



NEWSLETTER

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A FEW WORDS FROM DR TZIONA LEVY DIRECTOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, ISRAEL

As the director of the English department in Israel's Ministry of Education I have spent my life in educating Israel's population focusing on English teaching, learning and assessment. I can see how increasingly important it is to have our school graduates use English efficiently. Israel must continue to take its place on the world stage, whether that be the political stage, the international world of business, or by contributing to other emerging countries around the world, and this world stage does not generally speak Hebrew. While we are a small country, we certainly punch above our weight when it comes to global contributions, participation, and being the topic of discussion, and our students need to have the tools that will enable them to participate in these tasks. In an increasingly globalized world, Israel would like to continue to lead and can only do so by enabling the participation of its citizens enhanced by the use of English.

The Jewish story and the story of Israel is one of resourcefulness, of a brotherhood that has leaned on each other to make great things happen. Jews and Non- Jews alike have contributed their skills and talents to challenge some of the greatest problems we have faced. Israel Connect is a perfect example of individuals contributing to making a large change that will impact the students in the State of Israel. Assisting a student with English once a week may seem like a "small thing", but by changing the trajectory for our youth, and opening doors of opportunity for them, it has a ripple effect while helping the telling of a collective story. I have personally witnessed the impact the Israel Connect program has had by using simple technology but incredibly devoted individuals. Thank you to all those who have participated, put in their best effort, and lent a hand to create a program truly spectacular.

Our Featured School- Aroni Alef Ashekelon

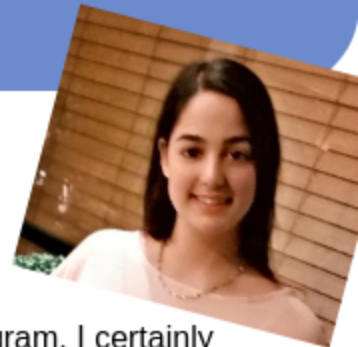
Ironi Aleph is a state comprehensive school located in Ashkelon. The school has about 1550 kids from various parts of the city. As a school, they really prioritize different interesting educational projects and programs. They especially place a lot of emphasis on ensuring that their students get to experiment with all types of technology. They are very proud that as a school they are considered a leading school in the region, with 90% of graduates entitled for Bagrut. As Ironi Aleph is close to the border, sometimes tension can rise in their city. It is so important for them to make their school a happy and safe place for all their students, a place where they can focus on a brighter future for their country.



From Our Director - Sarah Gordon

My favourite time of year is always the end of year. It is during the summer months that I have a chance to look back and analyze our results. What went well, what did not go well, and where we can improve. Our team works all summer in order to upgrade and create efficiencies to the Israel Connect program. As someone who was a middle school teacher for 7 years prior to founding Israel Connect, I can tell you the reason one goes into education is to see the type of results and receive the type of feedback we collect at the end of the year. There is nothing more encouraging than to hear of all our classes in which the students excelled. Classes in which students on the Israel Connect program took their English proficiency exams a year early (and skipped an entire grade) as they felt prepared by their mentors. Hearing about students who scored over 90% on their exams, and even more importantly, feel confident when using English. The feedback time and time again from students demonstrates how much they have gained and how much their mentor has cared.

As we have just started settling in a new year, it is always important to remember the incredible journey and opportunity that we will be giving a new group of students. A big thank you to all our teachers who tirelessly advocate for their students to ensure the schools have proper computer labs and equipment set up. Thank you to each and every mentor who gives of their time to patiently work with a student while they try to find their footing and become proficient in a foreign language. Thank you to everyone who shows up again and again despite the wrinkles, complications of working through multiple time zones, and shaky internet connections. I cannot wait to see what incredible accomplishments this year brings.



From a Student- Michal Shoval Danieli

When my teacher came into our classroom to present the Israel Connect program, I certainly felt it was an incredible opportunity as I would really like to improve my English. I have never really had an opportunity to really use English and I really did not want to let this pass me by.

Today in Israel many jobs require English and even in ones that it is not required, it boosts your salary substantially. You really need English for everything today to travel, to work, to communicate online. While it is many years away after my army service, I am considering a career in the physics or the sciences, and English would definitely be a requirement.

While I was happy for the opportunity, I was very scared. I am not a shy person, but I really did not feel that I could speak English. My mentor is great, he is so patient and takes the time to help me to pronounce tough words and explain the concepts to me. He makes me feel great about my English abilities, even though I know they are not so good.

This type of lesson is very different from the classroom lessons where we are given English rules and asked to write assignments. I do not feel that I really remember all the rules that were taught, but here I am actually learning the language while using it and I certainly feel that I retain much more of the information. I do feel that my English improves from week to week and more importantly I feel more confident. I look forward to my weekly session, so much so, that I wait an hour and 40 minutes after school to participate.

