoods as well. This decision actually took close to NIS 1 billion from the budget that was earmarked for subsidizing only the weak population (as of 2013, the budget did not give any priority to the weaker population groups) and added NIS 2 billion to decreasing the burden on the family budgets of the middle and upper classes.¹⁶ Without entering into a discussion about the justification and feasibility of a universal subsidy system as an effective method for reducing gaps, it is clear that the decision, which won very wide public support, was regressive.

The Ministry of Education took on the task with admirable vigor and efficiency and the number of children in the public preschools grew impressively – with part of the increase rooted in a transfer of children from private to public preschools. However, this raised a set of new problems. Since the personnel standards in the preschools did not change, the preschool teachers and assistants in places that previously served mainly 4-5-year-olds now had to deal with large numbers of 3-year-olds, some of whom were not yet out of diapers and required more care. This

¹⁶ The preschool education budget grew by about NIS 2 billion after the decision to implement the law. Whether the increase came at the expense of other items in the Ministry of Education budget or was added in full to the Ministry's budget, it does not change the fact that in essence it constituted a budget of NIS 2 billion that benefited stronger populations.

caused a great deal of distress among parents and even led to demonstrations throughout the country.

When the new Minister of Education Naftali Bennett took office, one of his first measures was to sign an agreement with the Ministry of Finance to subsidize a second teaching assistant for preschools serving 3-4-year-olds with more than 30 children in a class. This was undoubtedly an important step towards improving conditions in the preschools, but was it affirmative action? That is another question.

Surely the present measure will not make the conditions in preschools serving weak populations better than those serving more affluent populations. The new minister declared, “we will invest more, especially in the weak populations. A 3-year-old in Israel will receive the same opportunity whether he lives in Herzliya, Nahariya or Rahat. In the State of Israel, the quality of a child’s education will not be determined by his parents’ pay slip – be seen in the measures that were pursued (Ministry of Education, 2015b).” Unfortunately, this attitude is not reflected in the measures pursued by the Ministry of Education. The number of children per preschool class, the number of workers, the equipment, the size of the preschool room, and so on, will all be identical in all preschools, regardless of the population’s characteristics. Affirmative action would have been achieved were it determined, for example, that the maximum number of children in preschools that serve weak communities, would be 25 rather than 30. Although there was an intention to give more help to the weak municipalities by lowering their copayment for the second assistant, that intention was almost completely abandoned following the fierce objections by the more affluent municipalities.

Thus, as long as most of the 3-4-year-olds in the municipal preschools were children living in socioeconomically weak communities, no one complained about class size and no one demanded supplemental staffing. In fact, the public discourse did not deal with these issues at all. Only when the service became universal did the forces demanding its

improvement coalesce.¹⁷ Which is not to say that the plan to implement the Compulsory Education Law for Ages 3-4 and the addition of a second teaching assistant to the preschools are not important or positive programs, but this is another noteworthy example of the fact that in order to implement real reforms requiring a large budgetary supplement, there needs to be wide public support from the more affluent classes of society.

3. Reducing the Number of Pupils Per Class and the “Sardine Protest”

Unlike the crowding in preschools, the subject of class size has come up for public discussion periodically over the past years, with teachers’ organizations and parent unions applying strong pressure to reduce the number of pupils per class. In the past year, parental pressure increased and turned into a widespread protest movement called the “sardine protest.” The steps and missteps to reduce class size are another example of an educational reform continuously postponed due to a combination of a lack of resources and will. Nevertheless, the same reform reappeared on the government agenda and was pursued when pressure from the stronger population groups was felt.

The government’s first decision to reduce the number of pupils per class to 32 was made after the teachers’ union cited this demand as one of its main conditions for ending its long strike in 2007. At the end of the strike, the Ministers of Education and Finance declared at the National Labor Court: “The government of Israel views reducing the number of pupils per class as an important step for the promotion of the education

¹⁷ Beyond the fact that, following the implementation of the law, tens of thousands of children who had previously not gone to preschool or who went to private preschools joined the public preschool system, the need to put the plan into action quickly before adding all the necessary preschool classrooms apparently contributed to the higher density in the existing preschools.

system” (National Labor Court, 2007). In 2008, the government made a resolution to reduce the number of pupils per class to 32 in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education (Government Secretariat, 2008a). It is important to note that, according to the wording of the resolution, it was an all-encompassing decision that class size would not exceed 32 in all age groups and all classes. To examine modes of implementation, a public committee headed by Prof. Yitzhak Friedman was appointed.

