Coronavirus Crisis: A Window of Opportunity for a Growth Strategy for the Education System

Presented by the National Public Board of Education

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The Crisis as Opportunity - Background

The Coronavirus crisis offers an opportunity to expedite processes and serve as a catalyst for changing paradigms in Education. This is a genuine window of opportunity for change, for a shift from a teaching-based system to a learning-based one. This is a chance for rapid deployment and embedding of technologies, innovative pedagogy, and advanced management mechanisms.

The Crisis has proven that the Education System at large, and the leaders of education in particular, are capable of functioning during an extended emergency. The remote learning, into which the system was thrown overnight, catapulted the leaders of education—school principals, teachers, kindergarten teachers, counsellors and other support professionals- into the forefront. Without their leadership and concentrated efforts, we would have lagged behind. Parents too reclaimed a meaningful role in the educational ecosystem, and together with their children, narrowed gaps and swiftly adapted to the new situation.

Within a few short weeks, the confines of the classroom were breached. Digital arenas were established, new content and materials were developed at the Ministry and school level, as well as local governance and non-formal education. Gaps that would have taken a generation to narrow were bridged in real time. The use of online technologies was expedited; principals, teachers and schools were afforded considerable independence and creativity. This independence and initiative must be continued, encouraged, and enhanced.

At the same time, circumstances make it unequivocally clear that online learning cannot be a copy-paste replica of frontal learning, and calls for a different method of pedagogy altogether. It requires rethinking of content, pedagogy and learning methods, as well as methods of assessment and evaluation. It is evident that there are great disparities in digital skills among leaders of education. Knowledge-sharing platforms and professional colleague communities

must be created to bridge these gaps. The Education system must also equip students with the skills they need to assume responsibility and take full advantage of this form of learning.

The main operative recommendations suggested by the National Public Board of Education address the most pressing points of intervention that have come to light during the crisis. Implementing these will lay the infrastructure for an advanced education system, one positioned to meet the 21st-century challenges. These immediate recommendations are a part

of the National Public Board of Education's wider long-term strategic growth plan prepared and outlined in the roadmap presented in this document.

The National Public Board of Education

The National Public Board of Education ("the Cabinet") is a committed coalition comprising the majority of the players and stakeholders in the Education ecosystem, a collaborative effort working top-down, bottom-up, and across all related sectors. The Cabinet is dedicated to spearheading change in Israel's Education system by creating a vision and macro-strategy roadmap for the future. It aims to transform the country's learning systems into a leading ecosystem that places learning in the center.

In light of the crisis, and prior to the plan to be presented to the Government, the Cabinet has drafted a list of recommendations for a plan for immediate regeneration of the Educational system and Ecosystem, with the belief that the crisis can and should serve as an opportunity for the growth of Israel's Education system.

This is a genuine window of opportunity, an hour of grace. Education must adjust to the 'new normal'. Implementing these recommendations in the course of the current and next school year will propel education in Israel light years forward.

Summary of Opportunities and Recommendations:

In light of the Coronavirus Crisis, the Cabinet recommends the following emphases for the upcoming school year (2020-21). These will be elaborated further in the document.

1. **585** is the key to taking Education forward. Beginning in the upcoming school year change to: 5 days a week, 8-hour days, 5 matriculation exams (Hebrew, English, Math, Science, and one Humanities subject to be determined individually by each school).

2. **Independence for School Principals and Enhancing the Status of Education Leaders** at the pedagogical, management and content levels. Education leaders

3. stepped up and took responsibility during the crisis, demonstrating leadership and independent work, initiative and content development. This direction must be further encouraged to decentralize authority and empower field-level players in accordance with a 'traffic light method'.

4. A National Emergency Plan for **Closing Digital Gaps,** placing a special emphasis on the social and geographic periphery. This will address infrastructure

5. (computer and connection for every student and teacher), training for education teams and parents, as well as content development for all sectors. This will ensure narrowing digital gaps and social mobility in the medium-to-long term.

