Belize Education Sector

Plan 2021-2025

MAKING EDUCATION WORK FOR BELIZE!

MoECST

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

The Belize Education Sector Plan 2021-2025 sets out the Ministry of Education's vision and plan for Making Education Work for Belize. This plan has been developed at a time of great challenge for our Nation as we continue to face an unprecedented economic crisis brought on by the devastating COVID Pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed and widened the learning gaps in our education system particularly in our most vulnerable rural communities where the information technology infrastructure is virtually nonexistent.

Technology is central to our Education Sector Plan. We must embrace its use and we must be bold, creative, and progressive in its application to the needs and requirements of our 2021-2025 education system.

Our philosophy and vision, outlined in this Plan, are grounded in the simple yet fundamental truth that the ultimate goal of Education is improving quality of life. The more knowledge, information, and skills you possess, the greater the likelihood of you leading a more productive and meaningful life and the more likely you are to contribute positively to the development and upliftment of your family, community, and country.

This Plan is built on a commitment to Access, Equity, and Quality. Our plan is student centered and focused on student learning outcomes. Our education system continues to fail too many of our people. We must reverse this devastating reality with a sense of purpose and urgency. With over 100,000 students enrolled in our education system from pre-school to university, we have a unique opportunity to shape the future, change the future, build the future. I invite you to read this Plan and to join our efforts to "Make Education Work for Belize."

Hon. Francis W. Fonseca
Minister, MoECST
Belize

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER OF STATE

Thank you for your efforts to make education work for all Belizeans. It requires our combined contributions to ensure that our students receive virtuous values and principles, and innovative knowledge and skills relevant to attaining sustainable human development. All Belizeans must have the real opportunity to access a high-quality education at an affordable cost to achieve their goals and dreams. Together we should work to ensure the best for our students and our country.

The responsibility to deliver on this vision for education rests with all stakeholders, who comprise the entire country. Students, parents, teachers, principals, managements, the Ministry of Education, the Government of Belize, the private and NGO sectors, the religious and civil society communities, along with our international partners, all play a key role in the transformation of our education system. Our *Belize Education Sector Plan: Making Education Work for Belize, 2021-2025 (BESPlan)* lays out this exciting path that we are traveling together.

The sustainable human development of Belize depends on our success in realizing *BESPlan*. The economic, social, institutional, and environmental pillars of Horizon 2030 need your active human agency to enhance the capabilities of every Belizean, so that each person in our country may be able to function at her or his best desired state of wellbeing.

Our team at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology looks forward to collaborating with you in genuine partnership as we all execute *BESPlan*, and at the national level, endeavor for *"…peace, social justice, liberty, national happiness, the increase of industry, sobriety, and useful knowledge"* (Belizean National Prayer).

Hon. Louis Zabaneh
Minister of State, MoECST
Belize

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Tables and Figures

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACE	Adult Continuing Education
AD	Associate Degree
AG	Attorney General
AO	Administrative Officer
BBTE	Belize Board of Teacher Education
BD	Bachelor's Degree
BEMIS	Belize Education Management Information System
BJAT	Belize Junior Achievement Test
BTSC	Belize Teaching Service Commission
BZ	Belize
BzNVQ	Belize National Vocational Qualifications
CANTA	Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies
CAPE	Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CDB	Caribbean Development Bank
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CEdO	Chief Education Officer
CSEC	Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate
CVQ	Caribbean Vocational Qualifications
CY	Cayo
CZ	Corozal
DCEdO	Deputy Chief Education Officer
DEC	District Education Centre
EAR	Education [Amendment] Rules
ECDI	Early Childhood Development Index
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESS	Education Support Services
ETA	Education and Training Act
ETES	Employment Training and Education Services
FO	Finance Officer
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ITVET	Institute for Technical and Vocational Education and Training
IU	Implementing Unit
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
KRA	Key Result Area
LFS	Labour Force Survey
MD	Master's Degree
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoECST	Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology
MoEYSC	Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture

MPS	Ministry of Public Service
NCTVET	National Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
OOSCI	Out-of-School Children Initiative
OW	Orange Walk
PEU	Project Execution Unit
PPRE	Policy, Planning, Research and Evaluation
PSE	Primary School Examination
QADS	Quality Assurance Development Services
SC	Stann Creek
SEN	Special Education Needs
SIB	Statistical Institute of Belize
SICA	Sistema de la Integración Centroamericana (Central American Integration System)
STC	Science and Technology Coordinator
TL	Toledo
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
TWG	Technical Working Group
UB	University of Belize
UNDP	United Nations Development Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Country Context

POPULATION

Belize is a Caribbean nation of 8,867 square miles, located on the northeastern coast of Central America. The country is bordered in the north by Mexico, the west and south by Guatemala and the east by the Caribbean Sea. The population is culturally and linguistically diverse and spread over six administrative districts, each with its own unique environmental, economic and demographic characteristics. Belize's population is estimated to be around [1]400,000 with slightly more rural (55%) than urban (45%) inhabitants and with equal percentages of males and females.

The majority of the population, 65.8%, are 15-64 years of age, another 29.2% are 0-14 years of age, and those 65 years and older make up the remaining 5%. Figure 1 shows that over the last ten years, this latter age group, though small, grew by 46.1%. This is in contrast to the 0-14-year old population which grew by less than 1%

over the same period. This pattern is typical of populations experiencing declining birth rates and an increasingly aging population.

Figure 2 illustrates recent changes in the school-age population, specifically those 3-4 years (pre-primary), 5-12 years (primary), 13-16 years (secondary) and 17-21 years ([2]tertiary). This portion of the population stood at 148,207 or 37.3% of the total population in 2020.

