

The Jerusalem Policy Forum

A joint project of
The Peace and Democracy Forum and Ir Amim

From Dissonance to a Permanent Status Destination

**Toward Resolving the Educational Disparity in Jerusalem
Educational Development in East Jerusalem**

August 2007

From Dissonance to a Permanent Status Destination Toward Resolving the Educational Disparity in Jerusalem

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The Peace and Democracy Forum and Ir Amim

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The Jerusalem Policy Forum

Jerusalem is a city of vital importance to Palestinians and Israelis, as well as to three world religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Jerusalem is destined to play a pivotal role in any future political agreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

The Jerusalem Policy Forum is a joint project of the Peace and Democracy Forum, a Palestinian NGO, and Ir Amim, an Israeli NGO. The Jerusalem Policy Forum acts on the assumption that the optimal resolution of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians lies in a viable two-state solution, in which Jerusalem will serve as the capitals of both states. Therefore, the Forum is committed to thwart any action that may prejudice and prejudice the two-state solution in Jerusalem and its surroundings.

A steering committee from these organizations directs the work of the Forum:

- Prof. Elinoar Barzacchi
- Terry Boullata
- Avraham Burg
- Amos Gil
- Abdel Qader Hussein
- Prof. Nazmi al Ju'beh
- Saman Houry
- Sarah Kreimer

The Forum acts as a joint caucus for creating and advancing policies and actions which further Israeli and Arab Jerusalem in a manner that ensures the dignity and welfare of all residents, and safeguards their holy places and their historical and cultural heritages.

In addition, a broad network of Palestinian and Israeli experts on Jerusalem issues, from a variety of professional disciplines, implements the work of the Forum, aiming to create a reality more conducive to advancing final status negotiations on the issue of Jerusalem.

Background

As a result of Jerusalem's unique and still undetermined political status, the state of education in East Jerusalem is both extremely unusual and completely unacceptable. When, in 1994, control over education in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was transferred to the Palestinian Authority (PA) under the Oslo Agreement, the deferral of dealing with Jerusalem until final status negotiations meant that East Jerusalem was excluded from this transfer of control.

Following the Israeli occupation in 1967, the existing educational body, acting under the Jordanian authority in East Jerusalem, refused to adopt the Israeli curriculum as well as the Israeli authority. Accordingly, the education system split into two main educational administrations: municipal governmental Israeli and non-governmental, including the WAQF, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), and private schools. While basing their curricula on the common foundation of the existing Jordanian curriculum and later the new Palestinian curriculum, the various supervising educational authorities – the PA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the Israeli Authority, and private schools – currently work as distinct bodies.

The lack of a national authority with responsibility for the overall state of education in East Jerusalem together with 40 years of Israeli policies that aimed at weakening Palestinian educational institutions, as part of weakening the Palestinian society in East Jerusalem, resulted in physical shortages which are extremely detrimental to the education of thousands of students. This situation and the consequences of the complex political reality in East Jerusalem have converged to result in the current state of affairs: an uncoordinated aggregation of overcrowded and under-supplied educational institutions.

The Jerusalem Policy Forum seeks to improve the quality and accessibility of education in East Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Policy forum aims at providing the needs of the education system through empowering the Non-governmental system in East Jerusalem. Our review of the current research on the educational system(s) in East Jerusalem¹ has led us to the conclusion that this goal will best be accomplished by the implementation of new model schools to expand and enrich the non-governmental educational system- an ETPAC (Education Through Promoting an Active Community) educational model.

While working to strengthen the current educational systems is necessary, it is an endeavor which is extremely sensitive and difficult in the current political reality. This is the main reason why the new model schools within the non-governmental system are proposed here, as we believe this to be a relatively expedited method of providing a superb education to a large number of students.

¹ See: Ir Amim's report on education in East Jerusalem, *The Scandal Continues: An Assessment of the Arab-Palestinian Educational System in East Jerusalem in the 2007-2008 School Year*, the Coalition for the Advancement of Arab Public Education in East Jerusalem, Jerusalem 2007.

Additionally, the ETPAC educational umbrella would serve to promote mutual cooperation between the existing educational administrations, and could potentially be incorporated into the PA school system subsequent to political PA assumption of control over education in East Jerusalem.

The Problem

The following findings illustrate the critical state of education and the specific complexities which arise from the uncertain status of East Jerusalem:

1. Palestinian school-aged children, officially numbering almost 80,000, comprise more than 32% of the total Palestinian population in East Jerusalem. There are also an unknown number of Palestinian students who are not registered in the Israeli population registry, mainly due to having one parent who carries an Israeli ID card and one parent who carries a Palestinian ID card.
2. The challenge of having many unregistered students requires professional mapping in order to obtain a clearer picture of the dimensions of the problem. Currently, about 9,000 school-aged children are unaccounted for.
3. The annual population increase rate of 4.2% renders educational planning extremely difficult. For example, the number of Palestinian students in East Jerusalem ballooned from 60,000 in 2004-2005 to 80,000 in 2007. This is also due to population movement resulting from the construction of the wall.
4. In addition to the two distinct educational administrations in East Jerusalem, high quality PA schools in the West Bank as well as private schools in West Jerusalem each draw limited numbers of (economically stable) Palestinian students from East Jerusalem. Students who reside in the West Bank yet attend PA schools in East Jerusalem face the daily ordeal of passing through military checkpoints in order to travel to school.
5. The academic performance and level of educational achievement of the majority of Palestinian students in East Jerusalem is unsatisfactory.
6. The physical condition of schools does not meet modern standards and is for the most part unsuitable for educational purposes.

