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ENGELBERG CENTER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

**Ethiopian National Project:
Scholastic Assistance Program 2009
Main Findings from the Third Evaluation Report
about Program Impacts**

Dalia Ben-Rabi ♦ Ruth Baruj-Kovarsky ♦ Viacheslav Konstantinov

The study was initiated and funded by the Ethiopian National Project

The Ethiopian National Project (ENP) is a partnership between the Jewish Federations of North America, the Government of Israel, representatives of Ethiopian Jewish community organizations, the Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in Israel and Keren Hayesod-UJA.



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Acknowledgments

We are grateful to all those who helped us and made this study possible, above all, Dr. Nigist Mengesha, Director-General of the Ethiopian National Project; Amir Tewabe, Director of Operations at the ENP; and Grace Rodnitzki, ENP's Director of International Relations. Special thanks to the ENP supervisors, who informed us about the project, helped us collect the data and were at our disposal whenever we had questions or requests.

We thank the implementing organizations and the staff members responsible for the scholastic assistance program – Shirley Rimon, Merav Elkan, Said Anabusi and Eitan Bitew – for their cooperation, as well, of course, as all the coordinators and youth counselors working for them, who were kind enough to help us gather the data and shared their experience and insights with us.

Special thanks to the school principals who participated in the survey and provided the information that made this study possible and to the school staff whom we interviewed. Thanks in particular to the youth who took part in the study.

We thank the Ministry of Education for providing us with essential data and Dr. Rita Sever and Dr. Gad Abecasis for enlightening us with their important comments.

Finally, thanks to our colleagues at the Institute: Assaf Ben-Shoham, our statistical advisor, Chen Tamir-Tzuk, Director of the Fieldwork Unit, Mark Malkovich, who organized the fieldwork and collected the data, Ori Katzin, who was responsible for data collection and for the qualitative data, Tirzah Margolin and Ronli Rotem who helped prepare the report, and Revital Aviv Matok, who helped design and organize the report. We are grateful to Jenny Rosenfeld, Director of the Publications Unit, Naomi Halsted, who translated the report into English, and Leslie Klineman, who prepared it for publication. Thanks to Miriam Cohen-Navot, Director of the Engelberg Center for Children and Youth, who has been involved in the study from the start and whose insights and experience contributed greatly to it. Finally, we thank Prof. Jack Habib, Director of the Institute, for his support and guidance throughout every stage of the study.

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1. The Ethiopian National Project and the Scholastic Assistance Program

The Ethiopian National Project (ENP) was established in 2004 with the goal of enabling Ethiopian-Israeli youth to fulfill their potential and increase their chances of social mobility and future integration into the labor market. The project comprises a variety of interventions, the most significant among them being the scholastic assistance program, which is the subject of this report.

The ENP scholastic assistance program is provided to Ethiopian-Israeli students in junior high and high schools and is aimed at improving their achievements in matriculation exams and at reducing the dropout rate among these students; it does so by providing interventions addressing scholastic, emotional and social aspects. The program is implemented by four providers: The Branco-Weiss Institute, ORT-Israel, the Israel Association of Community Centers and Maksam.

In 2008/9, the scholastic assistance program was implemented in 96 schools in 26 localities and some 5,000 students in grades 7 through 12 participated. This represents a decline in the total number of participants, which was due to a significant decrease in the funding available to the program.

The ENP has been accompanied by an extensive ongoing evaluation since its inception. There has been a series of annual reports. In this report, we focus on a number of major indicators of the academic impacts of the program:

- ◆ Perceptions of the school principals and students about the program's contribution to scholastic success and the students' emotional and social well-being
- ◆ Success in the national matriculation exams
- ◆ The extent and pattern of dropping out and transferring out of the schools after 9th grade.

On a number of indicators, we also examined changes that occurred in relation to previous years. Overall, the findings for the 2008/09 school year are very positive and indicate an improvement in many of the indicators over time.

The study findings have been disseminated and discussed with those implementing and funding the program and they serve as the basis for improving the program and continuing its dissemination.

2. The Study

The research activities reported in this report were conducted in 2008/9 and they examined three main components of the program:

- ◆ Implementation of the program

- ◆ Satisfaction with the program and assessment of its contribution
- ◆ Impact of the program on the students' scholastic achievements in the matriculation exams.