Consistent with the broader demographic trends, the largest increase in school-age population, 17.5%, occurred in the tertiary age group, the secondary and pre-primary age groups also increased, but only slightly, by 4.5% and 2.9% respectively, while the primary school age population declined by 2%.

FIGURE 1 POPULATION BY AGE GROUPS, 2011-2020
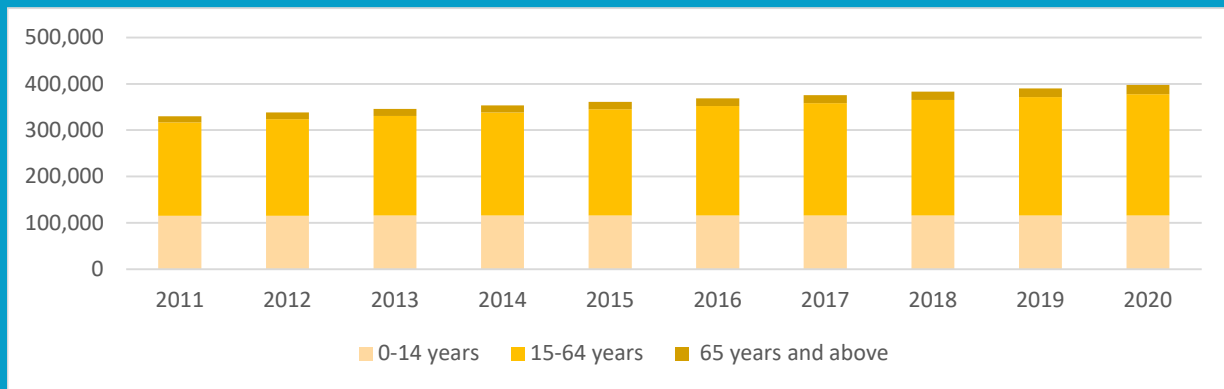
Source: UNDP, 2020

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[1] Population figures used in this sector plan were sourced from the United Nations Population Fund (UNDP) database which estimates the 2020 population to be 397,628.

[2] The terms 'tertiary education' and 'higher education' are used interchangeably in this document to refer to the level of education following secondary. It includes post-secondary and higher programs offered by junior colleges and universities.

FIGURE 2 SCHOOL-AGE POPULATION, 2011 AND 2020
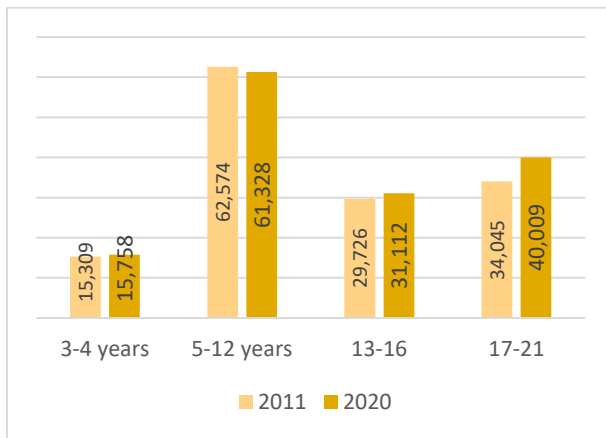
Source: UNDP, 2020

Major ethnic groups in Belize include Mestizos/Hispanics who, according to the country's 2010 Census, made up 47.9% of the population and the majority of inhabitants in the Corozal, Orange Walk, Cayo and Stann Creek districts. Creoles are the next largest ethnic group at 25.9% and form the majority of inhabitants in the Belize District. Other major ethnic groups include the Maya (Ketchi, Mopan and Yucatec) who make up 11.3% of the population and are the majority group in the Toledo District and Garifunas, East Indians and Mennonites who make up 6.1%, 3.9% and 3.6% of the total population respectively.

The 2010 Census also reported a wide variety of religious affiliations with the largest group, 40%, being Roman Catholics and 15% having no religious affiliation. Unlike other Central American countries, Belize's official language and the language of instruction in schools is English. However, the languages most often spoken in homes include Spanish, Belizean Creole (Kriol), the three Mayan languages, Garifuna, German and Chinese.

Implications for Education

Despite its diversity, Belize has maintained a stable parliamentary democracy without major ethnic or religious conflict and there has been frequent and peaceful transitions of power between the country's two major political parties since its independence from Great Britain in 1981. This socio-political backdrop has important implications for education planning. For example, the heterogeneity in ethnicity, religious beliefs and home language should be taken into account in the design and delivery of national curriculum, teacher training programs and student assessments. Failure to do so can affect the success of reform initiatives and reduce the achievement of expected outcomes.

School-age population trends also require attention as these have implications for the supply of education services and distribution of resources. As the upper secondary, tertiary and adult education sectors expand, increased investments in facilities and staffing will be needed to address the increased demands for education services by those age groups. Finally, in implementing education policies, consensus must always be sought among diverse social and political lines so that initiatives can be sustained towards the achievement of educational goals.

Economy

Table 1 outlines trends in Belize's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) from 2000 to 2019. Preliminary figures for 2019 indicate that economic activities generated an annual GDP of BZ$2.88 billion. Belize's economy is service sector-driven, with tourism being the largest driver within that sector. These tertiary industries accounted for 74.7% of GDP, an increase from 63% in 2000. The share of GDP from primary and secondary industries declined by 6 and 5 percentage points respectively over the same time period.

Despite declining contributions to GDP, primary industries remain critical for employment and foreign exchange earnings. Major exports include sugar, banana, citrus concentrate and marine products, which go primarily to the United States, Europe and the Caribbean. Exports brought in BZ$413 million in 2019; however, imports of machinery and transportation equipment, mineral fuels and lubricants, manufactured goods, food and chemicals, among other goods, cost BZ$ 1,972 million that same year.

