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Brookdale

The Weitzman-Bat Yam Initiative: Summary of the Childhood and Adolescence Phase Summative Evaluation Study

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Abstract

Background

The Weitzman-Bat Yam Initiative (hereinafter: the Initiative) was launched in the 2006-2007 school year at the initiative and with the funding of Jane Weitzman, a philanthropist and board member of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC). The Initiative was implemented by JDC-Ashalim in collaboration with the Bat Yam municipality and the Ministry of Education, and at a later stage, the public benefit company *Yuvalim* and the *Moriah Fund* joined the Initiative. The goal of the Initiative was to help participating students succeed in their studies and thereby promote the overarching goal of the Initiative – successful integration of the students in society as adults. The Initiative served 174 students from three consecutive years, comprising three main groups: Ethiopian Israeli students, students from other immigrant families (non-Ethiopian), and natives of Israel. The Initiative offered the students both individual and shared solutions in response to their needs in various areas throughout their school years. The Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute (MJB) conducted an evaluative study of the Initiative for the duration of its 14 years of implementation (from 2006 to 2020). This report presents a summative evaluation of the Initiative through its implementation during the participants' childhood and adolescence, until the age of 18.

Goals

The goals of this study were to conduct a summative evaluation of the Initiative and to examine (1) the development of the Initiative and its implementation during the participants' childhood and adolescence, until the age of 18; (2) the goals of the Initiative, its strengths, the challenges involved in its implementation, and its value for the students; (3) the inputs and outputs of the initiative; (4) the outcomes of the Initiative in terms of the academic achievements of the participating students from the *Hammer Darca High School* and the *Bait V'Gan Darca High School*, as reflected in their matriculation exam scores.

Methods

The study was based on qualitative and quantitative research methods. The qualitative research design included four semi-structured in-depth interviews with the officials and professionals in charge of implementing and managing the Initiative as well as analysis of data from previous research reports and internal working documents

of the Initiative. The data were collected in July 2021 and analyzed using the Atlas.ti Web software, based on the thematic approach. The quantitative research design included analysis of the solutions offered in response to the students' needs throughout the implementation of the Initiative as well as analysis of the matriculation exam scores of the participating students. The quantitative analyses were performed using SPSS, version 24.

Findings

The Weitzman-Bat Yam Initiative was established with the aim of promoting social mobility and equal opportunities between students from disadvantaged population groups and students from more privileged populations. The Initiative focused on solutions in response to the needs of the students in the academic field as well as to their emotional and social needs. Solutions in response to the health, health-related, and economic needs of the students were also provided. The Initiative targeted primarily the participating students and, at the same time, offered solutions in response to the common needs of both parents and students. Students from the *Hammer Darca High School* and the *Bait V'Gan Darca High School* and Ethiopian Israeli students from these and other schools were the main target population of the Initiative.

It appears that the Initiative has had a significant impact on the students' academic achievements, on their social and emotional status, and in other areas as well. Its value for the students, their families, and the community in various aspects of life is clearly evident. It thus seems that the Initiative has achieved its goals, specifically its overarching goal of promoting the successful integration of the participating students in Israeli society as adults.

Executive Summary

Background

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Findings

The goals of the Initiative in the educational and academic field and in the social and emotional field

According to the interviewees, one of the key goals of the Initiative was *to help the participating students succeed in their studies and graduate from high school with a matriculation certificate that meets university admission criteria*, and thereby enable them to pursue higher education and successfully integrate into society as adults. An associated goal of the Initiative mentioned by the interviewees was *to enhance the involvement of the parents in the educational and academic performance of their children* and thus support the primary goal of the Initiative in the educational and academic field. Another key goal of the Initiative noted by the interviewees was *to promote the well-being of its participants* in the various areas of life and thus, among other things, allow them the peace of mind to focus on their studies. Another goal noted, in the social field, was *to create a family-like community of the Initiative participants* – a community distinguished by a feeling of belonging to the Initiative, where long-term social relations are established between the participants and their family members. The interviewees highlighted the importance of the ties between the officials and professionals in charge of implementing and managing the Initiative and its participants as well as between Jane Weitzman and the participating students and their families. Another social goal noted was *to enhance the participants' feeling of belonging to Israeli society*. Some of the interviewees noted that the Initiative was also *intended to inform the participants and their family members about their rights and advise them how to exercise their rights*. Finally, the interviewees noted that another goal of the Initiative was *to instill in its participants the values of volunteering and contribution to society*, that is, to encourage them to come forward and become socially involved.

