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HAARETZ

English Edition

Tel Aviv backtracks, will not open bilingual school in Jaffa

About 60 Jewish and Arab kindergarten classmates will have to part ways next year after municipality backs out of plan.

By Yarden Skop | Jan. 30, 2015



An Israeli classroom. Photo by Dan Keinan

The Tel Aviv municipality will not enable opening a bilingual school in Jaffa in the coming school year, renegeing on a promise to parents of some 60 kindergarten children, the parents say. Almost 100 children aged 3-6 currently attend bilingual kindergartens in Jaffa. Their parents want them to continue studying in Hebrew and Arabic, in a framework combining Arab and Jewish children similar to the bilingual school in Jerusalem.

The parents of the children due to start first grade said they had negotiated with the city for months and had been promised that an independent first-grade bilingual class would open next school year. However, at the beginning of January municipal officials suggested that the classroom operates as part of an existing high school, which the parents say is not suitable for the program.

A municipal source confirmed the city had offered the parents of the bilingual kindergarten children to open a first grade as part of the Kiryat Hinuch school in Jaffa.

The parents said they met the school principal and submitted a list of requests and instructions on how the bilingual class was to operate. But at that point the principal refused to continue talking with them, they said. He also refused to visit the bilingual school in Jerusalem to see how studies were conducted there, they said.

“It’s ridiculous that after the city supported the bilingual program for several years it will end in the kindergarten,” said one of the parents, Ilan Lonai Weiner. “My daughter speaks fluent Arabic and she’s not even six years old yet. But without continuity this won’t last. The municipality prides itself on coexistence, but doesn’t want it to continue.”

The parents wrote in their statement, “in the absence of continuity, the move to set up bilingual education in Jaffa will die and with it the hope for a shared life for Jaffa’s people. The entire project is in danger now and we’re risking parents taking their children to private institutions. It will be another blow to public education in Jaffa.”

The municipality denied it had promised the parents anything. “After examining the issue it was decided there was no place for two schools in the same area,” read a municipal statement.