The Friedman Committee submitted its recommendations in August 2008,¹⁸ and the principle of a maximum of 32 pupils per class at all age levels was one of its central tenets. In November 2008, a third government resolution was made on the subject. The resolution adopted the principles of the Friedman Committee but introduced a significant change. Instead of determining that the maximum threshold for the number of pupils per class would be 32, it decided that:

*In the 2008-2009 school year, the number of schools that will enter the program will be determined by the budget framework approved for this subject for this school year. Schools selected for the program this year will be schools defined as the weakest according to Ministry of Education’s socioeconomic index in the primary, lower secondary and upper secondary schools. The program will be implemented in such a way that in these schools the number of pupils **for class budgeting** will be reduced to 32 (Government Secretariat, 2008b. Emphasis not in the original – NB).*

¹⁸ These recommendations were very similar in substance to those of the Taub Center for Social Policy in Israel on the same subject (Blass, 2008).

The cabinet also adopted the committee's recommendations to accompany the first stage of the process to reduce the number of pupils per class with a follow-up study to monitor pupil educational outcomes. This study would be conducted by the National Authority for Measurement and Evaluation.¹⁹

The significance of this "minor" change of wording is that whenever the number of pupils per class exceeds 32, instead of breaking the class up, the school can be compensated for the large class size with additional teaching weekly work hours. In other words, the schools may continue to have large classes but they will receive a supplement of teaching weekly work hours that can be used either to break the class up for some of the lessons or to add a second teacher or to use the compensation in any other way the school faculty sees fit. This can be illustrated using the example of a state school with 80 pupils in the third grade. According to the previous budgeting rules, the school had to divide the class into two 40-pupil classes, regardless of its socioeconomic index. The addition of a single pupil would require the Ministry of Education to approve dividing the grade into three classes, or else face the risk of a teacher strike. According to the current rules, such a school – assuming it does not operate as part of the "long school day" program – will be budgeted according to two classes of 40, with a budget of 39.6 teaching weekly work hours per class, for a total of 79.2 teaching weekly work hours, if it is classified in socioeconomic decile 1. On the other hand, if it is in decile 5 or 10, it will be budgeted according to three classes (two 27-pupil classes and one with 26 pupils) at 32.4 teaching weekly work hours per class, for a total of 97.2 teaching weekly work hours. The essential difference between the cabinet decision and the recommendations of the Friedman Committee is that schools from decile 5 and upward are not required to divide the grade into three classes. They can continue functioning with two classes of 40, without risking a teacher's strike supported by the teachers union, and use the extra hours however the school management sees fit.

¹⁹ No such study was ever conducted.

The Budgetary Significance of Reducing Class Size

The program to reduce the class size was budgeted through two different budgetary items. One is in the section dealing with primary education, which appeared for the first time in 2008 and disappeared after 2013. The second belongs to the section of secondary education that was first introduced in 2010 and continued to appear in 2014 (regulation number 270925). All in all, for the purpose of reducing class size, NIS 900 million was budgeted between 2008 and 2013, and the amount that was used – according to the Accountant General's Report – was only NIS 360 million.

When these figures were first presented by the Taub Center to the public, Ministry of Education officials claimed that they did not accurately reflect the situation. Apparently, they meant that part of the budget, and especially that part in the primary education regulations, was transferred to the general teaching weekly work hours regulation, but in practice was still used in order to reduce the number of pupils per class. This explanation cannot be seen in the budget books or in the budget notes, nor is it substantiated by the protocols of the Finance Committee for budgetary changes during those years. However, even if all of the amounts dedicated in the original budget to reducing class size were used for that purpose, the amount made available since 2008 is still significantly lower than the amount needed to realize that goal, which by the most cautious estimate in 2008 was NIS 5.7 billion (Blass, 2008).²⁰

The Outcomes of the Investment in Reducing Class Size

What are the outcomes of five years of Ministry of Education activity to reduce class size? Tables 3 and 4 provide the answer.

Table 3 shows that the changes in class size in primary education in the Jewish sector were minimal. In the Arab Israeli sector, on the other

²⁰ These amounts were calculated without taking into account the new wage agreements, which considerably increased the cost of teaching.

hand, there was substantial progress and the reduction reached an average of three pupils per class, which is about 10 percent.

Table 3. **Average number of pupils per class in primary education**
by sector and type of school supervision,* 2006-2013

Supervision type	2006	2008	2010	2012	2013
Jewish education					
Haredi	22.9	23.0	23.1	23.3	23.3
State	28.9	29.0	29.1	28.8	28.7
State-religious	25.1	24.9	24.9	24.7	24.5
Arab Israeli education					
Bedouin	31.0	30.9	29.4	28.0	27.3
Druze	29.8	29.5	28.4	27.5	27.0
Arab Israeli	31.4	31.5	30.7	28.8	28.2

* Excluding special education

Source: Nachum Blass, Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel

Data: Ministry of Education

Table 4 shows the changes in the lower secondary schools. In state and state-religious education in the Jewish sector,²¹ there is a small change (4 percent), although, it appears that this downward trend actually began in 2006, before the agreement on reducing class size was reached. In the Arab Israeli sector, the change is quite significant and, as in primary education, is on the scale of 9-10 percent. After that point, the average number of pupils per class begins to resemble the number in the Jewish state education system.

²¹ Haredi education is not specified here because it has very few lower secondary schools.