6. **Emphasizing the Personal Well being of Students** as a key component of the curriculum, with special emphasis on socialization and teacher-student, teacher-parent, and inter-educational team relationships.

7. **Innovative Models of Learning and Education**- developing a combined system of flexible learning (classroom-home-online learning) that will accommodate rapid switching between remote home-based learning to classroom learning and back while preserving the learning continuum. Developing online learning and education programs, as well as methods of teaching, innovative assessment and evaluation methods.

8. Establishing a **National Council for Education** as an advisory platform that will advance and drive initiatives to transform Israel's education system.

Key Recommendations

A. Establishing a National Council for Education:

In order to drive and lead long-term changes and enhance the stability of the education system, the Cabinet recommends establishing a National Council for Education, either as an auxiliary unit of the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Education, or alternatively, as an independent entity. The Council will serve as an advisory body for advancing reforms and broad strategic moves to improve the existing education and learning systems, while working in collaboration with all stakeholders throughout the Educational Ecosystem.

B. Status of Education Leaders

Throughout the Crisis, education leaders in the field adapted swiftly to the changing reality, showing tremendous leadership and responsibility. They continued to play a key role, despite change. During the past two months, education leaders have been given the opportunity to engage in planning and initiating rather than mere implementation, proving this both possible and successful. The crisis created an historic opportunity to enhance the status of education leaders, and boost the prestige of teaching and school management to make education an attractive professional option rather than a default occupation.

Online learning is not a substitute for leaders of education and cannot replace interpersonal connections. Rather, it serves to enhance these positions with new contents and ethos, making them genuine enablers of learning, mentorship and counsel.

Operative Recommendations:

1. Training leaders of education to develop thinking and learning skills.
2. Focusing efforts in the upcoming school year on developing student skills and capabilities, facilitating online and frontal content, individual emotional needs, and personalized learning tracks to maximize individual students' learning in line with their abilities and skills.
3. Establishing learning communities for both principals and teachers, as well as inter-staff learning groups within and between schools. Creating an online tool to

serve as a platform for co-worker learning and mutual support for professional colleagues.

4. Creating a diversified pipeline for training, recruiting and appointing school principals, including retraining academics and professionals with managerial experience from different fields (business, military, public sector) interested in transitioning to positions of management in the Education System.

5. Attracting the "Best to Education": expanding and optimizing the tracks to teaching professions, including retraining academics from diverse disciplines who are interested in transitioning to education.

C. Decentralization and Local Independence to Principals and to Schools

Throughout the Crisis, we have seen a wealth of educational initiatives, innovation and creative pedagogy that have benefited the students. These local initiatives have grown from the field, led by principals and educational staff.

This change must be not only embraced but taken forward, to write a new pedagogic chapter appropriate for our times. All future plans must emphasize granting principals and schools increased autonomy and flexibility on educational, pedagogic, managerial and administrative matters. This does not require supplementary budgeting but rather reducing Ministry regulation and encouraging flexible thinking. The longstanding division of responsibilities between Ministry administration and field-level education workers must be revised, and teachers and principals should be handed the lead in both creating and implementing programs. It is from the bottom-up that needs are identified and defined, and Ministry administration levels must provide the field with the support needed to meet these challenges.

Operative Recommendations:

1. Enhancing Principals' Roles- expanding their authority and responsibility to allow comprehensive pedagogic and managerial independence, including in determining contents, reducing regulation, setting of standards, allocation of hours, development of curriculum and study programs, and choice of disciplines and subject matters.

2. Decentralizing the system and increasing the authority and responsibility of principals and schools in the upcoming school year, in line with the following principles:

A. The degree of independence will be determined by the combination of two criteria:
   (1) The degree to which a principal and school are prepared to receive the autonomy and authority and comply with transparent benchmarks and measurements. School readiness will be classified as one of three levels: Green, fully mature; Yellow, partially ready, in need of support; Red: not ready.
   (2) The degree to which a principal and school are motivated and interested in being granted the designated level of autonomy.