The development of the Weitzman-Bat Yam Initiative over the years

1. *The composition of the participants in the Initiative:*

The Initiative was launched among first grade students in the 2006-2007 school year – class 1; in the 2007-2008 school year, the first-grade students of that year joined the Initiative – class 2; finally, in the 2008-2009 school year, the first-grade students of that year joined the Initiative – class 3 (that year, class 2 students

were second graders and class 1 students were third graders). As of the 2008-2009 school year, the Initiative served the students of all three classes throughout their school years. In the 2012-2013 school year, when class 1 students entered middle school, 174 students participated in the Initiative. Over the next years, the number of participating students gradually decreased for various reasons and by the end of their high school studies, the number of participating students fell to 148.

The Initiative was designed to serve a heterogeneous population of students: Ethiopian Israeli students, students from other immigrant families (non-Ethiopian, mostly immigrants from Syria), and natives of Israel. The participating students were all from families of middle and low socio-economic status. The Initiative was launched in the *Harel* state religious elementary school. Efforts were made to maintain heterogeneity and to that end, students from nearby neighborhoods were invited to join the Initiative and offered free shuttles to school, funded by the Initiative. There were no special admission requirements such as minimum score achievement or regular school attendance.

Significant differences were found in most of the measured areas between the Ethiopian Israeli students participating in the Initiative and participants from other families (non-Ethiopian). Thus, for instance, a higher percentage of Ethiopian Israeli students were from families with four or more children, compared with students from other families (non-Ethiopian): 58.0% compared with 27.0%, respectively; and a higher percentage of Ethiopian Israeli students were from single-income families: 52.0% compared with 38.0%, respectively.

2. *The solution model implemented in the various stages of the Initiative:*

The solutions in response to the students' various needs, primarily their academic, social, emotional, health, and health-related needs, were collectively provided to all students throughout their elementary school years. To ensure coordination and continuity, the solutions were provided for the most part during school hours – some during the regular school day and others, after regular school hours, as part of the longer school day. Both the educational staff and the parents noted their satisfaction with the provision of solutions during school hours, which, as they observed, facilitated individual follow-up of each of the students and increased the accessibility of the solutions – of importance, in particular, for families where both parents were working. Upon entering middle school, most of the students participating in the Initiative moved to the two *Darca* High Schools (both six-year high schools with middle and high school grades) in Bat Yam (where the *Harel* elementary school graduates generally continue their studies): the *Bait V'Gan Darca High School* for girls and the *Hammer Darca High School* for boys. The other participants moved to other middle schools or six-year high schools in Bat Yam and its environs.

At that stage, it became clear that the solution model had to be revised and that the comprehensive model providing solutions collectively to all participating students had to be replaced by an individually oriented model that offers personalized solutions. Accordingly, a set of solutions was tailored to the individual needs of each of the participating students and provided both during the regular school hours and in the afternoon hours. During the participants' high school years, the Initiative provided solutions primarily in the academic field, with the focus on preparation for the matriculation exams. At the same time, solutions in response to the students' social, emotional, and health needs were also provided. Some of the participants were even granted funding for various professional courses. In addition, the Initiative offered the students advice and guidance ahead of their national or military service and their integration in society as adults. As of the 2017-2018 school year, the year class 1 students graduated from high school, former Initiative participants have been offered support and guidance as young adults at various points in life: during their national or military service, upon completing service, upon admission to higher education institutions and/or non-academic professional programs and during their studies, when they were about to join the labor force, and even along the process of family building. Initiative graduates are also provided with solutions to their health needs and with support for their personal and professional development.

The Initiative inputs over the years

Significant inputs were allocated over the years in order to achieve the goals of the Initiative, and the participating students were provided with extensive solutions in response to their needs in a wide range of areas.