The study uses qualitative and quantitative study methods. The quantitative data were collected through structured telephone interviews (questionnaires) with principals of all schools with the program,¹ a self-report questionnaire completed by staff members of the implementers,² and self-report questionnaires by a large sample of over 1,400 participating students.³ The qualitative instruments included open, in-depth interviews and focus groups with staff from the ENP and the provider organizations, school principals, teachers and students. Observations of program activities were also conducted. Administrative files from the Ministry of Education were used to examine the impact of the program on students' achievements.

3. Program Implementation

- ◆ The program provided extra instruction in small classes held in the afternoon, after regular school hours, usually on the school premises. On average, four hours per week of extra instruction were provided per student and most sessions were conducted in small groups (on average 5 students). A light meal was provided for the participants.
- ◆ Most of the Ethiopian-Israeli students (an average of 74%) at schools with the program participated in its activities.
- ◆ The main subjects for which most of the students received assistance were mathematics and English.
- ◆ Half of the students (50%) reported that they needed additional assistance, most of them asking for help in subjects in which they were not currently receiving extra help.
- ◆ The program also provided activities addressing the students' social and emotional needs.

4. Satisfaction with the Program and Assessment of its Contribution

- ◆ Most of the school principals (82%) reported in 2009 "great" or "very great" satisfaction with the fact that the program was implemented in their schools.

¹ We interviewed 83 principals of schools with the project where at least 10 students participated (98% response rate). The information was cross-referenced with questionnaires distributed to principals of the same schools during a previous stage of the study in 2007 (61 principals).

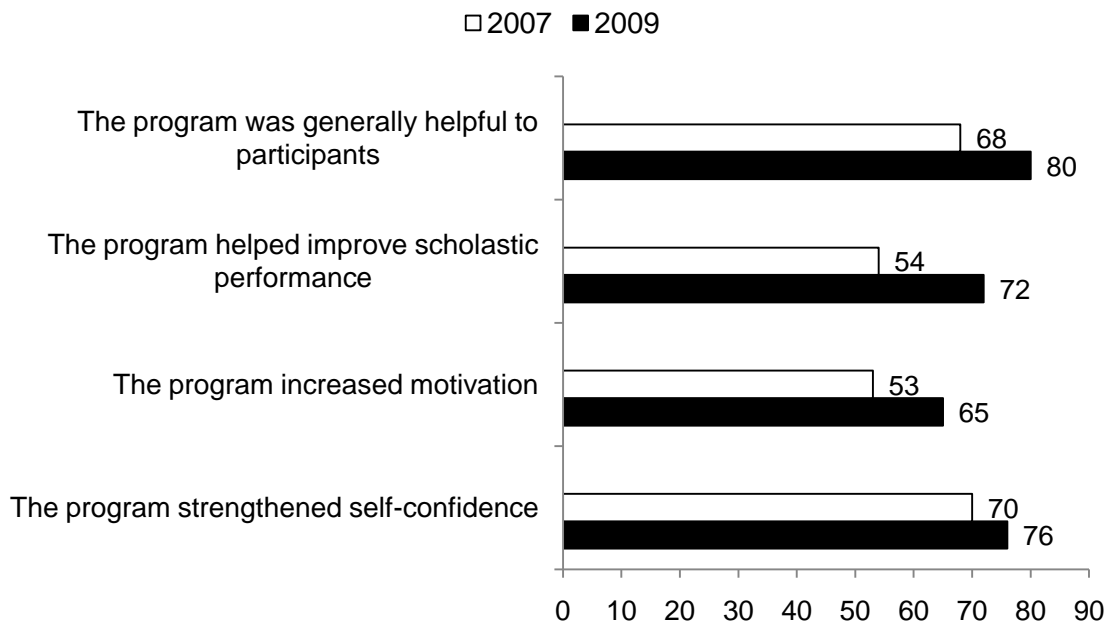
² The school coordinators at ORT-Israel and youth counselors at Branco-Weiss – 73 coordinators and youth counselors were interviewed (92% response rate).

³ Altogether, 1,422 students were interviewed at a sample of 41 schools and frameworks (96% response rate). These students account for 71% of all students registered in the scholastic assistance program in those schools.