B. A gradual decentralization model for transferring authorities to principals and schools. The Ministry of Education will create a staggered model based on the following criteria:
   - Green school: full decentralization, full transfer of authorities; semi-annual evaluation of objectives and performance.
   - Yellow school: gradual process of transferring authorities, professional support throughout the process, and defining objectives for attaining full decentralization.
   - Red school: maintaining the current situation, while mobilizing a process for improving and streamlining school management and practices.

3. Budgetary flexibility: principals will be granted autonomy and flexibility on staffing and employment, management of allotted hours, professional staff development, incentives and bonuses for teachers, funding of parent counselling and training.

4. Pedagogic flexibility: allowing principals to shape education in their school in keeping with a sliding scale; number of subjects that will be studied at the school, hours allocated to each subject, methods of learning, and contents.

5. Principals will be granted full responsibility for determining content learned, with the exception of core curricula determined and overseen at Ministry level. Principals will have a free hand in the "languages" taught for Matriculation exams

(Hebrew, English, Math, Sciences, Arabic for native speakers, and one Humanities subject of the school's choice).

6. Shifting from Supervision to Development: accompanying and supporting principals and teachers in keeping with the needs that arise from the field-level upwards.

D. New Models for Learning and Activity in Formal and Non-formal Education

The current working assumption is that the Crisis will remain with us through the end of the current school year and throughout the following one, calling for a learning method combining remote home-learning, online learning, and physical school attendance. In turn, these require flexibility in syllabus, assessment and evaluation, and teaching methods. Learning is no longer confined to physical classrooms. Formal education, non-formal education and the home setting have joined forces to provide continuity of learning that extends throughout the day in different frameworks and settings. Online and independent learning require learner responsibility, and call for a different skill set than that associated with the familiar frontal learning.

Operative Recommendations:

1. For the remainder of the current school year, there must be a shift from teaching and learning to containment and processing of the recent months together with the students, placing special emphasis on socialization, group work, and one on one personal teacher-student time (online or in person, situation permitting).
2. Flexible combined learning- developing programs combining the physical, home and virtual spaces, allowing rapid transition from home learning to school learning and back while preserving the learning continuum.
3. Development of remote learning programs that utilize innovative methods. These will be based on knowledge and experience gained in the field and not on an attempt to copy-paste frontal learning methods. Expert bodies such as the Center for Education Technology and Israel's National Digital Program can assist development of new relevant programs.
4. Adapt the curriculum of the upcoming school year to the changing reality: reduce the number of subjects, focus on developing learning skills and capabilities, develop online and network abilities and online learning systems.

5. Develop comprehensive and methodical programs for developing self-learning and investigative skills for young children starting at pre-school level.
6. The upcoming school year must emphasize developing a 21st century skill set including: entrepreneurship, creativity, collaboration and networking. This shall be achieved through active learning, investigative learning and projects.
7. Personalized learning: differential learning for each student in line with their individual capabilities, needs and progress through online learning. Developing adapted personalized exercises, assignments and research projects, practice routines, self-learning and teacher feedback.
8. Knowledge sharing: systematic documentation and gathering of various initiatives and success stories in the field and making them available to all teaching teams throughout the system.
9. Creating a program that will provide solutions to special education students and at-risk youth during crises and times of emergency.

E. Personal Well Being, Relationships and Socialization

The need for social distancing serves as a reminder of how important formal and non-formal education frameworks are to students' personal and social well being. These serve as the main arena for emotional and social learning, cultivating interpersonal skills, social situations, teamwork and education of values. The quality of interpersonal relations and the relationships between leaders of education and the students, and amongst educational teams themselves, are a meaningful component in the growth strategy.

The shift to home-based learning has transformed parents into legitimate partners in the educational ecosystem and learning processes.