1. Description of the inputs:

In the first six years of the Initiative implementation, the solutions in response to the students' needs were characterized by collectively allocated inputs. Thus, to reinforce the school staff, various professionals were hired, including teachers, program operators, therapists, a social worker, and an Amharic speaking facilitator. In addition, the school teachers received training and guidance on literacy promotion and work in a heterogeneous classroom. Besides, the first-grade classes were divided into smaller groups, the school building was renovated, the classrooms were equipped with educational aids, including books, and unique therapy and learning spaces were built. Also, a longer school day was implemented, warm lunch meals were served, and activities were offered in an after-school child care facility. Furthermore, action was taken to strengthen the ties between the school and the parents, this, through joint guidance sessions for the parents of the participating students. Action was also taken to strengthen the ties with municipal departments and to establish ties with third sector organizations. When the Initiative students entered middle school, most of

them moving on to the *Hammer Darca High School* and the *Bait V'Gan Darca High School*, the middle school buildings at the *Darca* high schools were renovated and upgraded. At the time, the *Ha'Hamama* youth club was also renovated thanks to funding by the Initiative. Enrichment activities and various events, such as *Bar/Bat Mitzvah* parties for the participating students, were also funded by the Initiative. All through the years of its implementation, Initiative staff members visited the homes of most of the participants.

2. *Statistical description of the inputs:*

The percentages of students who were provided with diverse solutions in response to their needs during their years of participation in the Initiative are detailed below – based on the cumulative percentage of solutions provided to each participating student throughout his or her school years.

- *Solutions in the academic field* – 100% of the students were provided with at least one solution in the academic field: 99% of the students received assistance in their studies, as needed – individual or group tutoring, remedial instruction, and more; 41.2% of the students were granted an award designed to encourage English language studies (e.g., English book vouchers); 38.5% of the students underwent an educational evaluation; and 2.7% of the students attended a preparation course for the psychometric test.
- *Solutions in the social field* – 98.0% of the students participated in enrichment classes and activities. During the elementary school years, the solutions in the social field were provided collectively to groups of students. During the middle school and high school years, solutions were provided individually, in accordance with each student's wishes and preferences: 13.5% of the students were selected for participation in the Szarvas summer camp in Hungary, organized by JDC Israel; 11.5% of the students took part in gender empowerment workshops; and 2.7% participated in a surfing class.
- *Solutions in the emotional field* – 88.5% of the students were provided with at least one solution in the emotional field: 53.4% of the students received emotional therapy, either individually or in groups; 8.8% of the students received assistance through intervention by welfare professionals; inter-professional committees discussed issues related to 32.4% of the pupils; and home visits were made by Initiative staff members to 81.8% of the students.
- *Solutions in the health and well-being field* – 75.7% of the students were provided with at least one solution in the health and well-being field: 60.1% received subscription to a gym; 31.1% of the students received dental care; 12.8% of the students received funding support for the purchase of eyeglasses or contact lenses; 9.5% of the students participated in a sexual health workshop.

- *Solutions in the economic field* – 37.8% of the students and their families received economic support from the Initiative and were provided with at least one solution in the economic field: 35.8% received holiday food coupons; 25.7% received funding support for the purchase of clothing; 13.5% received funding support for school payments.
- *Common solutions for both parents and students* – altogether, 53.4% of the students and their parents were provided with at least one common solution: 35.1% of the students and their parents participated in shared activities – football (soccer), for fathers and sons, and cooking, for mothers and daughters; and 31.8% of the parents received guidance aimed at improving their relationship with their children and strengthening their ties with the school.
- *Preparation for military service* – 77.7% of the students participated in a preparation course organized by the Initiative ahead of their army service.

The Initiative outputs and outcomes

1. *The Initiative outputs during the high school years:*

Over that time, improvement was indicated in the students' academic performance (regular school attendance, active participation in class, and homework preparation) and in their academic achievements as well as in their performance in the social field, in their emotional status, and in their behavior, in general. The percentage of students with either social, emotional, or behavioral problems decreased and the percentage of students with difficulties in all three fields also decreased.