TABLE 1 GROSS DOMESTIC PRODUCT BY ACTIVITY (BZ$ MILLION)

Industry	2000	2010	2019p
Primary Industries	*252.8*	*353.2*	*274.6*
Agriculture and forestry	181.6	237.9	237.0
Fishing	62.2	103.7	27.7
Mining and quarrying	9.0	11.5	10.0
Secondary Industries	*299.5*	*483.9*	*384.6*
Manufacturing	158.2	299.3	171.6
Electricity and water supply	58.4	130.9	114.6
Construction	82.8	53.6	98.4
Tertiary Industries	*938.5*	*1,429.0*	*1,945.2*
Wholesale and retail trade, repairs	270.7	354.1	583.5
Hotels and restaurants	58.5	81.0	122.2
Transport, and communication	141.7	206.9	242.2
Financial intermediation	103.8	285.7	258.7
Real estate, renting and business services	98.2	146.1	244.1
Community, social and personal services	100.7	132.7	153.0
General government services	164.8	222.5	341.4
Less: Financial services indirectly measured	35.2	166.6	129.7
All Industries at Basic Prices	*1455.6*	*2099.5*	*2474.7*
Taxes less subsidies on products	208.6	299.0	411.8
GDP at Market Prices	*1,664.1*	*2,398.5*	*2,886.4*

Source: Statistical Institute of Belize

Belize's per capita income places it in the category of an upper middle-income country; however, a large portion of the population is classified as poor. A recent Poverty Study report by the SIB placed Belize's poverty rate at 52% in 2018, up from 41% in 2009. As Figure 3 shows, Toledo had the highest rate of poverty as well as the largest increase in poverty over the time period, followed by Orange Walk and Cayo. This is in contrast to 2009 when the highest poverty rates were in the Toledo, Corozal and Stann Creek districts. Additionally, rates of poverty are highest among children, 0-14 years of age (59.8%), households headed by persons of Mayan ethnicity (77%), households headed by persons who had completed only a primary level education (55%) and those who had not completed any level of education (64%).

Rates of poverty are also traditionally higher in rural than urban areas. Since the study was conducted prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is likely that current poverty rates are much higher, with rates for districts most dependent on industries such as tourism experiencing the greatest increases.

As shown in Figure 4, compared to neighboring countries such as Honduras and Costa Rica, which had similar growth rates in 2014, Belize's growth rate declined significantly by 2016, while that of the two other countries increased. Also, although all three countries experienced overall declines between 2014 and 2019, Belize's decline was the most pronounced, ending the period with a GDP growth rate of just 0.3%.

FIGURE 4 GDP GROWTH RATE, 2014-2019
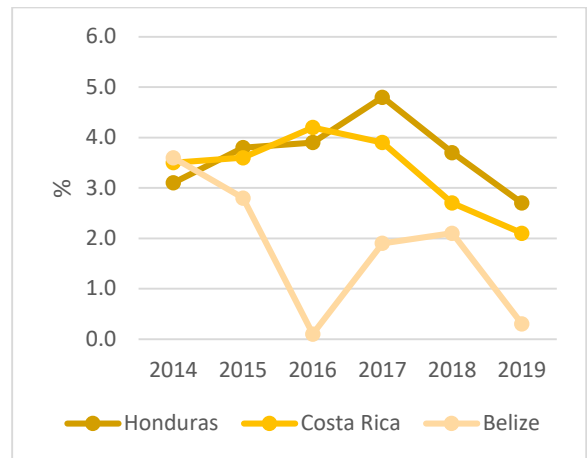
Source: World Bank

FIGURE 3 POVERTY RATES BY DISTRICT, 2009 AND 2018
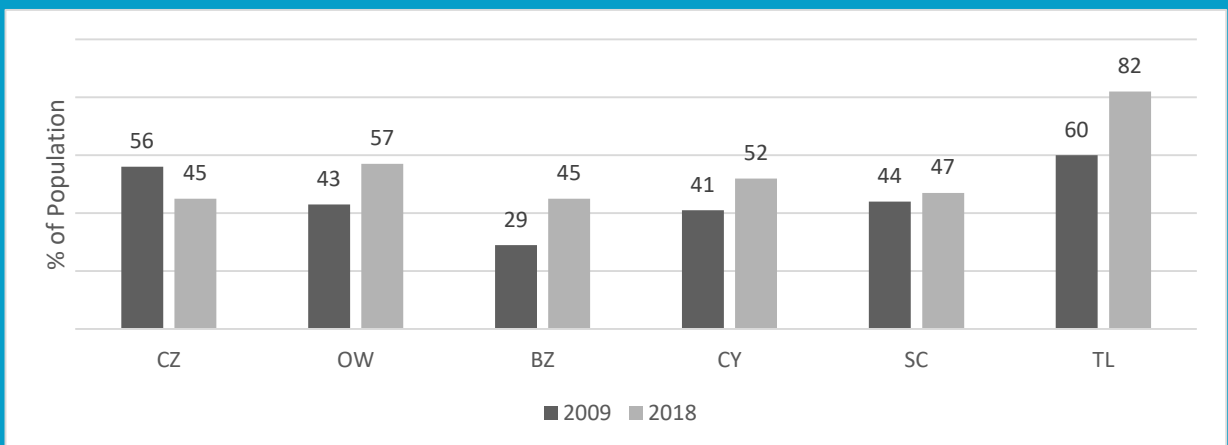
Source: Statistical Institute of Belize

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has weakened Belize's economic position even further. The SIB's Labour Force Survey reported an unemployment rate of 13.7% in September of 2020. There were 38,909 persons without work or out of the labour force due to the pandemic. Job losses in the Tourism Industry accounted for almost 30% of that number, as the share of employed persons in that sector went from 17.9% in September 2019 to 8.1% in 2020. There were big job losses in the 'Wholesale and Retail and Motor Vehicle Repairs' and 'Community, Social and Personal Services' industries as well. Many of those who remained employed reported reduced or partial wages and reduced work hours.

