



# Evaluation of the "Start" Program

## Executive Summary

February 2014

---

### **Program Description**

The Start program is operated by Rashi's subsidiary association Yecholot in conjunction with the Ministry of Education in high schools in the social or geographic periphery. It targets students who are the lowest achievers in their class at the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and who are in effect "hidden dropouts" on the verge of actual dropout. The program aims to lead participants to graduate school with matriculation, to prevent their dropping out of school, and to increase their sense of capability and belonging to community and society. The program runs for three years (from the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade through the end of 12<sup>th</sup>), operated by coordinators and teachers from the same schools who receive training and pedagogic guidance by Yecholot's team. The activity takes place both during regular school hours and during afternoons, evenings and some school vacations.

### **Purpose of the Study**

To examine the extent to which the program achieves its aims in the short and long term.

### **Methodology**

The study made use of data that the program collects regularly as part of its mapping and monitoring processes. These data include educational achievements, matriculation rates, attendance and exam scores. In addition, questionnaires were developed especially for this study and answered by students (N=381) and program coordinators (N=19). The questionnaires were intended to identify the changes that participants undergo in terms of sense of capability, exposure to at-risk behaviors, locus of control, classroom performance, sense of belonging and future aspiration. Students answered two questionnaires after they completed 12<sup>th</sup> grade, one asking about opinions and attitudes before joining the program at the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and the second asking about these issues today. The study also drew on IDF data.

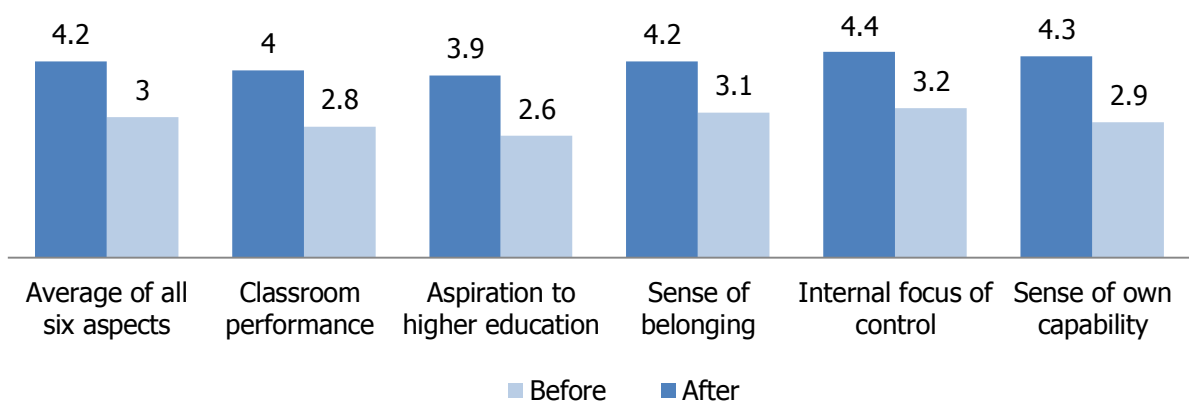
### **Main Findings**

- Participation in the Start program significantly increases the ability of under-achieving students to attain a matriculation certificate: 71% of program graduates (385 out of 542) who had on average 7.3 failed subjects at the end of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, managed to leave

school at the end of 12<sup>th</sup> grade with matriculation. This is 6.8% higher than the matriculation rate in the general population in Israel in 2012-3 (64.2%).

- The study shows that Start positively influences the performance of the entire school. In 17 schools where Start was operating, the matriculation rate was 70.4%, compared to 54.4% before Start began - an increase of 16%.
- It is clear that Start students undergo deep and meaningful change in terms of their attitudes towards themselves, their school and society in general. An analysis of the questionnaires showed that after three years, there were significant changes in every parameter that was checked: sense of own capability, internal locus of control, functioning in the classroom, sense of belonging and aspiration to higher education.

Changes in opinions, attitudes and behavior of Start graduates 2013-4, before joining and after completing the program (on a scale of 1-5)



- The program coordinators reported that participation in the program led to a definite decrease in involvement of students in disciplinary disturbances in school. For example, problematic behavior by Start students declined from 2.4 to 1.6 (on a scale of 1-5).
- Based on the latest records of the IDF, the rate of enlistment to military service among boy graduates of Start in 2010-1<sup>1</sup> was 91.7%. This is 17% higher than the general rate among boys in Israel (74.9%).
- Based on a survey of Start graduates, some 31.1% of the first cohort participants who were surveyed and who completed military service began academic studies by the 2013-4 school year, within seven years of graduating high school in 2007.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The findings show that the Start program succeeds in effecting deep changes in participants' thoughts and perceptions about themselves, their abilities and their place in society. These changes, along with the skills and learning practices they acquired through the program, constitute a platform for improving their social mobility and social integration.

---

<sup>1</sup>. The IDF has not yet released figures on 2011-2 and 2012-3 graduates.