Analysis of the matriculation exam scores of the participating students from the *Hammer Darca High School* and the *Bait V'Gan Darca High School* (where most of the participants in the Initiative studied), classified by the three classes (1, 2, and 3), indicated the following:

On the whole, the percentage of participating students eligible for a matriculation certificate was remarkably high. Thus, for instance, in 2019 and 2020, all the participating students were eligible for a matriculation certificate. Throughout the years of the Initiative implementation, the percentage of eligibility for a matriculation certificate of the participating students was higher than the eligibility percentage in the comparison group. Furthermore, in 2018 and 2019, the percentage of eligibility for a matriculation certificate of the participating students was higher than the eligibility percentage among all Jewish students in Israel.

2. *Eligibility for a high-quality matriculation certificate:*

Most of the participants in the Initiative were eligible for a high-quality matriculation certificate. In 2018, the percentage of eligibility for a high-quality matriculation certificate of the participating students, boys and

girls alike, was over 80.0% – higher than the corresponding eligibility percentage among all Jewish students in Israel that year (72.3%). In 2019, the percentage of eligibility for a high-quality matriculation certificate of the participating students was also higher than the corresponding eligibility percentage among all Jewish students in Israel (73.5%) – 100% of the participating boy students and 75.0% of the participating girl students were eligible for a high-quality matriculation certificate that year. Comparison between Ethiopian Israeli girl students who participated in the Initiative and participating girl students from non-Ethiopian families shows that in 2019, 100% of the former were eligible for a high-quality matriculation certificate while the corresponding eligibility percentage among the latter was 66.7%. In 2020, 100% of the students who participated in the Initiative were eligible for a high-quality matriculation certificate. As shown, over the years, the percentage of eligibility for a high-quality matriculation certificate of the participating students was stable or trending upward, except for the decrease in the corresponding eligibility percentage among girl students in 2019.

Overall, the percentages of eligibility for a matriculation certificate (89.0%-100%) and for a high-quality matriculation certificate (75.0%-100%) were remarkably high among the students who participated in the Initiative. In most cases, the percentages of eligibility for a matriculation certificate and for a high-quality matriculation certificate as well as the percentage of eligibility for a matriculation certificate with a 4-5-unit math exam were similar to or higher than the corresponding percentages among all students of the *Hammer Darca High School* and the *Bait V'Gan Darca High School* and in the vast majority of cases, higher than the corresponding eligibility percentages in the comparison group. Yet, while the eligibility percentages among the participating students were notably high, their average matriculation exam scores were slightly lower than the corresponding average scores of all Jewish students in Israel in 2018 and 2019. The average matriculation exam score (including bonus points) of the participating students of all three classes was about 80.0. It is also worth noting that notwithstanding the apparent socio-economic differences between Ethiopian Israeli students who participated in the Initiative and other participating students in the course of the Initiative implementation, in most cases, there were no significant differences between the matriculation exam scores of the two groups.

Unique aspects of the Initiative

According to the interviewees, one of the unique aspects of the Initiative was the *holistic approach adopted, whereby a holistic intervention program was developed for each of the students individually* – an approach that is usually infeasible in the educational setting as it requires multiple resources of various types. Thus, as of the middle school stage of the Initiative, personalized programs were developed, tailored to the emotional, social, health, and educational needs of each of the participating students. Another unique strength of the Initiative