- ◆ The reports of principals whose schools had participated in the program since 2007 revealed that the high level of satisfaction with the program had even increased over the years – from 77% in 2007 to 85% in 2009.
- ◆ Most of the principals felt that:
 - The program responded appropriately to the needs of all or most of the participating students (71%)
 - The program responded to the needs of Ethiopian-Israeli students whose needs had not previously been met (88%)
 - In their opinion, the program enhanced the quality of interventions provided for the Ethiopian-Israeli students (87%).
- ◆ The students also reported very high satisfaction with the program. Almost all of them reported very high satisfaction on a series of indicators:
 - 87% were highly satisfied with the program's scholastic assistance classes.
 - 90% would recommend participation in the program to their friends.
 - 89% felt the teachers providing the assistance cared about them.
 - 89% thought that there was a pleasant atmosphere in the class.
 - In addition, 76% said they found it easier to study in these settings than in the regular classroom.

The principals were asked about their perceptions of the program's contribution to the participants' scholastic achievements and their social and emotional well-being. A high percentage of the principals reported that the program contributed to the students in various ways (see Figure 1). Moreover, from 2007 to 2009, we see a clear improvement in their assessment of the program's contribution to its participants (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Program's Contribution to Participants to a "Great" or "Very Great" Extent,[^] according to School Principals in 2007 and 2009 (Percent)



[^] The other categories were: To a moderate extent, Somewhat and Not at all n=61. The data relate to schools that had participated in the program since 2007.

The students were asked what the program had contributed to them personally⁴ (see Figure 2).

◆ **Scholastic contributions**

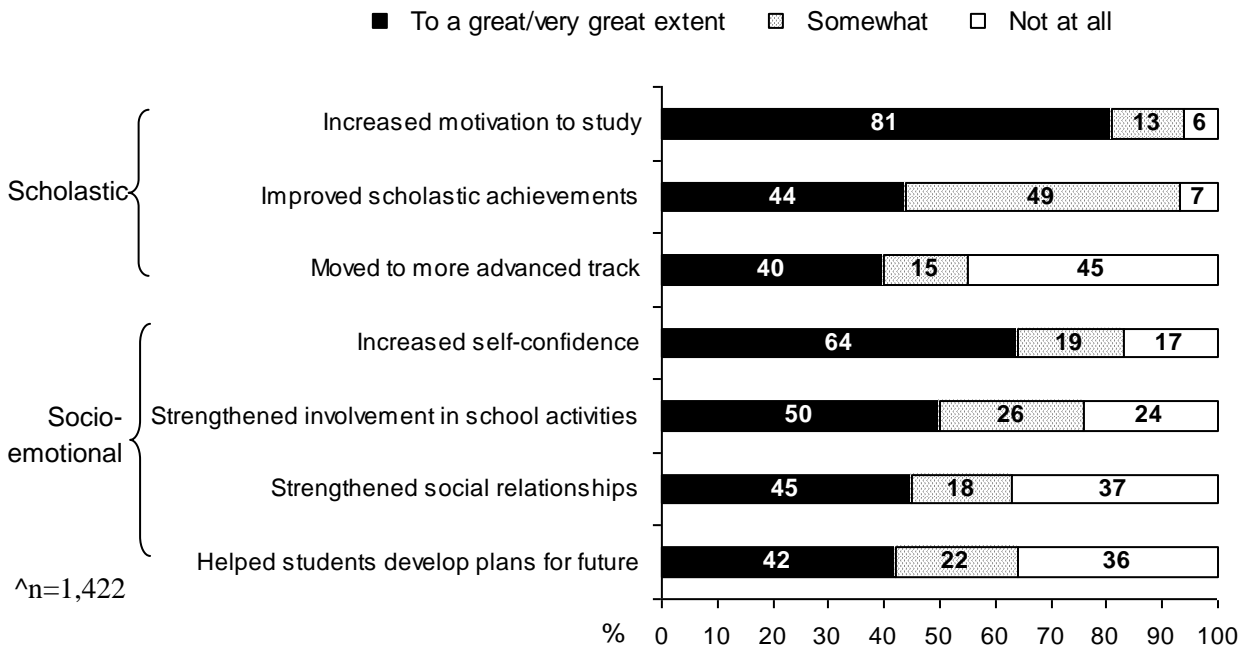
- Most (81%) reported that participation in the program had increased their motivation to study.
- Forty-four percent of the students felt that their academic achievements had improved greatly as a result of the program.
- Forty percent noted that they had moved up to a more advanced track for one or more subjects as a result of the program.

