



The Israel Center for Educational Innovation: Promoting Literacy in Elementary Schools with High Concentrations of Ethiopian-Israeli Students

Summary of Literacy Results and Student Achievement Levels in the 2010-2011 School Year

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November, 2011

***Operating Partners of the
Israel Center for Educational Innovation:***

The Moriah Fund,

The Center for Educational Innovation-Public Education Association (CEI-PEA), NY,

The Fidel Association for Education and Social Integration of Ethiopian Jews in Israel

ICEI is operated in partnership with:

The Reading and Writing Project, Teachers College, Columbia University

led by Lucy Calkins, the Robinson Professor of Literacy, which provides ongoing staff development to ICEI literacy personnel

and:

The Steering Center for Ethiopian Immigrants in the Education System

With Gratitude

The success of the Israel Center for Educational Innovation is dependent upon the ongoing support of the Moriah Fund and the generosity of our supporting partners:

The Israel Ministry of Education; the Municipalities of Petach Tikvah, Bat Yam, Netanya, Tel Aviv, Or Yehuda and Rishon Lezion; the Steinhardt Family Foundation, Israel; the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco; the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation; the Paula and Jerry Gottesman Foundation; the Pears Foundation; the Baron De Hirsch Fund; the Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Fund; the Levi Lassen Foundation; the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation; Unbound Philanthropies; the Grinspoon Foundation; and several anonymous individual and foundation donors.

Executive Summary

The Israel Center for Educational Innovation (ICEI) has considerably expanded activities since its first year, when it opened six classes in three schools in Netanya. In the past school year, activities took place in 96 classes in 13 different schools in three cities; seven schools in Netanya, three in Petach Tikva and three in Bat Yam. The full reading and writing model was offered for the full school year in the majority (66%) of classes. In the remaining classes, either the model was introduced only in the middle of the school year, or one of our short-term focused interventions was implemented.

ICEI places a strong emphasis on demonstrating effectiveness and accountability. Literacy skills were measured at three points during the school year, utilizing two assessment tools: (1) the Standardized Written Reading Comprehension Test (WT), administered to full classes in a single sitting and (2) the Running Record/Independent Oral Reading Test (RR) administered verbally to each student. The use of two different tools provides teachers and ICEI staff with detailed information on diverse aspects of students' reading and writing achievement. This year we also developed and tested a new criterion-based instrument to help in assessing students' progress in written expression.

To enhance our capacity to analyze, interpret and learn from the large amounts of data being collected, we have developed a web-based data collection and tabulation system, which was phased in during the 2010-11 school year. Teachers upload their test results on user-friendly screens and receive immediate feedback, via pre-formatted graphs and tables. These tools enable teachers, principals and literacy coaches to monitor individual students, whole classes and school-wide progress over time. ICEI personnel have access to all of the data in the system and can compare results across schools.

Key Achievements

- Findings from the 2010-11 school year show that ICEI's literacy program is leading to consistent and system-wide improvement in students' literacy skills and achievements. This progress is taking place in all grades and at all reading levels.
- We assessed students who studied for at least one full year in our complete reading and writing model, using the two assessment tools mentioned above: the Standardized Written Reading Comprehension and the Running Record.
- On the Written Tests, a dramatic shift took place. Approximately 72% of students finished the year *At or Above Standard* or *Well Above Standard* with another 19% *Approaching Standard*. Most impressive was the increase in the percentage of students in the highest category (*Well Above Standard*), from 29% in September to 47% in June.
- Findings show significant progress among students at all grade levels.
- The picture for 1st grade classes is particularly noteworthy. We were able to compare the results for first grade classes that participated in ICEI's full program with those that did not take part in the program (non-participating classes were tested to establish baseline scores in advance of joining next year). Findings point to a clear advantage for program participants. At the end of their first year in school almost three quarters (72%) of the 1st grade students who participated in ICEI's program were reading at a high level, as opposed to only half (53%) the students who did not take part in the program. At the other end of the spectrum, findings showed twice as many students in the non-program group reading at the three lowest levels, when compared with ICEI participants

(22% vs. 11%). It may thus be seen that offering the program from the start of elementary school is helping to prevent gaps in reading achievement among these high-risk students.