Implications for Education

Belize's large trade imbalance, heavy reliance on a few export commodities and primarily North American tourists make it extremely vulnerable to the impact of both natural disasters and global economic downturns. This fact has been made evident with the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the country's geographic location places it in the middle of both the hurricane belt and the illicit drug trade between North and South America. Increased unemployment is likely to create even higher rates of crime and juvenile delinquency.

The implications for education are clear. Reduced family income limits access and participation in education and increases the need to provide financial support to such families. This means that efficient use of resources, initiatives to address disparities, and increased social support services are critical.

2. The Education System

[3]SERVICE DELIVERY

The system of education in Belize is divided into four levels: pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary, as illustrated in Figure 5. Education from the pre-primary to the secondary level takes 14 years; however, only primary school is currently compulsory.

FIGURE 5 STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Education services are delivered by three types of institutions 1) government schools, which are owned, funded and managed by the Government of Belize; 2) government-aided schools, which receive public grants but are owned and managed by religious or community groups; and 3) private institutions, which are owned by private persons or entities and receive little or no public funding.

Table 2 lists the number and type of schools by district. As shown, 62% of all preschools, 65% of all primary schools, 48% of all high schools and 77% of all tertiary institutions are government-aided schools. Additionally, there are five government and one government-aided TVET institution; and three government, three government-aided

TABLE 2 NUMBER AND TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

District	Level and Funding Category													
	Pre-schools			Primary Schools			High Schools			Junior Colleges			Universities	
	G	GA	P	G	GA	P	G	GA	P	G	GA	P	GA	P
TOTAL	229			310			61			11			2	
	39	142	48	58	201	51	17	29	15	2	9	0	1	1
BZ	8	28	16	6	44	9	7	10	1	0	3	0	0	0
CY	9	24	16	15	42	20	2	7	8	0	2	0	1	1
CZ	6	30	1	6	34	2	1	4	1	1	2	0	0	0
OW	8	13	5	12	22	8	2	3	3	0	1	0	0	O
SC	4	22	8	5	21	8	3	2	1	1	1	0	0	0
TL	4	25	2	14	38	4	2	3	1	0	0	0	0	0

Source: PPRE Unit, MoECST

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[3] Mrs. Yvonne Flowers from the PPRE Unit made significant contributions to the Education System section of the analysis.

and five private Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) institutions. A variety of non-formal skills-based institutions and programs also operate within the system.

STUDENT ENROLMENT

Total enrolment in the formal education system declined slightly, by 1.8%, between 2015 and 2019. Preliminary figures for the year 2020, however, indicate a more significant decline in total enrolment between 2019 and 2020.

Table 3 shows that the levels most affected by this decline were pre-primary, primary and tertiary, which decreased by 33%, 4.7% and 8.6% respectively. This decrease in enrolment is most likely attributed to the economic impact of the pandemic and the prolonged school closure from March 2020 to March 2021. Prior to 2020, trends in school enrolment at the pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary levels were more or less consistent with population trends for those age groups.

There have been declines in both primary school enrolment and the number of 5-12 year olds in the population and increases can be seen in both tertiary enrolment and the number of 17-21 year olds in the population.

Figure 6 illustrates that enrolment at the lower levels of education is close to 1:1 for males and females, with only a slightly higher enrolment of males at the primary level and a slightly higher enrolment of females at the pre-primary and secondary levels. At the secondary level, the disparity is greater in the higher forms, as increasingly more males than females drop out of school. Males are significantly overrepresented in the TVET sector, making up almost 80% of enrolment, but underrepresented in both the tertiary and ACE sectors, where females make up almost two-thirds of enrolment.

TABLE 3 STUDENT ENROLMENT BY LEVEL AND SECTOR, 2015-2020

Sector	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020p
Pre-primary	7,618	7,461	7,349	7,485	7,312	4,914
Primary	68,084	67,298	66,465	65,993	64,982	61,914
Secondary	22,112	22,036	22,027	22,313	22,280	22,660
TVET	684	723	729	753	856	836
Tertiary	9,033	9,425	9,527	9,830	10,174	9,297
ACE	1,146	1,211	1,167	1,157	1,085	1,085
Total	108,677	108,154	107,264	107,531	106,689	100,477

Source: PPRE Unit-MoECST

FIGURE 6 PROPORTION OF ENROLLED MALES AND FEMALES BY SECTOR OF EDUCATION, 2020
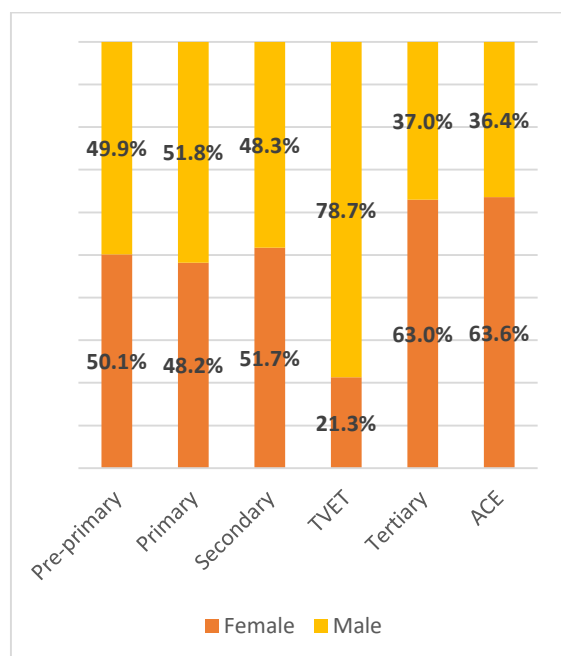
Source: PPRE Unit-MoECST

Figure 7 shows Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) for each level of education and highlights the impact that COVID-19 has had on participation in education. As can be seen, GER declined at all levels except secondary.