◆ **Social and emotional needs**

- The majority of students (65%) reported that the program had reinforced their self-confidence.
- Almost half reported a range of additional benefits:
 - Strengthening their involvement in school activities (50%)
 - Strengthening ties with friends (45%)
 - Helping them in developing plans and goals for the future (42%).
- Eighty-two percent of the students reported that they had benefitted from the program to a great or very great extent in at least one socio-emotional aspect.

⁴ Note that in the principals' questionnaire, the respondents were asked about all participants in general, while in the students' questionnaire, the respondents were asked about themselves as individuals.

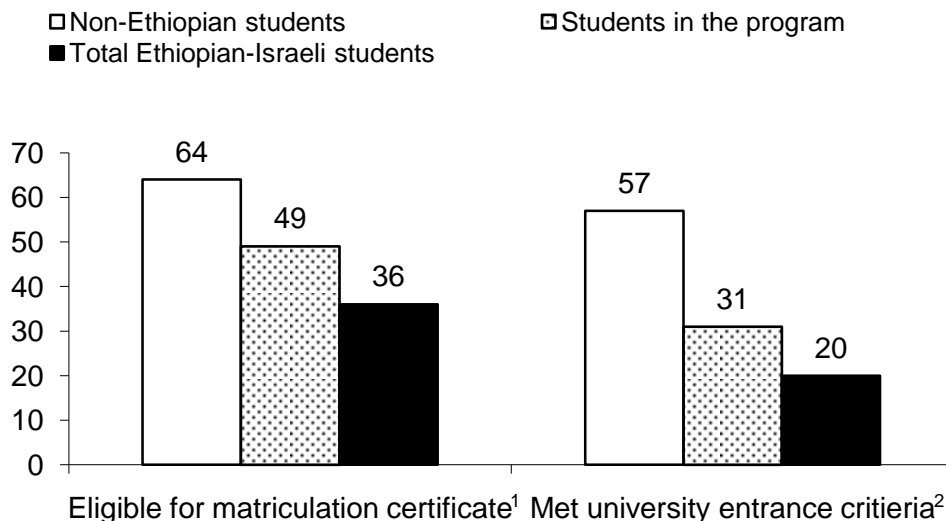
Figure 2: Program's Contribution to Participants in Scholastic and Socio-Emotional Areas, according to Participants' Reports (Percent)^



5. Program's Contribution to Improved Matriculation Results

Eligibility for matriculation certificates and the quality of the certificates are key measures of scholastic success and are requirements for acceptance at institutions of higher education.

Figure 3: Achievements of Non-Ethiopian Students, Total Ethiopian-Israeli Students and Students Participating in the Program, 2007/8 (Percent)



¹ State and State-Religious Hebrew-speaking schools

² In order to obtain a certificate that meets university entrance criteria, students are required to take at least 4 study units in English.

The analysis of the students' achievements in their matriculation exams was based on national data from the Ministry of Education.⁵