These conditions seriously jeopardize the chances of educational success for Palestinian Jerusalemite students, and render the par between East and West Jerusalem even greater. With fewer educational opportunities come fewer earning

opportunities, poorer socioeconomic conditions, and great frustration and embitterment.

In light of the aforementioned barriers to educational success and their serious ramifications, we propose a realistic and effective approach to higher quality and more accessible education for the growing Palestinian student population of East Jerusalem.

The Plan: The ETPAC Educational Coalition

I. Basic Principles

The proposed schools will function as a coalition, following a common philosophy while each operating with enough freedom to adapt to its own specific needs and goals. Designed as ‘community schools’, the role of parents and the community in school administration and management will be essential. During non-school hours, the schools will function as community centers which service the entire community at large.

The coalition will operate according to the following principles of practice:

1. The promotion of universal, humanistic and democratic values.
2. The promotion of a tolerant, open worldview with emphasis on the importance of diversity.
3. The promotion of peace, understanding and cooperation.
4. The promotion of excellence and honest competition.

II. School Governance

The coalition will be operated by a Palestinian supervisory board. The board will be responsible for outlining major coalition policies, strategic planning, personnel recruitment, financing and the monitoring and evaluation of individual schools.

However, individual school councils made up of parents, teachers, school administrators, students and community members, will be responsible for the direct management of each school. While these councils will be guided by the policies set by the supervisory board, the independence of each school council is a fundamental tenet of ETPAC philosophy.

With respect to their relationship with the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the Israeli Ministry of Education, and the municipality of Jerusalem, coalition schools will function as private schools. After determination of Jerusalem’s final status, the schools may be administered by the Palestinian Ministry of Education or remain privatized under PA supervision.

III. Curriculum

The curriculum will consist of a core program based on the new unified Palestinian (PA) curriculum, as well as a unique program designed specifically for coalition schools. This will ensure contiguity with the currently existing streams of education, while allowing the schools to fine tune their educational program to their own needs, desires and goals.

The core program will include Arabic, sciences, mathematics, computer science, English, history, geography, civics, literature, and art. The unique program will be centered on providing a humanistic education, and will also offer Hebrew as an optional language.

IV. Professional Training Center

The coalition will include a professional training center to be established simultaneously alongside the schools. Designed as a pedagogical institute, and serving all Palestinian educators in East Jerusalem, the center will have several functions:

1. Accreditation and training of teachers and principals.
2. Production of professional resource materials and provision of consultation services for educators.
3. Implementation of organizational development processes in schools.
4. Initiation and monitoring of a scholarship program to support outstanding students.
5. Running of after-school activities as well as guided homework preparation programs.
6. Expansion and strengthening of the relationship between parents, the community and the schools.

V. Financing

The four major sources of financing for the coalition will include:

- International support – for building and operational costs for the initial years.
- Direct municipal tax (*armona*) reductions should be arranged for parents whose children attend coalition schools, so that once they pay the school fees, they can present a receipt to the Jerusalem municipality to decrease their share of the *armona* tax.
- Funding from Palestinian national funds.
- Parental Participation – not to exceed twenty five percent. However, coalition schools will be accessible to all children regardless of parental ability to pay.
- Donations – from local, regional and international fundraising.

VI. Scope

The first phase of ETPAC should include the building of three to five schools, to be completed within three years of project commencement. Subsequently, five new schools should be opened every three years. This first phase will ultimately involve the building of fifteen schools with a combined capacity of 10,000-15,000 students aged 4-18.

VII. Implementation

On the one hand, Palestinians feel that Israel – as the occupier – should be responsible for education in East Jerusalem. On the other hand, there is a deep fear that such responsibility will serve to legitimize the continuation of occupation and increase Israelization of East Jerusalem.

Israel – as the governing authority – sees itself as being responsible for education in East Jerusalem, yet to a great extent has neglected its responsibilities in this regard and lacks the will and the budget to invest properly in this education.

We therefore recommend that an independent, professional body be created to manage the establishment and operation of the coalition schools.

Conclusion

The current situation negatively affects Israelis and Palestinians as well. The diverging socioeconomic gap between Palestinian and Israeli Jerusalemites – aggravated by the aforementioned educational problems– is leading to increasing discontent and hostility between the populations.

The need for serious action increases as the educational reality in East Jerusalem becomes grimmer with each passing day. Our proposal provides a method for significantly improving the quality and access to education for thousands of students.

The schools in this project will not only meet the urgent need for additional educational facilities, but will do so in a manner conforming to the particular needs of Jerusalemite students, and to the modern standards of the twenty-first century.

In light of the uniqueness of Jerusalem, the management of these schools will provide very useful experience in the administration of schools in Jerusalem. As well, the schools will empower students with creative thinking skills, a strong sense of community, and an appreciation for the multicultural nature of Jerusalem.

Most importantly, these schools will fill the void that currently exists in education in Jerusalem, providing an excellent education to thousands of Palestinian students. This will help enable Palestinian and Israeli Jerusalemites to build East and West Jerusalem equitably, allowing the city and its people to reach their full potential, and propelling them towards a political agreement.

Team Members

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