The 'morning student' and 'afterhours student' are one and the same, and the crisis has revealed this division as artificial. Boundaries everywhere have broken down, including the physical boundaries of the classrooms and daily routines. The resulting overlap between multiple frameworks is a positive development, as they complement and supplement each other. It has become evident that a holistic response to students' needs can only be provided by working together.

Operative Recommendations:

1. Parent training and coaching: creating a program to support parents, while placing a special emphasis on the geographic and social periphery. It is recommended that schools have a professional parent coach or counsellor.

2. Establishing roundtables at school and local governance for all players in formal and non-formal education systems to collaborate on formulating joint solutions.

3. Developing networking skills as a foundation for student socialization and relationships during the upcoming school year.

F. Bridging Digital Gaps: Infrastructure, Content, Training

Technology is an enabling tool of change. At the same time, it exposes the risks and gaps throughout the entire system, with disparities between and among education leaders, parents, teachers, and social groups and sectors. In order to ensure that no student is left behind and that all have access to the same opportunities for future social and occupational mobility, the growth strategy must prioritize closing digital gaps in terms of infrastructure, knowledge, parent training and language. Special emphasis must be placed on the geographic and social periphery, and the Arab and Ultra Orthodox sectors. This is an opportunity, for example, to improve access conditions so that teachers from central Israel may teach in schools in the geographic periphery, within the already allocated quota of teaching hours.

Recent weeks have illustrated that one-quarter of Israel's population lacks digital access, precluding large parts of the student population from remote learning possibilities.

Without a concentrated effort to close these gaps, they will widen, with a detrimental effect. Narrowing the digital gap will help bridge the geographic and cultural distance. Online learning cannot mimic traditional frontal teaching; we now have an opportunity to shift towards cultivating learner independence and related skills.

Operative Recommendations:

Infrastructure

1. A national emergency plan for closing digital gaps within a short period, a collaborative combined effort between the government, business and non-profit sectors.

Top priorities include:

    a. Deploying internet infrastructure in every single community, and enabling wifi access to all education leaders and students.

    b. Providing learning infrastructure for every single student: computer/tablet and internet connection for each student.

Content

1. Developing learning materials adapted to online learning with the help of experts such as the Center for Technological Education.
2. Establishing a database of initiatives and diverse teaching materials. It is recommended that the Ministry staff will curate the best practices used in the field this current school year in order to create a pool of content and resources for the upcoming school year. Approaching the teams and asking them to share programs and resources should be done at Ministry level.
3. Preparing and making available online content in areas that are lacking: languages- Arabic in particular, as well as pre-school and special education.
4. Preparing culture-sensitive programs for the Ultra Orthodox population.

Training

1. Creating a diverse range of trainings and professional development for education teams on online learning and developing of learning skills, such as nano-courses and micro-accreditation.
2. Training materials in online learning for parents so that they are able to assist the students.
3. Training teaching students in remote assistance for students requiring help and for special student populations.

G. Matriculation, Student Assessment and Evaluation

The Crisis called urgent attention to the need to rethink the existing structure, perception and method of student assessment and evaluation. Some countries have decided to cancel all testing for the current school year altogether. Changing the system also offers the opportunity to reassess the contents being studied. A shift to emphasize skills and learning capabilities needed in the 21st century calls for a corresponding change in the evaluation methods.

Operative Recommendations:

1. Reducing the number of final matriculation exams in the upcoming school year to 5, with a focus on "languages" (Hebrew, English, Math, Sciences) and one Humanities subject to be determined individually by schools. The remainder of

   subjects will be graded internally by the schools, based on yearly grades and research assignments and papers.

2. Developing new assessment and evaluation markers that are not only achievement-based.

3. Education for values shall be an integral part of the curriculum and preparing students for the 21st century.

H. 585

In order to advance the Education System, and taking the above recommendations into account, the school week, contents and evaluation must be restructured in a way that will holistically facilitate meaningful learning, develop relevant skills, and close existing gaps. Additionally, changing the school week and extending the school day will help the economy recover.