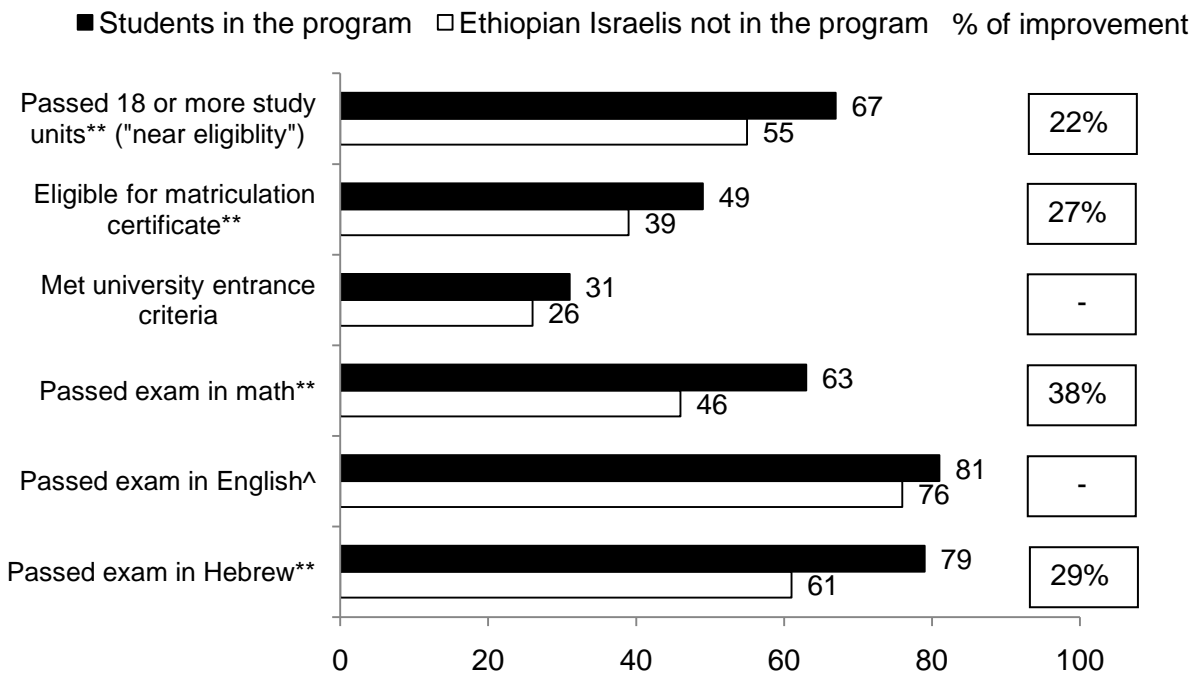
- ◆ There are considerable gaps between the achievements of Ethiopian-Israeli students and the total population of Jewish students. In 2008, the percentage of Ethiopian-Israeli students eligible for matriculation certificates was 36%, while for all students at all Hebrew-speaking schools in the State and State-Religious streams, it was 64%. The gaps in the percentages of those eligible for certificates that met university entrance criteria were much greater: 57% versus 20%. These gaps emphasize magnitude of the challenge facing the scholastic assistance program.
- ◆ The level of achievements of the Ethiopian-Israeli students at schools with the program were consistently higher over the years than those of all Ethiopian-Israeli students. The level of achievements of these schools was higher before the program began. Therefore, in order to assess the program's impact we need to compare the students in the program with students at schools with similar characteristics (State or State Religious, boys only, girls only or mixed), level of matriculation achievements for non-Ethiopian-Israelis in the school and prior level of Ethiopian-Israeli matriculation achievements.⁶
- ◆ Figure 3 shows the achievements of students who participated in the program in comparison to the achievements of Ethiopian-Israeli students at similar schools without the program.
 - A significant difference between the groups can be seen in the percentage of students who took exams and achieved near eligibility⁷ (a gap of 12.2 percentage points in favor of those who participated in the program, constituting an improvement of 22%).
 - A significant difference was found in the percentage of those eligible for a matriculation certificate (a gap of 10.7 percentage points, constituting an improvement of 28%).
 - No significant difference was found in the percentage of students whose achievements met the university entrance criteria.
 - Significant differences were also found in the percentage of those who passed the matriculation exams in math and Hebrew.

⁵ The Ministry of Education makes its matriculation data available for research analysis some sixteen months after the exams. Therefore, the latest data available for analysis are for 2007/8.

⁶ Note that even at schools without the program, immigrant students receive assistance from the Ministry of Education and it is possible that some of the students at schools without the program were receiving assistance through other programs that were not specifically for Ethiopian-Israeli students.

⁷ In order to be eligible for a matriculation certificate, students are required to pass at least 21 study units. The measure of "near eligibility" (passing at least 18 units) allows us to examine the program's impact on achievements at a lower level.

Figure 4: Achievements of Students Participating in the Program¹ and of Ethiopian Israelis from Similar Schools without the Program, 2007/8, and Percentage of Improvement



* $p < 0.05$

** $p < 0.01$

^ Almost statistically significant ($p < 0.10$)

¹ $n = 553$

The ENP's scholastic assistance program has been implemented in schools since 2004/5. It can thus be assumed that most of the students at the schools where it had been implemented for at least three years participated in the program for all three years of high school and took all their matriculation exams during the period when it was implemented. This is the first time that data on these students have been available. Their results therefore reflect a more complete impact of the program. In order to examine the impact of the program specifically when implemented in the school for an extensive period, we focused our attention on the program's impact on participants at "veteran"⁸ schools.