Table 4. **Average number of pupils per class in lower secondary schools**

by sector and type of school supervision,* (2006-2013)

Type of supervision	2006	2008	2010	2012	2013
Jewish education					
State	27.2	27.0	26.6	26.2	26.1
State-religious	24.7	24.6	24.3	24.0	23.8
Arab Israeli education					
Bedouin	29.1	29.3	28.2	27.1	26.6
Druze	27.9	27.8	26.7	25.6	25.4
Arab Israeli	29.7	29.5	28.4	27.0	26.7

* Excluding special education

Source: Nachum Blass, Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel

Data: Ministry of Education

Despite the improvement in the Arab Israeli sector, the overall drop in the average number of pupils per class is not substantial. However, in order to evaluate success in achieving the goal, it is worth looking not only at averages, but also at the share of classes exceeding the standard of 32 pupils per class over the years. Table 5 compares the distribution of classes by size in 2008, 2013 and 2015.²²

²² The group of very small classes (up to 10 pupils) includes mainly special education classes, whereas the group of classes with 40+ pupils includes mainly classes for which the reporting is erroneous. Therefore, we shall focus mainly on the groups in the middle. The examination was based on pupil data files for the relevant years.

Table 5. **Distribution of classes by number of pupils, 2008, 2013 and 2015**

grades 1-6 and grades 7-9, as percent of all classes in that age group, including special education

Number of pupils per class	2008	2013	2015
Grades 1-6			
10 or fewer pupils	7.7%	9.0%	9.4%
11-15	5.4%	5.9%	5.5%
16-20	7.4%	7.9%	7.5%
21-25	18.5%	22.8%	22.8%
26-30	26.4%	28.2%	28.0%
31-35	23.4%	19.1%	20.0%
36-40	10.5%	6.3%	6.3%
40+	0.7%	0.7%	0.6%
32 or fewer pupils	75.9%	83.0%	81.2%
Grades 7-9			
10 or fewer pupils	10.9%	12.2%	12.9%
11-15	6.9%	7.7%	7.3%
16-20	5.8%	7.0%	7.0%
21-25	10.3%	13.9%	14.3%
26-30	15.7%	21.0%	21.9%
31-35	24.4%	25.7%	24.5%
36-40	23.0%	11.3%	10.6%
40+	3.0%	1.3%	1.5%
32 or fewer pupils	58.8%	73.4%	74.4%

Source: Nachum Blass, Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel

Data: Ministry of Education

In grades 1-6, there was a drop of 3-4 percent in the number of classes with 33 pupils or more (from 24.1 percent in 2008 to 18.7 percent in 2015). This was reflected by the reduction in the number of classes with 31 to 40 pupils and the simultaneous increase in classes with 20 to 30 pupils. It is interesting that the share of classes with 11 to 20 pupils hardly changed at all. All in all, the number of classes with up to 32 pupils grew over seven years by 5.4 percent (of which 1.7 percent were in very small classes, most of which belong to special education).

On the other hand, in grades 7-9, the picture changed dramatically: the share of classes with more than 32 pupils dropped from 41.2 percent in 2008 to 25.6 percent in 2015. However, the fact that more than a quarter of all classes in those grade levels are still larger than required indicates that there is still a long way to go to reach the goal.

What Is Needed to Complete the Process and Does the Current Plan Meet the Needs?

Given the current situation, the main question is how many classes need to be added in order to reach the goal of no more than 32 pupils per class?²³ To address this question, a committee was appointed headed by the director of the Ministry of Education's Northern District, Dr. Orna Simchon. The committee's deliberations were held under absolute secrecy, and its final report was published only after numerous delays.

The report's title, the *Committee to Examine the Pupil-Teacher Ratio in Classes*, strongly indicates that the committee was intended to explore alternatives to reducing the number of pupils per class (such as adding a teacher or intern to large classes).²⁴ Indeed, the Simchon Committee examined various possibilities for resolving the problem of classroom

²³ It is important to distinguish between an additional class in the sense of study unit and an additional class in the sense of construction. The former requires many more "classes," of course.

²⁴ There is often confusion between "class size" and "pupil-teacher ratio." This issue was clarified in a number of publications, for example, in Blass (2010).

crowding, including differential reduction depending on cohorts and adding a teacher in training or an intern to particularly large classes.

