

Israel's English-language Matriculation Exams Switched After Questions Leaked

For the fourth time this year, test forms were posted on social media networks.

The matriculation exam in the English language was held on Monday as scheduled, but the test forms were exchanged with different questionnaires, after one of the original examination booklets was leaked to social media networks.

The test booklet that was leaked was for the three-point and four-point examinations. The apparent source was in one or more Arab high schools in the so-called Little Triangle, an area in central Israel that is roughly bounded by the Arab towns of Baka al-Garbiyeh, Taibeh and Tira.

The examination, which began at 4:45 P.M. on Monday, was nearly canceled but in the end the Education Ministry decided to go ahead with it and even gave the students an extra half hour to complete the questions.

It was the fourth time this year in which a matriculation exam has been leaked to the social networks. This is one of the most comprehensive exams, consisting of seven separate exam booklets. Around 200,000 students take it every year. In the previous instances this year, the sections of the exam that were made public were scrapped.

Last week the Education Ministry announced the cancellation of two parts in the matriculation exam in Hebrew language and literature for the Arab sector, after they were leaked to social networks. The leak was discovered shortly before the exams were to be held. The exams have not yet been rescheduled.

In January the matriculation exam in Arabic literature was canceled at the last moment after the test questions were leaked, as was a three-point mathematics exam, for the same reason.

Education Ministry Director General Michal Cohen said last week that the latest incident was very serious and that she did not intend to ignore it, especially in light of the earlier leaks this year.

“Maintaining the integrity of the exams is a supreme value that is supposed to serve as a guiding principle in the school system. Undermining this value is a serious and blatant violation of our educational work. Grades should be achieved through hard, consistent and fair study.”

Cohen instructed the ministry’s testing department to file a police complaint immediately in order to bring the full force of the law to bear against the offenders.

On Sunday, hundreds of Arab high-school students held a rally in Nazareth to protest last week cancellation of the matriculation exam in Hebrew language and literature for schools in the Arab sector. The demonstrators held signs with slogans that included “No more cancellation of exams, no more collective punishment of Arab students.” A number of Arab Knesset members joined the students, including the chairman of the Joint Arab List, MK Ayman Odeh.

“The students are angry. They study for weeks and suddenly there are people who don’t want there to be a test and they leak the exams,” said Mahmoud Agbariya, the chairman of the Arab student council

and one of the organizers of Sunday's protest. "There are students who want to apply to university for next year and now they can't because it's unclear when the makeup exam will be held. I'm opposed to leaking, and to students who don't uphold the testing standards, but the Education Ministry is applying collective punishment that's overly harsh. Not all the students are to blame that there's a leak."

A senior at a school in the Nazareth area told Haaretz that already at 1:30 P.M. some students had a photocopy of the test. "The first photocopy on WhatsApp wasn't clear, but towards 2 P.M. everything flowed and almost the entire exam was already on the social networks. Many of the students sat and studied the leaked exam thoroughly. The teachers and principals also found out, and felt very uncomfortable with this issue and didn't know what to do."

MK Esawi Freige (Meretz) claims the Education Ministry employed a double standard when it decided not to cancel yesterday's English exam after canceling three previous exams for the Arab sector this year when leaks were discovered. "When matriculation exams for the Arab sector are leaked they immediately cancel the exams and cause anguish to the Arab students who studied for the test. But when the exam is not for Arabs only, the Education Ministry uses all the means at its disposal in order to administer the exam, and not to harm the non-Arab students, God forbid," Freige said.

Continuing, he said, "The finger is much lighter on the trigger when it comes to canceling exams for Arabs. I'm in favor of the Education Ministry's decision to administer the exam and not to disappoint the students who studied, but I also expect the ministry to behave similarly when Arab students only are being tested."

Ariel Levy, pedagogical director at the Education Ministry, said that when a leak is discovered, cancelling the test for everyone is the only way the ministry has of dealing with the problem in real time. He said it is not a malicious form of collective punishment.