- To examine students' progress over a longer period of exposure to the program, we separately examined two cohorts: classes that entered the program in September 2008 (3 full years in the program) and classes that entered the program in September 2009 (2 full years in the program). Findings from the Standardized Written Reading Comprehension Test showed a complex picture, marked by significant progress within each school year, along with substantial setbacks during each summer vacation, followed by recovery and further progress.
- Analyses of the progress made over the course of the 2010-2011 school year, using the Running Record Assessment tool, show that the majority of students (65%) met or exceeded normative expectations for their age group.
- To recognize the scope of this achievement, it should be kept in mind that a large proportion of our students come from severely disadvantaged backgrounds and are not generally assessed against normative expectations.
- We further asked whether ICEI's program advances students at all achievement levels, as opposed to being beneficial for a limited range of students. Running Record findings showed significant progress over the year among students who commenced the year at all reading levels. Especially notable is the finding that students who started the year at the lowest reading level (*Need Significant Support*) advanced the most: 37% of this group showed excellent progress, advancing 7 levels or more during the year.
- In order to close reading gaps that have developed over time, it is not enough that students progress – they must also accelerate their *rate of learning* relative to the past. Findings show that the great majority of our weakest students, those with the most significant gaps, almost doubled their previous rate of learning.
- All classes receive focused attention on improving students' abilities to express themselves in writing. We tested a new criterion-based instrument to help in assessing students' progress in this area in a significant sample of our classes. Data from this pilot test indicate that students at all grade levels made significant progress over the year in written expression and that this tool has the potential to guide teachers in identifying specific aspects requiring focused attention.
- As mentioned earlier, some classes received a brief learning intervention (2-4 months) in either reading or mathematics. These interventions were each evaluated separately. Our initial findings point to substantial benefits for students who participated in a focused intervention and support the continued use of this strategy in situations where there is an identified need to close significant gaps for sizable numbers of students within individual classes in upper grades prior to introduction of ICEI's full instructional model.
- ICEI's program is active in schools that have a concentration of Ethiopian-Israelis within the student population – between 21% to 96% depending on the school. The overall picture shows that more than half (53%) of the total number of students who participated in ICEI's program in the 2010-11 school year are of Ethiopian origin.
- Comparison of Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian students showed that Ethiopian students showed significant progress throughout the school year, similar to and in parallel with the progress made by

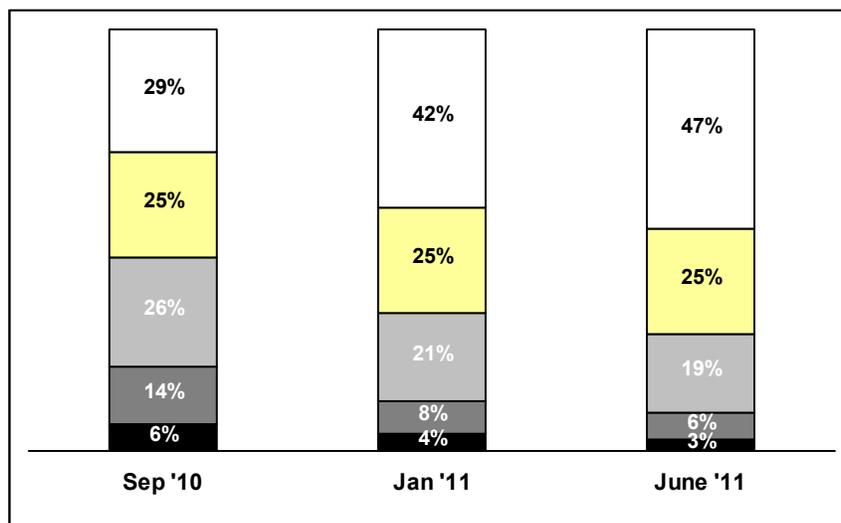
the non-Ethiopian students. At all three assessment points the Ethiopian students' achievement levels were close to, but slightly lower than, those of the non-Ethiopian students. It must be noted that the program works to advance all students, not only the Ethiopian students. The average starting point for Ethiopian students is lower than the average starting point for non-Ethiopian students, so it should not surprise us that the gap remains, i.e., that the two groups are making parallel progress. In the coming year, ICEI will consider additional measures to help close these gaps, without sacrificing our commitment to avoid situations during school hours in which Ethiopian students are isolated from other students.

Findings of the Standardized Written Reading Comprehension Examinations

This section presents outcomes on the Standardized Written Reading Comprehension Examination (WT), which ICEI administers three times a year. This test is modeled on the examination used by the Ministry of Education as part of its *School Efficiency and Growth Rating* (in Hebrew - the *Meitzav*). Test scores range from 0-100.