noted in this context was *the involvement of the students in the development of the personalized programs*. The students' involvement enhanced their commitment to the Initiative and contributed to their personal development. Another plus point mentioned by the interviewees was *the teamwork among the officials and professionals in charge of implementing and managing the Initiative*. As further observed by the interviewees, the Initiative was also unique in that it made full use of the municipal and governmental solutions offered in response to the needs of the students and their parents and funded on its own unmet needs, matching the funding provided by the authorities. The interviewees further noted the ties established by those in charge of implementing and managing the Initiative with entities relevant to the students' well-being with the aim of fully exercising the students' rights and realizing the benefits they were entitled to under the law. In this context, the interviewees also noted *the flexible allocation of resources*, which enabled the Initiative to act for the realization of the rights and benefits that the students were entitled to under the law and to fund from its own budget solutions in response to needs that were not covered by the state. Another positive aspect that distinguished the Initiative, according to the interviewees, was *the absence of minimum admission requirements*. Furthermore, every effort was made to maintain contact with the students, even with those who chose to quit, so as to ensure the ongoing participation of each one of them in the Initiative. On the downside, the interviewees noted that while significant funding was allocated in support of the students who participated in the Initiative, their peers in the same schools were not provided with similar support. The officials and professionals in charge of the Initiative were aware of the bias; however, they believe that nonparticipating students and the schools, in general, also benefited from the Initiative – for instance, thanks to the renovation of school buildings and the expansion of the *Yuvalim program*¹ for the benefit of all middle school students at the *Hammer Darca High School* and the *Bait V'Gan Darca High School*.

The value of the Initiative for the students, their families, and the community

1. The value of the Initiative for the students and their families:

Most of the interviewees noted the value of the Initiative for the students *in the educational and academic field*. They felt that the Initiative instilled in the students a passion for learning, allowed them the peace of mind to focus on their studies, offered them vital assistance in their studies, and thereby enabled them to successfully graduate from high school. As noted by the interviewees, thanks to the Initiative, students from disadvantaged families fared much better in school, with academic outcomes that could not have been

¹ A program for academic enrichment, personal empowerment, and the promotion of social involvement launched by the public benefit company *Yuvalim* in several localities across Israel.

achieved otherwise. Furthermore, according to the interviewees, the Initiative was helpful in improving the relationship between students and their parents and strengthening the ties of students and parents alike with the school.

Most of the interviewees also noted the value of the Initiative for the students *in the social and emotional field*. The support, guidance, and encouragement provided by the Initiative throughout the students' school years enhanced their sense of confidence, reassuring them that they had someone to turn to in case of need. Moreover, as noted by the interviewees, the solutions in response to the students' needs and the personal support and guidance were provided by the Initiative unconditionally.

The interviewees felt that the Initiative had value for the students' parents as well. As noted above, the students were all from families of middle and low socio-economic status – some of them from immigrant families, from Ethiopia and other countries. According to the interviewees, the Initiative was helpful in the integration of the immigrant families in Israel and facilitated decision-making by the parents regarding their children. At the same time, some of the interviewees noted that one of the main difficulties facing the families of participating students was the fact that the other children in the family were not provided with solutions to their needs, leaving them at a disadvantage.

The interviewees also noted the high percentage of participants in the Initiative who went on to enlist in the army or to volunteer for national service – in both cases, contributing to the overarching goal of the Initiative, i.e., the successful integration of the students in Israeli society as adults.

2. *The value of the Initiative for the community:*

The interviewees noted that in the past, before the Initiative was launched, Ethiopian Israeli students were usually referred to ethnically homogenous schools. Following the implementation of the Initiative, it was decided in the Bat Yam municipality to apply the model of diversity adopted by the Initiative and open heterogeneous classes in other schools in the city as well. The interviewees further noted in this context that during the first six years of the Initiative implementation, representatives of other localities in Israel visited Bat Yam to learn from its experience in working with heterogeneous groups.

Summary and Insights

The Weitzman-Bat Yam Initiative is a unique program thanks to the large financial investment in the program and the support and guidance it offered its participants throughout their school years. Launching a similar program

is likely to prove most challenging. However, a lot can be learned from its unique aspects and the experience gained in the course of its implementation and the lessons learned can be applied in other education programs. First, there are many advantages to the holistic approach adopted by the Initiative, which attends to the needs of each student individually in the educational setting, whether in school or in other education frameworks. Second, as shown by the Initiative, program goals may be promoted through the use of diverse funding sources and the flexible allocation of resources. Third, program success depends, among other things, on long-term partnerships of the type established by the Initiative with various entities and organizations in the community and outside the community. Last but not least, the evaluation study of the Initiative, conducted all through the years of its implementation, enabled the ongoing improvement of its work practices. The Initiative could thus be adapted to unanticipated circumstances and meet the evolving needs of the participating students and their families.