FIGURE 7 GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO BY LEVEL, 2011-2020
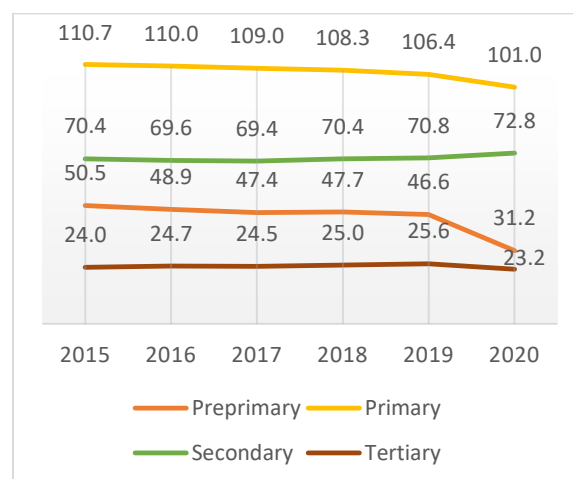
Sources: UNDP; PPRE Unit-MoECST

Table 4 records the number and percentage of children who are estimated to be out of school. These estimates suggest that 74.2% of 3-4year olds were out of school during the 2020-21 school year compared to 49.5% in 2019-20. Over 3,600 children, or 6% of 5-12 year olds, were also out of school compared to fewer than 2% the year before. On the other hand, the number and percentage of 13-16 year olds attending school increased to 80.3% in 2020 compared to 70.4% in 2019.

TABLE 4 OUT OF SCHOOL POPULATION, 2019 AND 2020

Year	2019				2020			
	In school		Out of School		In School		Out of School	
Age Group	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
3-4yrs	7,932	50.5%	7,764	**49.5%**	4,047	25.7%	11,711	**74.3%**
5-12yrs	60,111	98.4%	967	**1.6%**	57,670	94.0%	3,658	**6.0%**
13-16yrs	22,152	70.4%	9,336	**29.6%**	24,972	80.3%	6,140	**19.7%**

Sources: UNDP; PPRE Unit-MoECST

[4]CURRENT ACCESS TO AND USE OF TECHNOLOGY

Accessibility

Access to technology such as the Internet and digital devices is recognized as essential for teaching and learning in the 21st Century. The COVID-19 pandemic has made these technologies even more essential. Belize entered a lockdown in March of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic which forced education services to continue through distance learning for the remainder of that academic year and well into 2020/21.

Although 45% of preschools and 40% of primary schools provided some online content, printed packages were the only accessible means of continued learning for the majority of students. This was especially true for students in the Toledo District where only 16% of preschools and 11% of primary schools engaged in some online instruction.

Most secondary schools used a blended learning approach with online classes for students who had access and printed packages for those who did not. The use of exclusively online delivery was highest in Orange Walk where 53% of schools provided online-only instruction. None of the secondary schools in Toledo were able to do so; in fact, the majority of the schools in that district used printed packages exclusively (see Figure 8). Online learning was most common in secondary schools located in urban areas.

In the Continuing Education (ACE) sector, learning also continued through distance learning modalities, with over 95% of

FIGURE 8 DISTANCE LEARNING FORMATS AT SECONDARY SCHOOLS BY DISTRICT, 2020

Source: PPRE Unit, MoECST

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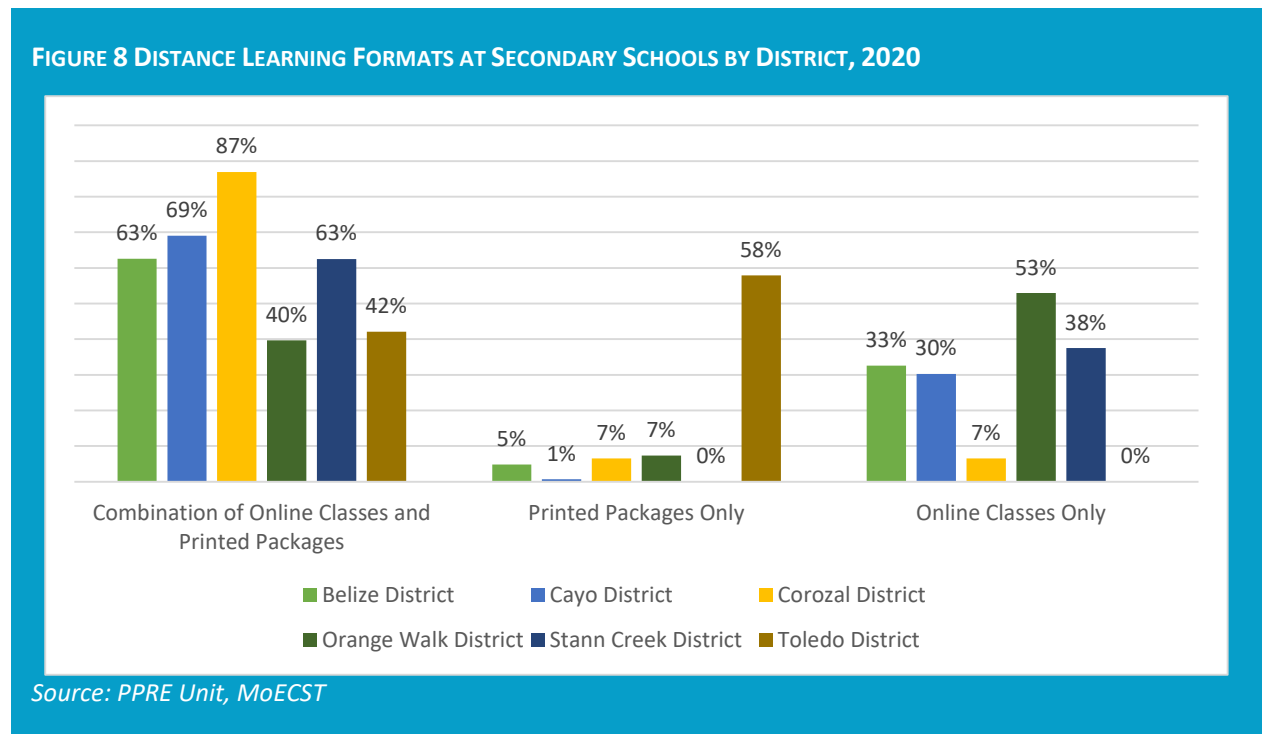
[4] Mr. Bernaldino Pech and Mr. Ricardo Gideon from the PPRE Unit made significant contributions to this section of the analysis.