Operative Recommendations:

1. 5 days a week: shortening the school week will allow optimal use of allocated teaching hours. Non-formal education alternatives should be provided to the parents and children expressing interest.

2. 8-hour days: extending the daily hours to create longer and more diverse days, combining formal and non-formal education, different methods of learning, diversified subject matters, and providing a hot meal.

3. 5 final matriculation exams: students will take external matriculation examinations in Hebrew, English, Math and Science, and a Humanities subject of the school's choice. All other subjects studied will be evaluated and graded internally by the school. These grades will be based on yearly grades, exams and research assignments and papers, and other methodology determined by individual principals and schools.

Cabinet Proposal for Short, Medium, and Long-Term Strategy

The short-term recommendations for the remainder of the current school year and for the upcoming school year 2020-21 presented in this document are part of the long-term strategy and roadmap prepared by the National Public Board of Education, which intends to submit its proposal to the new Government taking office in the immediate future.
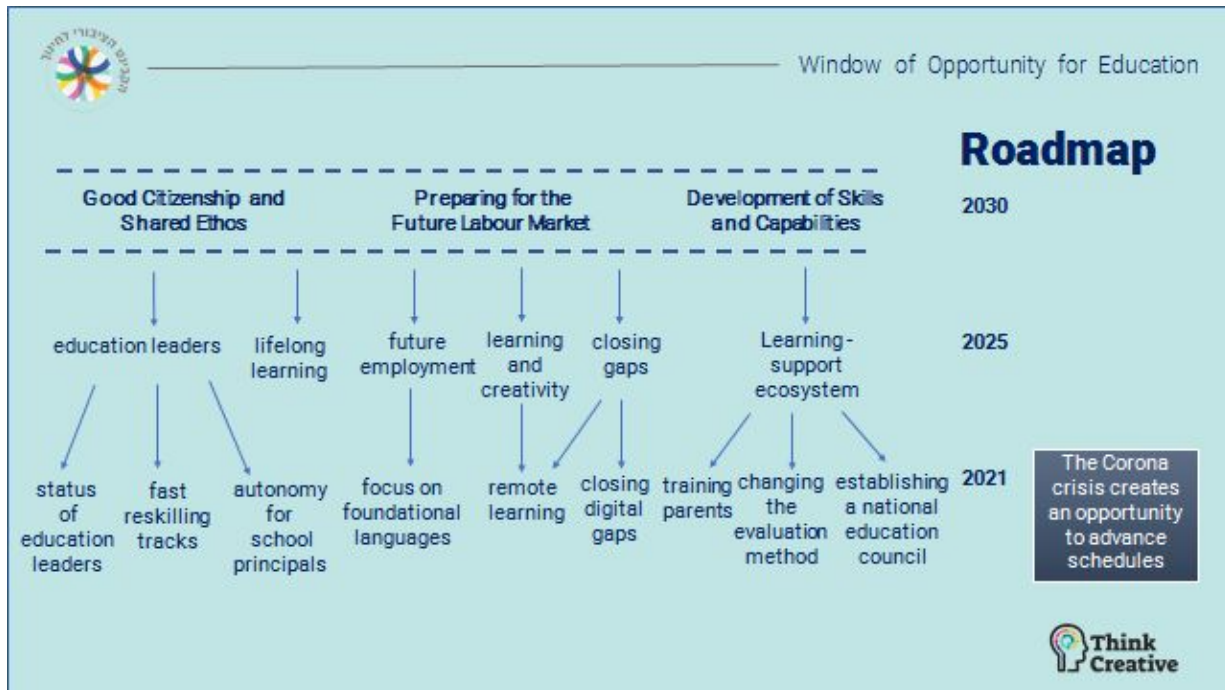
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