

What is the secret of Beit Jann's incredible success in the matriculation examinations?

“What they say: “To repair the world means to repair education” | Janusz Korczak” Joel Benno,

Beit Jann has jumped to third place in the eligibility rates for matriculation examinations in Israel. So what is the secret of the Druze community? A supportive education system which doesn't give up on any student, but also great economic investment by the State. The conclusion: Cash infusions to other places will create such revolutions there too.

Learning how to Win

When the principal of the Beit Jann Comprehensive School, Ali Salalha, took up his position thirteen years ago, he placed a sign at the entrance, which proclaimed, “He who toils achieves, and he who sows, reaps”. Two lions stood on either side of the slogan as a symbol of strength. This motto symbolizes the school's success better than anything else, which this week was ranked in third place nationally in its 2012 matriculation eligibility rates, with 85.13%. Only Kochav Yair and Shoham preceded the large Druze community.

When Salalha took up his post in 2000, the school had a 12% success rate – if that can be termed success. But he decided to make a fresh start. So what is the secret of his success? Firstly, nurturing motivation and faith among the teachers and students. But, of course, that isn't enough. A large portion of the achievements are due to rich study programs, which require plenty of money. The Ministry of Education – in cooperation with the Rashi Foundation and the Yeholot Association – has developed the Start program for advancing very weak students, and the results began to flow.

We work hard

Already at the beginning, 33 students with seven or more failures, who no one thought had any chance, were eligible for a matriculation certificate. “Our motto is that every student is able to succeed, if we convey the feeling that he can and that he is no different from the others,” says the pedagogic principal Jalal Saad, a mathematics and computers teacher. “In one case I drove to bring a student who had decided to work picking fruit, to the exam, and he was successful.”

Saad is the decisive proof that it is forbidden to give up. He dropped out of his studies in 8th grade and began working to help his family make a living. He completed his studies in mechanical engineering after the army. When the school opened an electricity and electronics track, he was given the job, and since then – for twenty years – he is there, in love with his work. “We don't have any students who failed; we have students who haven't yet succeeded. And the belief in every single one's ability will help also them to succeed,” he says.

We don't have another Beit Jann,” the school principal joins the conversation. “The human resource is the most important of all, and alongside it – the many hours of remedial help, the concentrated study days before the examinations, and the right

educators appointed. No longer the Middle Eastern mindset which works against you and tries to divide, but cooperation, increasing motivation, and delegation of authority. Alongside safeguarding our traditions, we must think about progress, on workplaces and positions in the Israeli economy, and drive into the students' heads that without higher education they don't have anything to look for in life."

Asem Kis, a 12th grader in the physics and electronics track, plans to study computer engineering at the Technion as part of the officer candidate academic studies program. "The school invests in every student, regardless of his individual level," he explains. "Sometimes we studied for twelve hours a day or more. They simply didn't give in to us. The school is also open on Friday and Saturday, and the teachers drove into us how difficult it is to succeed in life without having studied."

The pedagogic principal Jalal Saad: "Our motto is that every student is able to succeed, if we make him believe in himself. In one case I drove to bring a student who had decided to work picking fruit, to the exam, and he was successful."

"Don't think that we are any different from anyone else; we simply work very hard, sometimes even more than others do," says Dana Hamud, a 12th grader in the chemistry and biology track whose great dream is to be a scientist. "To reach the highest point possible, we have to make an effort, be stubborn, and not give up. The concern for every student is an important part of the success. I, for example, wanted to be tested on 5 points in mathematics. My grade was borderline – 80 – but the teacher let me despite that, because he believes in my abilities."

The teacher woke me up in the morning

One of the outstanding graduates of the school is Rima Ali, who specialized in physics and electronics. Rima was one of 15 students from all over Israel who were meticulously selected from 700 candidates to study for an entire year in America, as part of a project run by the USA embassy and Israel. A not insignificant step in the conservative Druze society. Her father is a lawyer, and her mother an Arabic teacher. Her sister was accepted to study medicine at the Technion. Meanwhile, she is already planning to study law, and dreams of entering politics to advance and change the face of Druze society. "The teachers taught us on their own time, and urged us on to achieve high grades," she says. "They showed us examples of people who went far, to spur us on, and it helped. The village residents don't have money for private lessons, and, therefore, the students' responsibility is to study and make the most of what the school gives."

Va'al Sarbuch, a 12th grader in the physics and mathematics track, who plans to enlist in the Israel Navy's elite commando unit, Shayetet 13, says motivation is the key to success. "The teachers strengthened our egos, talked to us about our future, about professions in which we can find appropriate and respectable employment. Our motivation was sky high. Thanks to them, I started to believe in myself. I have friends in other schools, whose teachers couldn't care less about whether or not they study, or even if they come to school. With us, if a student doesn't come in the morning, the teacher calls him, takes an interest, and sometimes even goes to the student's home to find out what has happened to him."

So what next? Ali Salalha, the school principal, says that according to the statistics he has, the school is already ranked in first place for 2013, after all 188 students successfully passed their matriculation examinations. “We are in first place, ahead of Kochav Yair and Shoham. We are at the top. My dream is to stay there, and for as long as possible.” And he has another dream – to see the first scientist from Beit Jann being awarded a Nobel Prize. “It’s possible,” he says with total confidence, “for sure it’s possible.”