students in ACE engaging through online instruction and a few students engaging through printed packages.

At the tertiary level, learning progressed solely through online instruction. At this level, 77% of students indicated they had access to home internet and 95% confirmed that they had access to remote learning devices (e.g. computer, smart phone or tablet).

The TVET sector was hit especially hard as levels of access to internet and devices by trainees were very low. Although most institutions provided a combination of online learning and printed packages, neither method was accessible to some trainees, especially those living in remote areas. Thus some trainees, as much as 98% at the Toledo ITVET, were not engaged in any type of continued learning.

As shown in Figures 9 and 10, internet connectivity varies by district, area and level. A total of 62% of preschools, 77% of primary schools and 92% of secondary schools are connected to the internet, with rates in urban areas higher than in rural areas.

FIGURE 10 PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS WITH INTERNET CONNECTION BY LEVEL AND AREA, 2020
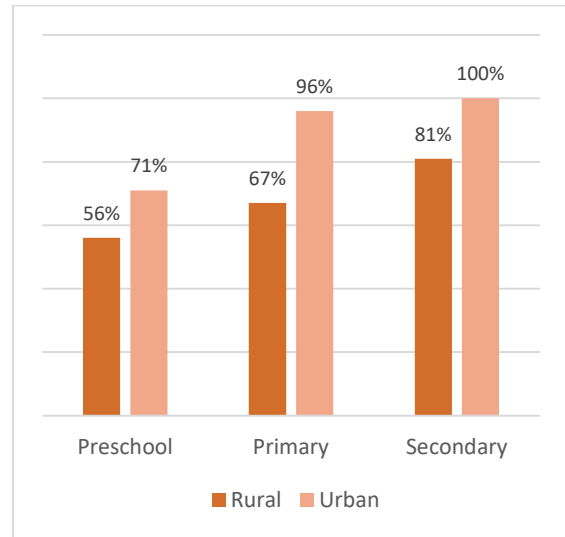
Source: PPRE Unit, MoECST

FIGURE 9 PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS WITH INTERNET CONNECTION BY DISTRICT AND LEVEL, 2020
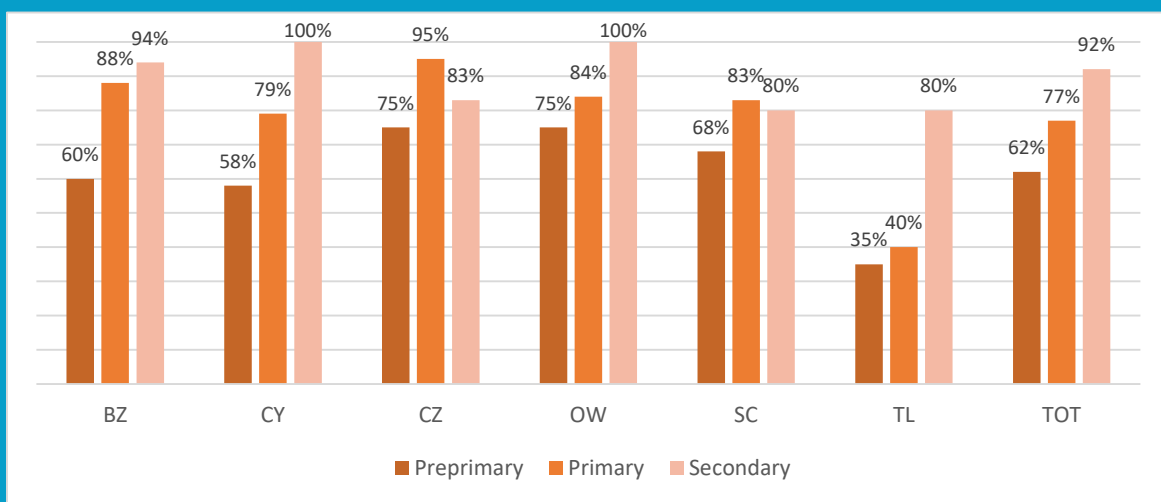
Source: PPRE Unit, MoECST

Use of Technology

Most teachers (83%) have access to reliable internet and a computer at home (86%). Nonetheless, in a recent survey, only 32% of teachers rated themselves as "very comfortable" with using technology for basic tasks, 63% chose a rating of "somewhat comfortable" and 5% selected a rating of "not comfortable". Younger teachers and those teaching in the higher sectors of education reported higher levels of comfort (see Table 5).

Online lessons at the preschool and primary school levels have been delivered mostly through Google Classroom, Zoom sessions and WhatsApp. Secondary schools also make use of Moodle, Microsoft Teams and other platforms for lesson delivery. Schools also use a variety of platforms for communicating with parents and students, the most common being WhatsApp, as detailed in Figure 11.