The first of the various options included in the Committee's report was an across-the-board reduction in the number of pupils per class in primary and lower secondary schools to 32 pupils.²⁵ According to the Committee's report, which does not include details of its calculation methods, this option involves an addition of 2,673 classes and 5,111 teachers, at a cost of NIS 3.6 billion (Ministry of Education, 2015c). It is not clear what these figures are based on, but our calculations done for this chapter yield substantially different figures than the Committee's estimate. Our calculations are based on the number of pupils in regular education in each institution and in each cohort. Based on these figures, the number of classes needed in each cohort if the maximum number of pupils per class were 40 was compared to the number needed with a maximum of 32 pupils per class. The difference between the existing number of classes and the required number of classes is the number of classes to be added. The calculation did not take into account needs arising from natural growth and internal migration, so the final figure is an underestimate.²⁶ Nevertheless, it turns out that when looking at all cohorts from grades 1-12, the number of additional classes needed in order to implement the process today is higher than in 2008. While, in 2008, an addition of 8,200 classes was needed in order to achieve a maximum of 32 pupils per class, in 2013, nearly 9,000 classes are needed (an average of 750 classes per grade) or 6,750 classes for grades 1-9. The budget needed to add a class includes the following components:

²⁵ It is noteworthy that even this option contradicts the initial government decision to apply reduction of the number of pupils per class to the entire education system, including upper secondary schools.

²⁶ Usually, the natural growth of the education system is 1.5 to 2 percent a year and means an addition of 1,200 preschool and school classes. Many hundreds of classes must be added to respond to internal migration (Blass, 1983).

- A. The cost of teaching and operating new classes.** The average teaching cost of a class in primary education is NIS 402,000. In lower secondary school, the cost is NIS 508,000, and, in upper secondary school, it is more than NIS 600,000 (Ministry of Education, 2015). Assuming that only 6,750 classes need to be added (750 classes per grade in grades 1-9), at an average teaching cost of NIS 430,000 per class, the total cost will be around NIS 3 billion.
- B. The cost of building a classroom.** The cost of building a classroom is estimated at NIS 750,000.²⁷ Even if only 3,000 classrooms need to be built (on the assumption that other classes will be combined or existing buildings will be used), the expense will be NIS 2.25 billion.
- C. The cost of training teachers.** The cost of training a new teacher today is at least NIS 250,000.²⁸ The addition of 6,750 classes requires an addition of 10,000 FTEs, and since most teachers do not work full-time, there will be a need to add at least 13,000 teachers, whose training cost is estimated at NIS 3 billion.²⁹
- D. The cost of additional auxiliary services.** Along with the addition of classes there will be a need to add services such as secretaries and janitors, but the additional cost of this item is not large relative to the other extra costs.

²⁷ The Ministry of Education (2013) said that the cost of building classrooms in 2012 was NIS 711,000 and, therefore, the estimate of NIS 750,000 per classroom in 2015 seemed reasonable.

²⁸ According to the Simchon Report, the cost of training a teacher is NIS 120,000. This figure ignores the fact that, in light of the dropout rate during training and in the first few years of employment, between two and three teachers must be trained in order to bring a single long-term teacher into the system. These figures were checked by the Central Bureau of Statistics and are, of course, known to the Ministry of Education.

²⁹ It is very likely that the cost of this item can be reduced in light of the recent growth in the number of graduates of teacher training institutions.

Thus, a very rough estimate of the costs of completing the process to reduce class size to no more than 32 pupils reaches about NIS 8.25 billion – based on very lenient assumptions as to construction needs, and without including the upper secondary classes in the process. These figures are, of course, an initial estimate, and there are a number of ways to reduce costs (see Blass, 2008). Even after all possible measures are taken, there is no doubt that a very large budget will be needed to complete the process.

Table 6. **Estimate of the costs of completing the process of reducing the number of pupils per class to a maximum of 32**

recommendations of the Simchon Committee and Taub Center data, in millions of shekels

Budget line	Education level	Simchon Committee	Taub Center calculations
Teaching	Primary	703	1,809
	Lower secondary	255	1,143
	Total	958	2,952
Construction	Primary	1,532	1,500
	Lower secondary	473	750
	Total	2,005	2,250
Teacher training	Primary	470	2,160
	Lower secondary	143	1,069
	Total	613	3,229
Other	Primary	64	64
	Lower secondary	16	16
	Total	80	80
Total		3,656	8,510

Source: Nachum Blass, Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel

Data: Simchon Committee Report (Ministry of Education, 2015); Ministry of Education

This leads to some skepticism regarding the Ministry of Education's announcement about reducing class size in grades 1-2; the Minister of Education announced that within five years all Israeli pupils in primary education would study in small classes with only 32-34 pupils (Dattel, 2015). The process in question concerns only 321 classes, whereas the first grade cohort in the 2015-2016 school year includes more than 4,500 classes. Clearly this is a positive move, but its impact is very limited. The NIS 1 billion allocated for the next five years to reduce class size and improve the pupil-teacher ratio in the preschools and schools, according to the Ministry of Education's declarations, will in no way be sufficient to achieve the goal of reducing class size to 32 pupils in the entire primary education system, and certainly not in both primary and lower secondary schools (not to mention upper secondary schools).