ABOUT THE BALTIMORE ASHKELON PARTNERSHIP

Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore strengthens and nurtures Jewish life by engaging and supporting community partners in Greater Baltimore, Israel and around the world. For over the past 15 years, through the Baltimore-Ashkelon Partnership, The Associated's sister-city relationship with Ashkelon, we have connected the people of Baltimore and Ashkelon through collaborative projects that build long-lasting and meaningful relationships, and a great love for Israel and the Jewish people. The Associated invests in projects that strengthen the bond between our communities and ensure a vibrant and strong community in Ashkelon.

The Edward A. Myerberg Center is a state of the art community center providing programming for adults ages 55 and older in Northwest Baltimore. The Center's mission is to inspire healthy aging through wellness, creativity, and connection. We are an innovative hub of activity that offers compelling programs in a warm and welcoming environment.

This past year we launched the Tech-Knowledge Hub at the Myerberg Center. The goal of the Tech-Knowledge Hub is to bridge the gap between technology and older adults by teaching older adults how to use smart devices to decrease social isolation and lead independent and connected lives.

We are so pleased to be a partner of the Israel Connect program which enables the Myerberg Center to meet the goals of increasing social connection through technology.

FROM ONE OF OUR MENTORS

AUSTIN COHEN

On Tuesdays, I attend the Bagel Boys Club at the Myerberg centre, where I get to schmooze with my friends while attending various lectures. One week we were introduced to Israel Connect, a new partnership between The Associated and the Myerberg centre. I immediately said, "Sign me up!" The idea of helping a young person with their education, specifically someone in Israel, really appealed to me. I believe that education is gold. I know how much education has led the path for me in my career and believe there is simply nothing more important than ensuring proper education for our next generation. If I can help in any way possible, I certainly am more than happy to do so.

My student was initially very shy but very keen to learn English. I wonder if she is actually not shy but rather hesitant in using a language that is not her own. As a matter of fact, one week, she wanted to ask her friend sitting next to her a question, turned to her friend and had a very loud and animated conversation in Hebrew. What a surprise for someone I was certain was a reserved person! Yet at the same time, she is a very dedicated student and has been very interested in learning. Her English is not bad at all and she reads the text weekly, and many times I work with her on the meaning of the more difficult words and their pronunciation. I certainly see her improvement from week to week, and it is wonderful to watch her confidence in the use of the language.

Despite being a very active member of the community, involved with The Associated and the Myerberg institute, I must admit that while I had heard about Ashkelon, I did not know where it was! Before our first session, I went to look it up on the map. Being part of the program has certainly highlighted to me about life in the region. Recently my student described to me that school had been closed for two days due to the escalation of tension with Gaza. I had not even been aware that there was significant escalation. It really hurts me to think that such a young student must be impacted.

Overall participating in the program has been a very positive experience for both of us. While my student's English continues to improve, I certainly enjoy the weekly sessions. I am very happy to be able to have been provided with the opportunity to give back.



From the
Principal
of Makif
Beit
Ashkelon
Yaniv
Akiva

I have the tremendous privilege to be the principal of the Amit Makif Beit school in Ashkelon. Our school services over 1,530 local boys and girls ranging from grades 7 to 12. It is a very diverse school, and we are very fortunate that a quarter of our student body is comprised of Ethiopian students who have chosen our school as the one that will take them to the next stage in their lives. This also presents an added challenge when it comes to teaching English, as it makes English their third language.

English is becoming more and more integral to our students. When our students graduate and finish the army, we hope for them to be able to attend the university program of their choice. Here in Israel, that University program is more likely than not to be in English. Israel is also a very small country and our economy relies heavily on trade, all of which is conducted in English. As a school that really seeks to have our students succeed in their life journey, and English could not be more essential. Our students understand this and are very motivated to acquire the language to pass their exams. Their army division, university programs, and future opportunities rely heavily on their grades.

Yet, here the challenge as an educator presents itself. How do I give students the opportunity for proper English language experiences in Ashkelon? When the Israel Connect program was presented to me I jumped on it. I myself spent two years teaching in Hebrew Academy of Montreal and experienced what immersion had on my language acquisition. While our students spend 6 hours a week studying English, in large classrooms of 30+ students they do not have the opportunity to use the language much.

At first, our students were hesitant, they were very self-conscious to speak a language they were not proficient in with a stranger. After having tried it, they love the program. They feel so accomplished having communicated and being understood in another language. For them, it is invaluable to have that time every week in which someone is listening to them speak English and working on their personal errors and areas for improvement. One student, in particular, comes to mind. After her first session, she came over to me and exclaimed, "Wow I did it! I spoke to someone in English and he understood me. He didn't even think my English was funny."

This personal connection has been even more valuable in recent weeks. With tensions rising in Gaza, our city received over 400 rockets in the course of 3 days. This meant school was cancelled, as it was too dangerous to go outside. One of our students lost his home to a rocket, and we had to treat some students for trauma. I know that living in Israel is an extraordinary privilege and this is the responsibility that comes along with it. I think it was very eye-opening for our students and their mentors to discuss the impact our circumstances have had on our students. While we may be oceans apart, I think it opens a new perspective for all when we can experience life together.