TABLE 5 PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS WITH HIGH TECHNOLOGY COMFORT LEVEL, BY AGE AND SECTOR, 2021

Age Group				Education Level				
18 - 30	*31 - 40*	*41 - 50*	*50+*	*Preschool*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*ITVET*	*Tertiary*
46%	35%	22%	21%	23%	26%	44%	48%	54%

Source: Teacher Readiness Survey, 2021

FIGURE 11 SCHOOL COMMUNICATION MODES, 2021

WhatsApp — Pre-90% Pri-84% Sec-90%

Text Messages — Pre-83% Pri-83% Sec-77%

Phone Calls — Pre-74% Pri-82% Sec-88%

Printed Notes — Pre-48% Pri-44% Sec-54%

Facebook/Messenger — Pre-31% Pri-42% Sec-90%

Email — Pre-18% Pri-26% Sec-73%
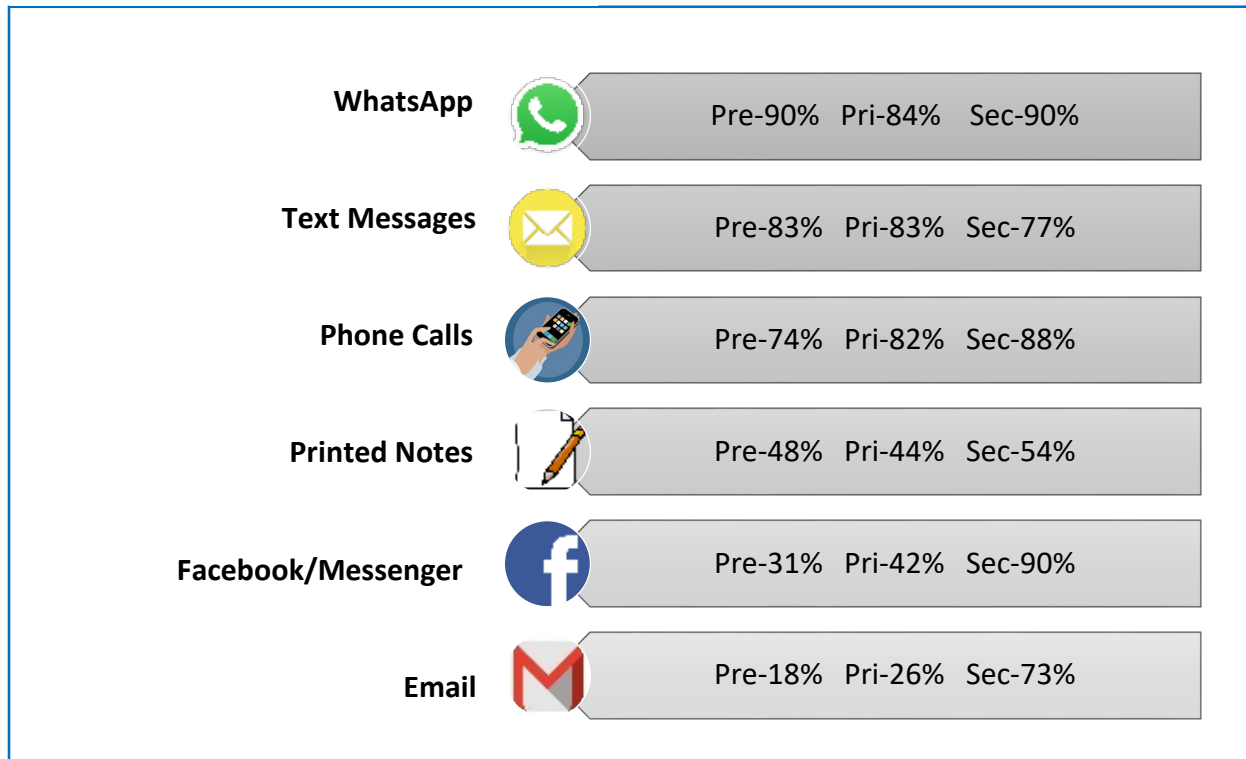
While teachers, students and parents did their best to communicate and continue the learning process through distance modalities, the Ministry of Education was equally challenged to find ways to continue its core services. Between April and June of 2020, much of the Ministry of Education's human and financial resources were focused on providing continuing education support to schools, including the production of learning resources and guidance in developing learning continuity plans.

Reports from school administrators indicate that 82% of preschools and 91% of primary schools incorporated the Ministry's printed resources into their learning continuity plans; 65% of preschools and 77% of primary schools used the radio resources and 43% of preschools and 44% of primary schools incorporated the electronic resources. The video resources were used by 37% of preschools and 39% of primary schools. Printed resources were provided to 52% of high schools, all of those indicating the need for such assistance.

The efforts to assist schools in this way proved unsustainable and were not continued into the 2020/21 academic year. Instead, focus turned to the development of a national education learning platform and the procurement and distribution of digital learning devices and internet access for students in need. These efforts are still ongoing.

Other ways in which the Ministry of Education adjusted its services included the following:

- use of online platforms for the delivery of continuing professional development courses;
- the suspension and replacement of standardized exams at the primary level with grade level diagnostic assessments; and
- changes in supervision and appraisal criteria to include new protocols related to the COVID-19 pandemic and distance learning.

Internal and stakeholder meetings were done exclusively online and so too were a number of surveys; however, limited access to technology by some groups, especially parents and students in rural areas, resulted in some inequities in the reporting and recording of challenges.

The Belize Education Management Information System (BEMIS), which is the country's school, student and teacher database, proved helpful in providing information such as changes in enrolment as a result of the pandemic, despite challenges with field verification due to school closure. Full system functionality, including more comprehensive student, teacher and school data within the system and use of the system for processing teacher leaves, conducting appraisals, and recording teacher professional development hours, would have facilitated the move to online services and could have provided more data to support decision-making.