Back to the "sardine protest." The protest occurred mainly in the affluent neighborhoods in central Israel, following a Ministry of Education decision not to allow parents to pay for extra teachers from their own pockets in order to facilitate breaking up particularly large classes. Undoubtedly, the parents' demand that the Ministry of Education keep its commitment to reducing class size to 32 is justified and logical. The problem is that realizing that commitment is very expensive, and the obvious question is who will be the main beneficiaries of such a massive investment? Apparently, the main beneficiaries will be the Arab Israeli pupils, and justifiably so, because of the particularly crowded classes in that sector. To a lesser extent, pupils in the Jewish state school system, who are rated next after them in classroom crowding per sector, will benefit. The fact remains, though, that a large part of the Arab Israeli pupils would have benefited from a reduction in class size under the existing budgeting method as well, since those schools with high socioeconomic ratings on the Deprivation Index were slated for class reductions regardless. Thus, those who will enjoy the latest move, just as in the case of the second teaching assistant, will mainly be the more affluent populations.

4. The Protest of the Christian Schools: The Story of Recognized but Unofficial Education³⁰

At the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year, the Christian schools went on strike for almost one month demanding to make their terms of funding equal to those of the Haredi schools.³¹ The strike put two separate issues on the public agenda. One is the issue of discriminating against the Arab Israeli education system, and the other is the issue of private education and its positioning vis-à-vis public education. The desire to contend with both issues successfully creates, at least prima facie, a conflict of interest.

The first issue – the discrimination against Arab Israeli education – is reflected in numerous ways: from budgeting, through the ability to express their unique national character in a separate administrative framework, and all the way to the possibility of maintaining a separate religious system within the Jewish education system.³² The public and media treatment of the strike also indicates the marginalization of Arab Israeli education: it is clear that if 33,000 Jewish pupils were on strike from school for such a long time the whole country would be up in arms. All the more so if it involved elitist schools such as the Hebrew Reali School in Haifa, Gymnasia Herzliya, or the University High School in Jerusalem. Yet, dozens of schools in the Arab Israeli sector, including some of the best schools in the country – judging not only by

³⁰ A portion of this section is based on commentaries written by an internet forum led by the author of this chapter, even if they are not specifically cited as such.

³¹ The strike ended after promising an immediate addition of NIS 50 million to their budget and establishing a committee that is supposed to examine the issue in depth.

³² In some towns, the most prominent example being Jerusalem, there are not enough public schools at an adequate level to provide education in the Arabic language to all of the pupils.

matriculation results but also by their graduates' achievements at later stages of life – went on strike, and no one seemed to pay much attention.

This discriminatory treatment requires immediate rectification. A demand to apply the compromise signed with the Jewish sector Hebrew Reali School in Haifa to the Christian schools – a very gradual reduction of the tuition collected from the parents, in exchange for accepting the reduction of government copayment – was also justified. However, the Christian schools did not demand to be considered comparable to the Hebrew Reali School but, rather to Haredi schools. In this demand, the Christian schools combined the Independent Education System and Maayan Hinuch Torani, (both are Haredi although they are affiliated with different political parties) with the rest of the Haredi recognized but unofficial schools. They were also careful not to make a distinction between the budgeting of primary and lower secondary education on the one hand and upper secondary education, on the other – and for good reason, as shall be explained below.

The National Aspect and the Class Aspect

Before discussing the systemic implications of the struggle of the Christian schools, it is worth noting an aspect that was not sufficiently emphasized during the strike, namely the national aspect. The Christian schools, some of which were established before the state, have, from their inception, served the elite of the Christian Arab community in Israel, and they cultivate and ensure that it continues to exist and thrive. In recent years, they have gradually been losing their religious character and becoming a very popular alternative for the growing middle class in the Arab Israeli community at large. Thousands of doctors, lawyers, engineers, and business people have been educated in these schools.³³ In

³³ An interesting historic footnote by Prof. Amnon Rubenstein: “In the past, the Christian schools did not receive a cent from the State, and I decided to follow constitutional principles and to recognize them as ‘recognized but unofficial.’ Minister Yuli Tamir and I were also willing to recognize them as official schools, as long as they did not select pupils. Some of the schools were

contrast to the public Arab Israeli schools, the private Christian schools enjoy full freedom to appoint teachers and principals,³⁴ and at least partial freedom to set their curricula.³⁵ The existence of such schools provides an alternative for parents who seek religious education for their children – an option provided to Jewish parents as part of the public education system. Sometimes, they are also the only option to provide excellent education to Arab pupils in their communities.

In light of this, it is plainly evident why the vast majority of the Arab Israeli public united behind the struggle of the Christian schools, even though it helps increase class polarization within that community. In this case, the nationalist ideological element outweighs the class ideological element, even among political party leaders and organizations that might be expected to prioritize the social universal aspect.

This political-educational reality causes wide circles that on various occasions represent uncompromising positions against “privatizing education” when it comes to the Jewish sector to be fully accepting of the growth of a thriving private education system in the Arab Israeli sector, even though it is no less selective and discriminatory. Their answer to this internal contradiction in their positions is usually that the basic discrimination against the Arab Israeli sector must be treated, and members of a national minority must not be required to spearhead the struggle for social equality.

willing to do so but did not agree to transfer their land to the state, as the legal advisors had demanded. Personally, I don't think that demand is objectively justified and I suggested to Minister Yuli Tamir to initiate a legal amendment, if one was indeed needed” (personal correspondence).

