

## Education Ministry Drops Controversial New Anti-Cheating Exam Rules

Plan to make students be in classrooms 45 minutes before exam proves a nonstarter.

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The Education Ministry announced on Monday it had reversed its previous decision that required students taking matriculation exams to be isolated in classrooms 45 minutes before tests started in order to prevent cheating.

The ministry said it would change the way it distributes the exams to schools, and students would now only be required to turn over their cellphones 30 minutes before the exam, and then be allowed to wait outside the classroom until the exam starts. The new rules will come into effect tomorrow with the math matriculation exam.

The ministry had taken a number of steps to cut down on cheating, after a wave of tests were leaked to students this year – not necessarily just by students.

Under the new rules, half of the schools administering the exams will receive the forms directly from the ministry, which will dispatch them by courier – and not via the local post office as it did previously. The other half will appoint two representatives on behalf of the school who will collect the exams from the local post office. They will sign for the envelopes at the post office and be responsible for guarding them until the exam starts.

One of the changes the ministry tried to implement – but has now decided to stop – was for schools to download the exams via the Internet 45 minutes before the exams were scheduled to start, and print them out for students. This method will now be used only in emergencies.

Two matriculation exams were held on Monday according to the now jettisoned rules, so in practice they applied only to these two tests, Arabic and French. The mooted new rules had met almost universal opposition from teachers, parents and students – including demonstrations and strikes at several schools.

This was the first major decision that the new education minister, Naftali Bennett, was involved in.