Distribution of Students Who Participated in the Program During the 2010-11 School Year, According to Reading Levels on the Standardized Written Reading Comprehension Examinations

11 Schools, 59 Classes, 1,524 Students *



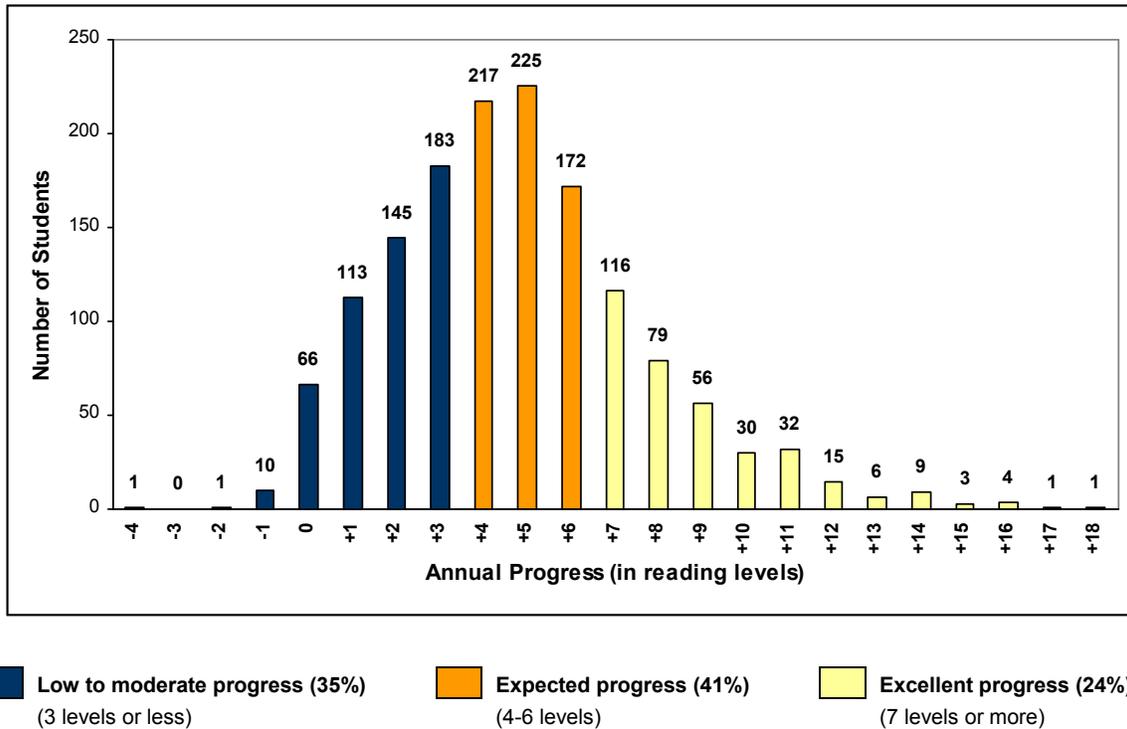
Well Below Standard (0-40)
 Below Standard (41-57)
 Approaching Standard (58-73)
 At or Above Standard (74-84)
 Well Above Standard (85-100)

Findings point to clear progress, with a consistent increase over time in the percentage of students classified as reading within the two highest levels (colored white and yellow in the above graph), from 54% in September 2010 to 67% in January, to 72% in June 2011. A concomitant reduction over time was found in the percentage of students classified in the two lowest reading levels (colored black and dark grey in the graph above), from 20% in September to 12% in January, to 9% in June.

Findings of the Running Record/Independent Oral Reading Tests

We examined how much these students have advanced over the school year. To assess individual progress we subtracted each student's reading score on the RR test at the start of the year (September 2010) from that obtained at the end of the school year (June 2011). The following figure shows the distribution of students, according to the number of reading levels they advanced over the school year.

Distribution of Students According to Amount of Progress on the Running Record/Independent Oral Reading Test *



* N = 1,485. This analysis excludes 81 high achieving students potentially affected by a “ceiling effect”. These students, in grades 3 to 6, commenced the year reading at a level of 32 or above (7th grade level) and at year's end scored 35, the highest possible score on this test. As these students started the year at or very close to the “ceiling” of this scale, they could show little to no progress on the test at the end of the year, although they may in fact have progressed considerably.

- 24% of students (352 out of 1,485) showed outstanding progress and advanced 7 or more reading levels over the course of a single school year.
- 41% of students (614 out of 1,485) improved in accord with normative expectations, advancing between 4 to 6 reading levels.
- 35% of students (519 out of 1,485) showed only low to moderate progress, advancing less than 4 levels.
- In sum, the large majority of students (65%) *met or exceeded normative expectations* for their age in terms of the amount of progress they made in literacy achievement over a single year. We consider this to be a major achievement, as a large proportion of our students come from severely disadvantaged backgrounds and are not generally assessed against normative expectations. Moreover, normative progress exceeds what most of these students achieved prior to this program.