³⁴ It should be recalled that for many years, and some say even today, the Israel Security Agency had a say in choosing school principals, and attempts to stop this practice were unsuccessful.

³⁵ The institutions own the land on which the schools are built, and have no desire to transfer that ownership to the State.

Budgeting Primary and Lower Secondary Schools and Privatization

The struggle of the Christian schools (as well as the struggle of the Hebrew Reali School in Haifa a few months earlier) must be viewed in the context of the legal, organizational and budgetary reality of the education system. Legally speaking, schools in Israel are divided into three categories depending on the level of state supervision to which they are subject: official schools, recognized but unofficial schools, and exempt institutions.³⁶ Some of the recognized but unofficial schools (especially in upper secondary education) are public institutions in every aspect except ownership. They teach according to the national curriculum, employ their teachers based on national labor agreements, accept all applicants, and so on. Some of these schools abide by only some of these criteria, and some do not abide by most of them.³⁷ All of the Christian schools are legally defined as “recognized but unofficial,” and are therefore supposed to be budgeted similarly to Jewish schools with the same status.

The primary schools with the status of recognized but unofficial are budgeted at the level of 75 percent of the budgeting of the official schools, and the exempt institutions at the level of 55 percent. This is the maximum level, but it can and should be reduced if they fail to teach the

³⁶ This section discusses primary schools, where there is a difference in budgeting between the official schools and the recognized but unofficial schools. In upper secondary education, most of which is defined as recognized but unofficial, the problem does not exist because the budgeting is identical and determined based on the grade, academic track, profile of the teaching staff, and level of service at the school. There are hardly any recognized but unofficial lower secondary schools (in 2014 they had 614 pupils).

³⁷ The same is true for all of the recognized but unofficial primary schools, whether they are Jewish or Arab Israeli. Pupils in the upper secondary grades are budgeted by the state equally to public schools (perhaps except for municipality copayment), and they supplement their budgets by collecting tuition and, in the case of the the Christian institutions, with church support.

core curriculum, or have pupil admission criteria, and if the socioeconomic profile of the pupil population indicates that they bar the admission of pupils from weak socioeconomic backgrounds. The reason for these restrictions is the desire to strengthen the public education system, which complies with a long list of rules and regulations from which the fully or semi-private school systems are exempt.

These budgeting rules apply only to the so-called “basic teaching budget.”³⁸ The budgeting of other expenditure elements, which can be numerous and whose weight can be very significant in the school budget (such as transportation, the deprivation basket, additional school staff, and so on), is not set forth in the regulations and is at the exclusive discretion of the Ministry of Education. This is how, in 2012-2013, the recognized but unofficial schools received supplements for incentives and culture, which were then canceled in 2013-2014.³⁹

In a document based on figures provided by the recognized but unofficial schools and the exempt institutions, there are various assessments that indicate that the level of government contribution to these budgets is much lower than 75 percent and 55 percent, respectively (Knesset Research and Information Center, 2013). However, the authors of the document doubt its accuracy and, in any case, most of the gap arises from the fact that the criteria for subsidy are not fully upheld, as well as from large differences in the cost of the teaching staff, arising

³⁸ In the Ministry of Education parlance, this refers mainly to the basic teaching weekly work hours. In the official institutions, salaries are paid directly to the employees and they are considered state employees. In the recognized but unofficial schools the teaching weekly work hours are transferred to the institution owners, and are budgeted according to the profile of the school’s teaching staff. Since the profile of the teaching staff in the Haredi schools is substantially different in terms of tenure, education and in-service training credits (all of which are usually much lower), even when the number of teaching weekly work hours is identical, their shekel value is lower.

³⁹ Furthermore, the Haredi educational institutions that belong to the large networks received supplements for prayer, dividing classes by gender in grades 1-2, and a few other items.

from the teacher profiles as well as their failure to join the Ofek Hadash agreement on the grounds that this agreement applies only to state employees who commit to all of the rules of training and promotion.

In 2013-2014, the Ministry of Education canceled the budget supplements given to the recognized but unofficial institutions the previous year. Furthermore, it imposed restrictions on collecting tuition from the pupils of those institutions, and allowed the schools to collect only the difference between the budget it transferred and the budget received by schools in official education, with an additional 15 percent. With this decision, the Ministry created a severe budget crunch for these schools, making it difficult for them to continue providing their previous level of educational services, and some of them may have to close down.

This is fair enough. The State of Israel wants to encourage public education and discourage private education, and it does so by increasing the budgetary advantage for those who follow the rules it dictates. Since the Christian schools are defined as recognized but unofficial, they seemingly have no legal grounds – and as long as they fail to fulfill the terms for official schools, no moral grounds either – to make budgetary demands on the state, as long as the same applies to the other recognized but unofficial schools as well.

