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Arab education plagued by problems

By [Eli Ashkenazi](#), Haaretz Correspondent

The 5,000-classroom shortage in Arab schools is but one of the numerous problems plaguing the Arab education system, according to data the Higher Arab Monitoring Committee presented during a news conference Wednesday in Nazareth.

Due to the shortage, Arab local authorities are forced to rent private buildings to use as classrooms. "The average cost of a rented classroom is about NIS 30,000 a year, while the Education Ministry allocates only some NIS 8,600 a year per classroom. The Arab authorities, which are already on the verge of collapse, finance the difference," said Shauki Hatib, chairman of the national committee of Arab authority heads.

Nabia Abu-Salah, chair of the national committee for Arab education, cited a host of deprivations in the Arab education system. For example, the state spends an average of NIS 4,935 on each Jewish pupil, but only NIS 862 on each Arab pupil.

In 2005 the state earmarked resources for only five preschools in the Arab communities. More than 65 percent of preschools are run privately, with no supervision of conditions or the teachers' qualifications.

Israel's 430,000 Arab pupils comprise about a quarter of all students. Their dropout rate is 12 percent - 70 percent at schools in the unrecognized villages in the Negev - compared to 6 percent in Jewish schools. Only some 31 percent pass their matriculation exams, compared to 53 percent of the Jewish pupils.

"We will open the school year, but as of September 18 we will put up a protest tent outside the Prime Minister's Office, and perhaps call a strike in the education system," Hatib said.

He said the state must allocate an additional NIS 600 million to Arab education. "We ask the Education Ministry to sit with us to sort out the acute problems," he said.

Abu Salah said the committee recommended adopting the Dovrat reforms with a few reservations, like adjusting infrastructures, respecting teachers' rights and finding financial resources to feed children in communities where the parents and authorities cannot foot the bill.

The first stage of the Dovrat report was implemented this year in nine Arab local authorities, including Reine, near Nazareth. "Implementing the report would enable us to close the gap and give us an equal chance, if they adjust the infrastructures and give us more classrooms," said Reine council head Jamal Zaidan.