April 20, 2020

Mr. Shmuel Abuab
Director of Ministry of Education

RE: Delay in Returning to Schools in Arab Society During Ramadan

Dear Mr. Shmuel Abuab,

We are reaching out to stress the importance of the upcoming weeks in light of the COVID-19 crisis, and the need to delay the return to schools across Arab society. We request a delayed return due to the recent outbreak across Arab communities, just as Ramadan is about to begin. In parallel, we request an immediate response to the digital gap in remote learning so that Arab students can continue their studies during this crisis.

As we warned at the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, the education system in Arab society was not prepared to transition to remote learning systems due to widespread digital gaps. These gaps have made remote learning, even before the outbreak, extremely difficult. These difficulties are now much more acute. School principals and administrators have expressed their frustration with remote learning systems and Arab students' lost learning potential at this time.

Remote learning is not attainable in most Arab schools, and a majority of students have not been in a school-based setting for over a month now. With the month of Ramadan approaching, when teaching is limited normally, these digital gaps cannot be ignored.

It should be noted that COVID-19 has only reached Arab communities this past week, and we are beginning to witness rapid spread of the virus. This is happening on the eve of Ramadan, a month of celebrations characterized by social and religious gatherings. Normally, many Muslims reduce their working hours during Ramadan due to fasting. School activities in Arab society end earlier than usual, and nearly half of the student body rarely attends school during the month of Ramadan.

In light of this situation, we request the following:
1. Extend the schools' vacation by two weeks to include the beginning of Ramadan, when studies are limited.
2. Shorten summer vacation to address the pedagogical gap created by the failure of remote learning and Ramadan.
3. Distribute 65,000 laptops equipped with NetStick (Internet connection in the absence of infrastructure) for each child, based on the mapping conducted in response to the COVID-19 crisis.

These measures are necessary to prevent the widening of the pedagogical gaps between Arab and Jewish students during the crisis, and to stop the spread of the virus during the month of Ramadan.

Sincerely,

Yael Maayan   Yaacob Ibrahim
Director of Education Department   Co-Director of Public Affairs