

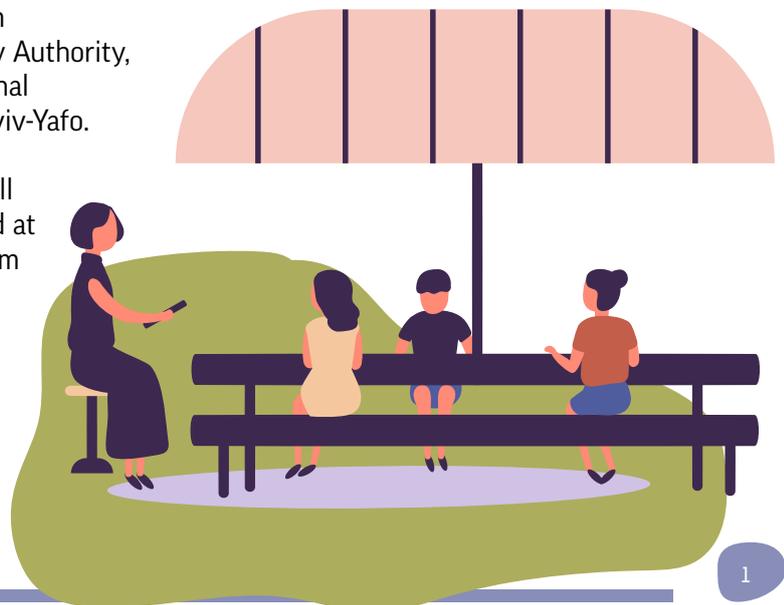
Education for Gender Equality

In the last 100 years, our world has witnessed change in all that concerns gender roles of women and men. Yet, in our society, from a young age girls and boys still internalize gender expectations about what suits girls and what suits boys. During childhood and adolescence, areas of interest are formed, traits and skills develop, and the confidence that girls and boys have in their abilities and their sense of self-efficacy take root. All these factors have an effect on how their future will look, on personal and professional aspirations, and on the choices girls and boys make later on in life.

The educational environment, like other environments, is influenced by gender bias that limits the ability of girls and boys to develop and succeed. Social constructs about what constitutes the “right” traits and areas of interest appropriate for boys and girls have an effect on them from an early age and become increasingly embedded in the years they spend in the formal education system. Girls and boys are exposed to overt and hidden messages regarding the gender roles expected of them, messages that become barriers to realizing their full human potential.

Gender equality education is actively and vigorously pursued in Tel Aviv-Yafo, and many kindergartens and schools in the city are advancing the matter in different ways. However, similar to the situation around the world and in Israel in general, in Tel Aviv-Yafo, as well, the action taken in this regard is mostly narrow in scope and typically does not have an effect on the educational culture as a whole.

In the municipal education system, teachers and administrators have an abundance of motivation, a high level of readiness, and a clear desire to deepen, expand and perfect the advancement of gender equality. This chapter, led by the Education Administration and the Resilience and Social Equality Authority, reviews the literature on gender bias in the educational environment and maps the current situation in Tel Aviv-Yafo. The chapter presents informative models from other places in the world and adopts a holistic plan that will affect how everyday pedagogical routines are shaped at the schools and kindergartens in the city, with the aim being to advance education for gender equality.



Gender Bias in the Educational Environment

Gender bias affects girls and boys from a young age, and as early as kindergarten one can see how gender identity and norms are embedded. Girls' and boys' interests, the way they play games in kindergarten, the choice of the toys and the design of the activity areas, the choice of roles and clothing, and their thoughts about the future – all these are influenced by gender constructs and reflect the gender roles expected of them. The girls and boys learn these roles from their surroundings, from their homes, and from their friends, and also from the stories and songs taught in kindergarten.

At the schools, gender bias is manifest in all layers of the educational environment, both in the overt curriculum as well as the hidden one. The first and most formal expression of gender inequality in education is found in the overt layer, namely in the curricula and textbooks: assumptions about gender, areas of interest, or traits appropriate for boys and girls can usually be inferred from them. Hence, they frequently do not mention the contribution of women to society, and women are depicted in them as having a role in the household space, and as being fragile, needy and sensitive. On the other hand, men are depicted as having a profession and as being entrepreneurial, strong, bold, assertive and rational.

The hidden curriculum includes everything that goes on informally within the walls of the school: social interactions, the communication between the educational staff and the students, and the school climate. It, too, normally contains messages that reinforce gender roles, and apparently is the factor with the most impact on gender socialization processes among girl and boy students. Teachers' perceptions of gender roles, which reflect the social perceptions prevalent in Israeli society, are a major factor that influences the hidden curriculum.

The social gender messages conveyed in the overt and hidden curricula affect views about studies in general, the choice about which subjects to study, the overall commitment to learning, scholastic achievements, and perceptions of ability and efficacy.



Research studies conducted in Israel and overseas indicate that girls are usually considered better students at school and quite often are higher achievers. However, as a result of internalizing gender messages, they are scared to take risks, experience low self-efficacy, participate less in class, play fewer ball games in the schoolyard, etc. It was also found that girls, more than boys, tend to identify failure as stemming from an internal source, as opposed to success which stems from an external source. All these, coupled with the desire to excel, result in girl students being less prone to explore new skills and territories. Rather, they are inclined to 'play it safe' and dare less when it comes to their studies.



This also affects boy students: from a young age, they realize that society expects them to be strong, self-confident and tough, and to 'go for it' at full speed. They are less inclined to ask for help, are more competitive and individualistic, take up more space at school, and focus on STEM subjects. Boy students have lower achievements in reading and generally have a more negative attitude towards school. They often feel that devoting time to their studies is not for them, they are tardy and unorganized and, in the end, drop out of school more.



