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# **“Chanoch LaNa’ar” Program for Preventing Dropout from Haredi Yeshiva High Schools An Evaluation Study**

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# Abstract

## Background

The “Chanoch LaNa’ar” program (Educating Each Youth According to Their Own Way) has been implemented since 2016 under the supervision of the Division for the Education of Children and Youth at Risk in the Ministry of Education. The program aims to prevent overt dropout and hidden disengagement from school in **Haredi yeshiva high schools (yeshivot ketanot, or “small yeshivas”)** and to improve students’ academic performance and emotional and social well-being.

Within the program, each student is paired with a personal mentor. Mentors work with four students, either individually or in small groups, and receive ongoing guidance from a designated contact person in the yeshiva, typically the **“mashgiach” (a senior educational supervisor responsible for students’ educational, emotional, and spiritual well-being)**. Mentors receive professional supervision and support from **program coordinators**. The Ministry of Education commissioned the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute to conduct an evaluation of the program.

## Study Objective

The study examined the implementation of the “Chanoch LaNa’ar” program, focusing on its mechanisms of action, the experiences of participating students, and key implementation challenges.

It also explored how students, parents, mentors, and yeshiva staff perceived the program’s success in achieving its goals and identified possible directions for strengthening its effectiveness. In addition, the study profiled the needs of students referred to the program and highlighted factors that may shape its implementation and perceived outcomes.

The evaluation has several methodological limitations. Most notably, the absence of a comparison group prevents causal conclusions about the program’s impact. The study also does not include longitudinal measurement and relies primarily on subjective data sources. Despite these limitations, the findings provide a broad picture of program implementation and perceived contribution, while offering practical insights for further development.

## Method

The study used a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data collection included in-depth interviews with mentors, mentees, parents, yeshiva staff, and program coordinators; analysis of administrative program data; and surveys of **“mashgichim” (educational supervisors)** ( $n = 89$ ) and mentors ( $n = 130$ ) regarding individual students.

## Key Findings

### Program Participants (Mentees)

Most students referred to the program face academic and emotional challenges and show low motivation for learning. Some also experience family-related difficulties or engage in risk behaviors.

### Program Mentors

Mentors are **“avreichim” (married yeshiva scholars)**, typically aged 30–45, with prior experience working with youth. They are highly valued by students, parents, and staff. At the same time, mentors report the need for expanded training, particularly in addressing emotional and social issues.

### Working Relationships

Relationships among mentors, yeshiva staff, and coordinators were generally described as positive. At the same time, some mentors reported a need for better information flow from yeshiva staff and more extensive professional support from program coordinators.

Tensions also arise between expectations for reporting and the need to maintain confidentiality in mentoring relationships in order to build trust.

### Nature of the Mentoring

Nearly all students receive academic assistance from their mentor, and most also receive support in additional areas, particularly emotional support and help in coping with social challenges.

The mentoring provided through the program combines academic tutoring with meaningful relationship building, support, and empowerment, in line with the principles of therapeutic pedagogy.

However, in many yeshivas, mentoring sessions focus primarily on academic learning, while social and emotional support is often provided outside paid hours. This may diminish the non-academic component of the mentoring model.

## **Students' Perceptions of Mentoring**

The students interviewed reported looking forward to meetings with their mentor and expressed satisfaction with the support they receive, especially academic assistance. However, they expressed a desire for additional meeting time, particularly individual sessions focused on non-academic topics. Some students reported that they had not been informed in advance that they would receive mentoring, and their responses to this varied.

## **Parental Involvement**

The findings indicate that some parents are not substantially involved in aspects related to mentoring, and some are not even aware that their children are receiving mentoring. At the same time, mentors who maintained contact with parents reported that such communication greatly supports the success of the mentoring process.

## **Satisfaction and Areas for Improvement**

All stakeholders in the program expressed satisfaction with the program and its contribution to students. However, yeshiva staff called for improvements in the number of mentor positions and the number of hours allocated per mentor, as well as better integration of mentoring with additional services such as assessment and treatment. Mentors highlighted the need for increased working hours and/or improved compensation, along with more ongoing professional support from program management and coordinators.

## **Perceived Improvement in Students' Academic Performance and Emotional and Social Well-being**

"Mashgichim" estimated that 86% of students showed significant improvement in mood since the beginning of mentoring. In addition, 70% or more of the students were reported to have shown substantial improvement in the other domains examined: understanding of learning materials, social engagement, behavior, and motivation for studies.

## **Factors Associated with Perceived Improvement**

Analysis of the data showed that higher assessments of improvement were reported when:

- The "mashgiach" consistently shared information about the student with the mentor
- The "mashgiach" consulted with the coordinator or program management
- Parents contacted the "mashgiach" and/or mentor and sought their advice

## **Key Challenges**

The findings point to several challenges in implementing the program:

- A gap between students' needs and the available resources
- Ambiguity regarding the mentor's role and boundaries within the yeshiva
- The need to balance academic support with emotional and social support

Additional challenges relate to parental involvement and to addressing complex difficulties requiring professional assessment or treatment beyond the mentoring framework.

## **Recommendations**

The recommendations focus on strengthening mentors' training and professional support, and on clarifying the structure of the mentoring setting, including defining the roles and responsibilities of mentors, yeshivas, and coordinators. Additional recommendations address improving collaboration among stakeholders and enhancing parental involvement in the mentoring process. It is also recommended to develop systematic measurement mechanisms and to strengthen links between the program and external services in the areas of counseling, assessment, and treatment.