



ENGELBERG CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

## **MENTA - Support Program for Technical and Practical Engineering Students: Evaluation Study**

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Ben Simon, B.; Kahan-Strawczynski, P. (2017). *Transition to Work: Policy and Programs for at-Risk Children and Youth*. Literature Review. (Hebrew only).

Ben Simon, B.; Paula Kahan-Strawczynski, P. (2016). *Youth Employment Programs: Lessons from the Literature and from Meitar-Susan's House*. RR-735-16 (Hebrew).

Ben Rabi, D.; Baruj-Kovarsky, R.; Viacheslav Konstantinov. (2014). *"Hidden Dropouts": A Reexamination of School Disengagement in Israel*. RR-686-14 (Hebrew only).

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# Abstract

## Background

Israel offers a post-high school college education system for technical occupations and engineering, aimed at high-school graduates of technological tracks. Students demonstrating technological potential in schools supervised by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and Services (MOLSA) may avail themselves of the MENTA Program, which provides scholastic, emotional, and social support throughout their high school and college studies. This support helps them meet the scholastic challenges and demands of the vocational track and, via the program, strives to expand both the number of youth continuing through college Grades 13-14<sup>1</sup> and the percentage eligible for a diploma at the end of their studies. The program was formulated by JDC-Ashalim in cooperation with the HEZNEK organization, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Economy (and subsequently, MOLSA), and by education networks operating schools.

## Research goals

The evaluation was conducted in 2016-17 as a formative study to follow MENTA's implementation for purposes of improvement during the pilot and an assessment of its goal achievement as a basis for deciding on further dissemination.

## Research methods

The study consisted of 22 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with program professionals, 6 focus groups of students, a quantitative survey administered by questionnaire to 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> grade students, and administrative data from program directors.

## Findings

MENTA is growing and changing. It began in 2013 with 3 schools and 3 colleges and by 2018, had expanded to 7 schools and 5 colleges. The target population also expanded to additional school cohorts and tracks. A survey of 12<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> graders showed that for each of the three main program components (scholastic assistance, social activity, and meetings with the coordinator) participation was some 70%, while 40% participated in all three components.

The administrative data collected by program operators showed that 50% of the 12<sup>th</sup>-grade participants in 2016 continued on to Grade 13 in 2017, and 58% of the MENTA students in Grade 13 in 2016 completed their studies with a diploma. Numerous changes, from year to year, and the absence of a comparison group make it difficult to identify the program's impact on these achievements.

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<sup>1</sup> Grades 13-14 continue on directly from high school and are for students completing 12<sup>th</sup> grade in a technological track. Students in the program can receive professional certification prior to military service (on condition of receiving a deferment). The training is oriented at integrating the college graduates into industry and the IDF. The classes are run by the Ministry of Education in the framework of its post-high school technological education.

The program's main contributions, according to the interviewees, concern the assistance to students to complete their matriculation, strengthen their sense of self-efficacy, and create for themselves a picture of the future. The findings also point to areas warranting further improvement: the need for a clear definition of the target population and the inputs they receive, improvement in student readiness for the transition to college, and a definition of the scope of the coordinators' role, given their heavy workload.

## **Conclusion**

MENTA is unique in the array of support provided for MOLSA-supervised schools. It occupies a highly important place in the support and assistance for students in situations of risk who dropped out of the academic high-school system and transferred to MOLSA-supervised vocational schools. Its continued improvement and development will facilitate the provision of responses to the student needs that emerged in the study.