The problem is that these rules have an exception, which makes the state and the Ministry of Education's budgeting policy problematic. The schools in the Haredi networks, Maayan Hinuch Torani and Independent Education, are budgeted at the same level as the state schools.⁴⁰ In light of this fact, the Christian schools claim discrimination and demand equal budgeting to those institutions (but not to the Haredi schools operating outside of these systems). Their argument is reinforced by the fact that in the Jewish education system parents can choose their child's educational institution in line with their religious orientation, without harming the funding their child's education receives and without having to add

⁴⁰ Under the Budget Foundations Law, passed under pressure of the Haredi parties in 1985. It may be a discriminatory law, but it is still the law.

anything from their private pockets, while this possibility does not exist in the Arab Israeli education system, which is all public.

Many people, especially leaders of the Arab Israeli sector but also the Secondary School Teachers Association, for example, reach a clear conclusion from this situation: the struggle of the Christian schools is justified and their demands must be met. This is a hasty conclusion, though, which could cause public education as a whole to face some very serious problems.

The main risk in recognizing the demand of the Christian schools is setting a precedent. According to the Christian schools, their total number of pupils is 33,000. It is likely that less than half of them are in grades 1-6, which is to say that the number of pupils involved is probably around 17,000 pupils. If the struggle of the Christian schools is successful, it will be unjust and impossible to leave it within those limits and it will have to be applied to all of the recognized but unofficial schools.

In 2013-2014, there were 195,000 pupils in the recognized but unofficial primary schools, including 116,000 in the Maayan Hinuch Torani and Independent Education systems. This means that the issue is relevant not to 17,000 pupils but to 80,000 pupils, half of whom are Arab Israelis (23,000 East Jerusalem pupils who did not participate in the strike, and the rest in the church schools), 32,000 other Haredim, and about 9,000 Jews in state and state-religious schools. The struggle of the Christian schools is, in effect, a struggle of all of the recognized but unofficial primary schools, and can undermine all of the Ministry of Education's efforts to strengthen the public schools by increasing their budgetary advantage relative to the recognized but unofficial schools.

The cost of increasing the funding of all of the recognized but unofficial primary schools from 75 percent to 100 percent is the least damaging option. The real damage is paving the way and removing most of the obstacles to opening private schools – which would increase polarization in the entire education system. The damage to Arab Israeli education, where the tendency to seek private education has increased

significantly in recent years,⁴¹ could be particularly severe. Furthermore, equal funding for public and private schools, which are not subject to the Ministry of Education's content and administrative demands, and consequently manage to provide better service to their clients, will also have extremely harsh consequences for Jewish public education. The number of children currently attending recognized but unofficial schools under state and state-religious supervision may be negligible, but there are a substantial number of children in various "unique," "experimental" and "supra-regional" schools, who enjoy full public funding even though they violate many of the binding rules of public education (especially those rules regarding admission criteria and tuition fees). It is highly likely that making the funding terms for recognized but unofficial education comparable to those of official education will instigate a mass exodus from official education so institutions can enjoy the greater freedom provided by the status of recognized but unofficial schools.

Therefore, it seems that if the desire is to strengthen public education as part of the struggle for equality in education, the Ministry of Education's position is justified and correct, and the fact that it is facing a group of elitist schools, whether in the Arab Israeli or Jewish sectors, makes it no less justified. Anyone who is truly interested in raising the level of achievements of the entire population, not only of its more affluent sectors, does not have to be impressed by the arguments of those who run elitist schools and their graduates. These institutions attain their achievements largely thanks to their ability to operate in more lenient environments than public schools. If the private schools, both Jewish and Arab Israeli, are willing to give up the privilege of selecting pupils, collecting as much money as they want, and employing teachers under different terms than those set by the government, then we can talk about comparing the funding they receive to that of the public schools. As long as that does not happen, the Ministry of Education should stick to its

⁴¹ The share of the recognized but unofficial schools (not only Christian) in the Arab Israeli sector is currently 22.9 percent. In 2004, it was 14.3 percent, and in 2000, it was 11.7 percent.

principled position and apply it not only to the Christian schools but also to the recognized but unofficial Jewish schools, including the Hebrew Reali School in Haifa.

5. Conclusion

This chapter reviewed four current issues in the education system, each of which is related to reducing educational and social gaps between pupils from different social classes. A review of the education system's budgeting method showed that after many changes, the method that is supposed to be applied in the coming years is less advantageous to the disempowered classes than previous methods. The review of both the implementation of the Compulsory Education Law for Ages 3-4 and the addition of a teaching assistant showed that the main beneficiaries from changing the policy will probably be the relatively affluent classes, and furthermore, the problem of a personnel shortage in the preschools appeared on the public agenda only when it affected those classes.

On the matter of reducing class size, the data in this chapter showed that the implementation of previous government decisions to reduce the class size to a maximum of 32 pupils will require greater resources than the Ministry of Education's predictions indicate. In addition, pupils from low socioeconomic classes will not derive any greater benefit than they could have expected based on the previous policy.

