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GRAPEVINE

• By GREER FAY CASHMAN

■ ARAB CITIZENS of Israel today have a much better opportunities to attain a higher education than in the past. They will continue to do so based on the initial success of the Council for Higher Education's (CHE) 2017-22 multi-year plan to double the representation of Arabs in higher education.

The CHE's goal, set on the basis of the proportion of Arabs in Israeli society as a whole, was met three years early. According to data for the 2007-08 academic year, the number of Arab undergraduate students was 21,534, about 10% of the total number of undergraduates in Israel. A decade later, in 2017-18, 39,160 Arab students are studying for a bachelor's degree. Currently, Arab students make up 17% of the student body, and the CHE is very close to reaching its target of 21%, which is the percentage of Arabs in the country's population.

Thanks to the broad support system provided, the number of Arab students almost doubled within a decade. The number of Arab students pursuing master's degrees grew by 228%. The number of doctoral students increased by 115%.

The CHE's holistic approach for integrating Arab students in Israeli higher education includes the Rowad program and 800 Irteka scholarships per year, which provide assistance both before acceptance to universities and colleges and while enrolled.

The Rowad ("Gate to Academia") program for high school students functions in approximately 45 regional clusters and exposes young people to available options

in higher education. The program provides information, counseling and academic guidance, as well as support for relevant courses (e.g. preparation for the psychometric aptitude test), college tours and a higher education fair in cooperation with local educational institutions.

Special programs are offered for Arab students in pre-academic preparatory programs. Assistance is also available in language enrichment in Hebrew and English, as well as offering academic, economic and social support for students enrolled in academic institutions.

The CHE's planning and budgeting committee (PBC) supports academic excellence and gives scholarships to outstanding Arab-Israelis who are studying for master's degrees, doctorates and post-doctoral fellowships.

Once students graduate, they face the challenge of finding employment. The CHE funds career centers at academic institutions to guide and integrate them into the labor market. The PBC also supports the hiring of Arab staff by offering scholarships for the integration of outstanding faculty in teaching positions.

PBC chairperson Prof. Yaffa Zilbershats, said, "The revolution of integrating Arab students into higher education is very good news for Israeli society in general, and for Arab society in particular. Thanks to a comprehensive, holistic program, personal accompaniment and guidance, we have successfully opened the gates of higher education to Arab students, and removed barriers that have existed for decades. Academia is the key to reducing gaps, social leadership, employment and integration into Israeli society."