We found that the program had a greater impact on matriculation eligibility among students at "veteran" schools (a gap of 14 percentage points between them and students in similar schools without the program, constituting an improvement of 33%). Among students at these schools, not only did the program increase the percentage of those eligible for a matriculation certificate, but it also had an almost statistically significant impact on the percentage of students obtaining certificates that met university entrance criteria.

⁸ Schools where the program was introduced in or before 2005/6.

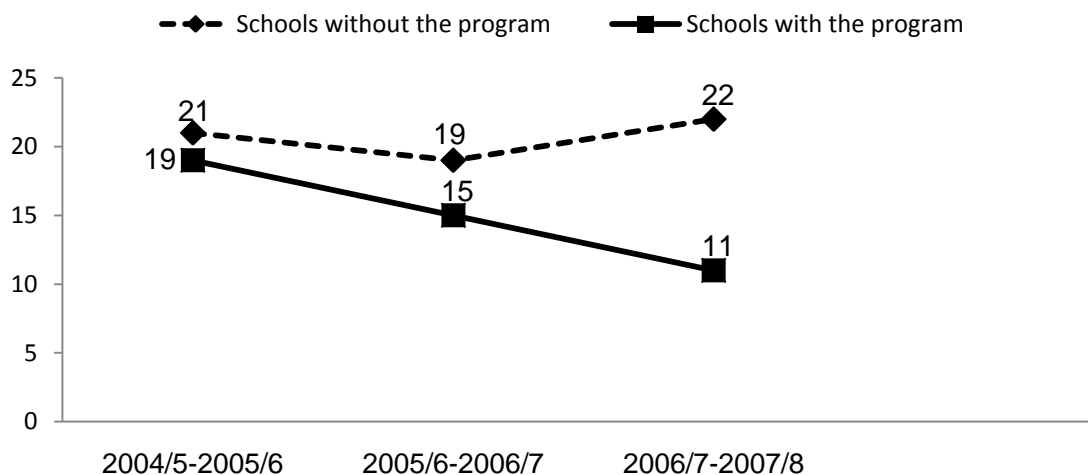
6. Dropout Prevention

Another aspect examined was the program's success in preventing students from dropping out of the education system between junior high and high school and reducing the extent of transfers to a different school at the end of junior high (after 9th grade) at schools with grades from 7 through 12.

Analysis of the data revealed that in recent years, the dropout rate during the transition from 9th to 10th grade among all Ethiopian-Israeli students in Israel has declined, evidently due to the Ministry of Education's policy to ensure that all students complete 12th grade. The decline was found to be similar at schools participating in the program (from 8.0% to 5.6%) and those that did not participate (from 9.0% to 6.1%).

Nevertheless, a significant gap was found between schools in which the program was implemented and those in which it was not, in the percentage of students moving to another school after 9th grade rather than staying at the same school for the senior grades (see Figure 5).⁹ At the schools participating in the program, the percentage of Ethiopian-Israeli students transferring to another school declined from 19% in 2005/6 to 11% in 2007/8. In contrast, at the schools that did not participate in the program, the percentage of Ethiopian-Israeli students transferring to another school remained similar over the years (approximately 20% of the students). The decline in the percentage of transfers is especially significant in light of the fact that most transfers were to weaker schools.

Figure 5: Percentage of Ethiopian-Israeli Students Moving to Another School after Ninth Grade, Schools with and without the Program



⁹ The data were analyzed only for schools where it is possible for students to remain throughout all six grades of junior high and high school and it is a natural progression for them to do so. The data relate to all Ethiopian-Israeli students at those schools and not only to program participants.

7. Summary of the Main Impacts of the Program

- ◆ The principals and students are very satisfied with the implementation of the program.
- ◆ They feel that the program contributes to a great or very great extent to the promotion of the students, both in scholastic and social-emotional aspects.
- ◆ Analysis of the matriculation achievements in 2007/8 shows a very significant improvement in the achievements of students who participated in the program compared to similar students who did not participate in the program, in the rate of eligibility for a matriculation certificate and in the grades in Hebrew and math.
- ◆ There are still considerable gaps between Ethiopian-Israeli students and non-Ethiopian-Israeli students, especially in eligibility for a matriculation certificate that meets university entrance criteria.
- ◆ In the schools where the program was implemented, there was a significant decline in the percentage of Ethiopian-Israeli students moving to other schools after 9th grade.