In the final section, which analyzed the protest of the Christian schools and budgeting for recognized but unofficial institutions, the chapter argues that the trends arising from that struggle, as from the struggle of the Hebrew Reali School in Haifa, could potentially jeopardize the status of Israeli public education.

In general, this chapter provides an overview of the direction the education system is heading. The issues raised show that, despite the declarations by various parties regarding the importance of equality in education, the various ministry administrations ultimately support measures that serve to work against affirmative action. Usually,

resistance by the privileged groups manages to completely offset, or at least to dull and reduce, the distributional consequences of the processes designated to reduce inequality. These difficulties remain even though the budget allocated to the education system has grown and there are opportunities to reduce gaps.

As a counterweight to the argument in favor of universal services, which are insensitive to the pupils' and parents' socioeconomic profiles, one can argue that excellent public education, from which even the weakest social classes can derive maximum benefit, can exist only if the entire public, including the stronger social classes, support it. This is a very strong argument based on the model used in Scandinavian countries, and seems to also be substantiated by the Israeli situation.

In light of this, it is clear that the massive transfer of resources between different sectors of Israeli society, and especially from the Jewish to the Arab Israeli sector or from the state to the Haredi sector, can be expected to meet fierce resistance. However, that this is a difficult task does not absolve the heads of the education system and policy makers from their duty to carry it out.

Appendix

Appendix Table 1A. **A comparison of teaching hour by the Shoshani Committee outline and the new differential budgeting method**

hours per third grade, by Deprivation Index level

Number of pupils per class	Deprivation Index level					Ratio of weakest to strongest, new budget method
	Strong	Average, Shoshani	Average, new budget method	Weak, Shoshani	Weak, new budget method	
20	31.00	31.00	34.00	31.00	38.00	1.23
21	31.20	31.20	34.20	31.20	38.20	1.22
22	31.40	31.40	34.40	31.40	38.40	1.22
23	31.60	31.60	34.60	31.60	38.60	1.22
24	31.80	31.80	34.80	31.80	38.80	1.22
25	32.00	32.00	35.00	32.00	39.00	1.22
26	32.20	32.20	35.20	32.20	39.20	1.22
27	32.40	32.40	35.40	32.40	39.40	1.22
28	32.60	32.60	35.60	32.60	39.60	1.21
29	32.80	32.80	35.80	32.80	39.80	1.21
30	33.00	33.00	36.00	33.00	40.00	1.21
31	33.20	33.20	36.20	33.20	40.20	1.21
32	33.40	33.40	36.40	33.40	40.40	1.21
33	33.60	33.60	36.60	35.40	42.40	1.26
34	33.80	33.80	36.80	37.40	44.40	1.31
35	34.00	34.00	37.00	39.40	46.40	1.36
36	34.20	34.20	37.20	41.40	48.40	1.42
37	35.40	35.40	38.40	43.40	50.40	1.42
38	36.60	37.40	40.40	45.40	52.40	1.43
39	37.80	39.40	42.40	47.40	54.40	1.44
40	39.00	41.40	44.40	49.40	56.40	1.45

Appendix Table 1B. **A comparison of teaching hour by the Shoshani Committee outline and the new differential budgeting method**

hours per pupil, by Deprivation Index level

Number of pupils per class	Deprivation Index level					Ratio of weakest to strongest, new budget method
	Strong	Average, Shoshani	Average, new budget method	Weak, Shoshani	Weak, new budget method	
20	1.55	1.55	1.70	1.55	1.90	1.23
21	1.49	1.49	1.63	1.49	1.82	1.22
22	1.43	1.43	1.56	1.43	1.75	1.22
23	1.37	1.37	1.50	1.37	1.68	1.22
24	1.33	1.33	1.45	1.33	1.62	1.22
25	1.28	1.28	1.40	1.28	1.56	1.22
26	1.24	1.24	1.35	1.24	1.51	1.22
27	1.20	1.20	1.31	1.20	1.46	1.22
28	1.16	1.16	1.27	1.16	1.41	1.21
29	1.13	1.13	1.23	1.13	1.37	1.21
30	1.10	1.10	1.20	1.10	1.33	1.21
31	1.07	1.07	1.17	1.07	1.30	1.21
32	1.04	1.04	1.14	1.04	1.26	1.21
33	1.02	1.02	1.11	1.07	1.28	1.26
34	0.99	0.99	1.08	1.10	1.31	1.31
35	0.97	0.97	1.06	1.13	1.33	1.36
36	0.95	0.95	1.03	1.15	1.34	1.42
37	0.96	0.96	1.04	1.17	1.36	1.42
38	0.96	0.98	1.06	1.19	1.38	1.43
39	0.97	1.01	1.09	1.22	1.39	1.44
40	0.98	1.04	1.11	1.24	1.41	1.45

Source: Nachum Blass, Taub Center for Social Policy Studies in Israel
Data: Ministry of Education

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