BOYS TEND TO BE MUCH MORE DOMINANT THAN GIRLS IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

A comprehensive research study on schools in Israel found, for example, that boys participate in class twice as much as girls, raise their hands more frequently, and interrupt others more often.

(Pollak, Segal and Lefstein, 2015).



What did we learn from other parts of the world?

The OECD recommends reducing gender biases in education by training educational staff members and providing information about gender and education, developing critical awareness, and implementing teaching strategies aimed at narrowing gender gaps.

In Vienna, Austria, the REFLECT teacher training program encourages secondary school teachers to reflect on how they themselves are affected by gender stereotypes in their personal lives and in their teaching practices. The aim is to influence their own actions and challenge the views held by the students.

In England, the Gender Action program aims to challenge the stereotypes and gendered professional aspirations of girl and boy students by training the school staff and the parents. The goal of the program is to challenge and diminish the impact of gender constructs that hinder the realization of girls' and boys' potential. The holistic program is founded on an approach that addresses the entire educational continuum from early childhood to the end of secondary school.



The Municipal Initiative in Tel Aviv-Yafo

To deal with the sources of gender inequality and gender perceptions that take root among girls and boys from an early age, the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality aims to mainstream gender in education. In 2021, a comprehensive mapping was carried out in order to understand the needs emerging from the field and to design a working model customized to the city, while holding a dialogue with educational staff members and fully cooperating with them.

A review of the current situation suggests that over the years many kindergartens and schools in the city have adopted initiatives for advancing gender equality, although most of them were initiatives with a narrow focus. The faculties from different schools have a keen desire to expand the learning and implementation pertaining to this matter and integrate it institutionally and holistically. All the stakeholders stressed that the key to systemic and optimal advancement of gender equality at the kindergartens and schools lies in **the educational staff**. To achieve that, professional guidance and process-based training are needed in order to provide tools for identifying gender bias, for learning and experimenting with pedagogical practices that advance gender equality, and for the large-scale mobilization of the entire staff. Many schools expressed a desire to hold classroom discussions about the issue alongside perceptions of self-efficacy and self-confidence. They also want to make gender equality an area of knowledge and promote activism concerning the issue. At the kindergartens, the action arenas are somewhat different than those at schools due to the different nature of the kindergarten environment. They include, for example, books and story characters, language and images, the way in which the activity areas and the schoolyard are organized and, of course, the conversations and interactions with the kindergarten staff.

Based on all of the above, a municipal program for advancing education for gender equality was formulated. The aim of the program is to augment and develop the actions that can be taken at the kindergartens and schools and equip the educational staff with tools and customized pedagogical practices, while linking the program to other educational programs in place in the city. Because gender bias affects all the elements of the educational environment, the initiative hopes to have an impact on the kindergarten and school culture as a whole.

The initiative is intended not only for girls, but seeks to advance **gender equality for all**. As noted above, gender bias in the educational environment affects not only girls, but also boys in many ways. Consequently, advancing fundamental gender equality in education means removing gender barriers and creating an educational environment that facilitates learning, growth, and freedom of choice, so all girls and boys will be able to realize their human potential to the fullest.

The program's operating principles

1

The educational staff as change agents

focusing on training faculty members who are the primary agents of change, who have the power to shape the educational environment and influence the perceptions and development of girls and boys.

2

Changing regularities at all the educational environments

in terms of the curricula, teaching and learning practices, communication, discourse and language, and evaluation and feedback methods – and also in the social and community space.



3

Adapting the process to the cultural and community fabric

of each kindergarten and school, out of recognition of the intersectionality of gender and other identity factors that characterize the younger and older girls and boys, the members of the staff, and the community of parents.

4

Involving the community of parents in the initiative and working with the parenting centers.



Steps in the short term – Program Pilot



10
Kindergartens



9 Elementary
Schools



3 Secondary
Schools

A pilot program was launched in the 2021-2022 school year at ten kindergartens, nine elementary schools and three secondary schools in the city. The kindergartens and schools that were selected are from different parts of Tel Aviv-Yafo and have diverse characteristics.

The key steps that are being implemented under the pilot include:

- **A gender equality team** was established at each of the kindergartens and schools participating in the pilot program. The team is responsible for mapping the educational environment from a gender perspective, forming a plan for the future, and defining and implementing objectives for the work process.
- The gender equality teams receive **individual training and professional guidance all along the way**, which take into account the specific characteristics of each kindergarten or school. The gender equality teams also meet in a municipal forum to share knowledge and participate in peer learning.
- **Professional development** is provided to all staff members at the kindergartens and schools included in the pilot program (in tandem with the gender equality teams).
- Defining **anchors at the municipal level for all the kindergartens and schools in the city**, including: a week of special municipal events on the subject of gender, a content development hackathon for educational staff members, and more.
- **Developing evaluation and research tools** that will make it possible to draw conclusions and expand the pilot.

Steps in the medium and long term:

Based on the pilot, a municipal model will be defined that is tailored to the diverse kindergartens and schools in the city. It will include a holistic program for multiple age groups, founded on age-appropriate targets. The program will be implemented at all the educational institutions in the city, coupled with the design of municipal platforms for sharing and developing action-based knowledge.

[Click here to read the introduction and the other chapters of the plan >>](#)

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***Research and academic guidance:** Yael Boim-Fein, Director of The Israeli Institute for Gender Equality in Education