EDUCATION OUTCOMES

One of the primary aims of education is to produce "good, productive" citizens. This presupposes that the education system will be aligned to the social and economic needs of the country and that graduates will successfully attain the knowledge, capacities, values and attitudes to participate meaningfully in the economic life of the nation and to live harmoniously with others.

[5]Table 6 is based on reports from the SIB's September 2020 Labour Force Survey (LFS). The figures indicate that 13% of the labour force had not completed any level of education, another 38% had only a primary school education, 25% had completed secondary school, and 21% had completed tertiary education. Males make up 60.3% of the labour force.

Data in Table 7 illustrate that a person's level of education can influence their employment outcomes. Specifically, those with higher levels of education tend to have higher labour force participation rates, lower levels of unemployment and higher average monthly incomes.

LFS data reveal gender disparities in employment outcomes as well. For example, in September 2020, 17% of females who were available for work and wanted to work were unemployed compared to 11.6% of males. A recent IDB study on employability in Belize also found that women earn lower average monthly incomes than men with the same level of education, even within the same fields (Naslund-Hadley, Navarro-Palau & Prada, 2020).

TABLE 6 LABOUR FORCE BY EDUCATION LEVEL AND GENDER

Highest Level of Education Completed	Male	Female	Total
None	14,414	7,476	21,890
Primary	43,171	20,313	63,484
Secondary	23,698	19,255	42,954
Tertiary	16,799	18,615	35,414
Other	2,642	682	3,324
Don't Know/Not Stated	1,045	520	1,565
Total	101,768	66,861	168,630

Source: LFS, September 2020, SIB

TABLE 7 EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED

Outcomes	None	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Labour Force Participation Rate	67.9	63.6	75.3	86.8
Unemployment by Education Attainment	44.4	27.3	14.3	13.2
Average Monthly Income	$803	$943	$1,226	$1,816

Source: LFS, September 2019, SIB

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[5] Figures reported in the 2019 survey were 16% for no formal education, 44% for primary, 23% for secondary and 17% for tertiary. The difference may be related to the change in definitions used by the SIB to classify persons as part of the labour force. For example, persons who produce goods primarily or solely for family consumption are no longer considered employed. The impact of COVID-19 on labour force participation rates of different groups may also be a factor.

About 22.5% of the labour force, 37,987 workers, in September 2020 were young persons, 14-24 years of age. This group is primarily male, 62%, and had an unemployment rate of 23%, almost twice the national rate. Youth unemployment and non-participation in school are major contributors to crime, especially in urban areas, where alternative livelihood opportunities, such as subsistence farming, are not readily available.

Major crimes such as drug and firearm offences are prevalent. Belize also has one of the highest homicide rates in the world. The Belize Crime Observatory's annual report for 2020 placed the homicide rate at 24.3 per 100,000 inhabitants. This is down from a peak of 42.6 in 2012. The majority of homicide victims are males, 89% in 2020, and most are under the age of 35.

As shown in Table 8, Belize's health, education and socio-economic status produced a Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.716 in 2019, a ranking of 110 out of 189 countries. Over the last three decades, life expectancy increased from 71.2 to 74.6 years,

children born in 2019 could expect to receive 13.1 years of schooling compared to 10.8 years for those born in 1990, and the average years of schooling in the population was 9.9 years compared to 5.9 years in 1990. Gross National Income (GNI) also increased by 36.5%.

Although education is not the only determinant of human development, it can be both a contributing factor and a policy solution for many of the problems that the country currently faces. Quality, relevant, equitable and accessible education can be a driver for personal, community, and national development, but this requires purposeful reform of the education system, innovative transformation of teaching and learning approaches, intentional prioritization of currently underserved sectors and skillful maximization of Belize's human capital for sustained social and economic development. That is the intention with which the current Belize Education Sector Plan (BESPlan) 2021-2025 was formulated.

TABLE 8 HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX, 1990-2019					
Year	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita (2017 PPP$)	HDI value
1990	71.2	10.8	5.9	4,674	0.610
1995	69.4	11.3	6.4	5,570	0.624
2000	68.8	11.8	7.1	6,080	0.640
2005	70.0	12.3	7.6	6,539	0.662
2010	72.1	12.4	9.5	6,524	0.695
2015	74.0	12.8	9.5	6,846	0.710
2016	74.2	13.5	9.7	6,671	0.717
2017	74.4	13.1	9.8	6,507	0.714
2018	74.5	13.1	9.8	6,453	0.714
2019	74.6	13.1	9.9	6,382	0.716

Source: UNDP, 2020

3. Overview of the Belize Education Sector Plan 2021-2025

The Belize Education Sector Plan (BESPlan) was developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology (MoECST) over the period January to August 2021. The process was led by the Ministry's Policy, Planning, Research and Evaluation Unit and started with a statistical analysis of current demographic, economic and education data and a thorough review of the following education plans, policy documents and related studies:

- the Belize Education Sector Strategy 2020-2025, which was based on the evaluation of the country's previous education sector plan and subsequent education sector analysis, as well as extensive consultations with stakeholders;
- the planBelize Education Policy, which was developed by the current administration in consultation with education professionals and a wide range of stakeholders, as part of a broader development framework for Belize; and
- surveys, research studies and reports from the MoECST and others on the general situation of education, as well as the effects and implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on the system and the country.

The statistical analysis and literature review led to a tentative selection of priority areas and strategic actions. These were further validated through consultations within the MoECST, as well as with various stakeholder groups. Information from stakeholder groups came primarily through an Education Symposium held in May of 2021. The

symposium brought parents, students, teachers, school leaders and employers together with education officers to discuss the future of education.

The MoECST used information from this discourse to revise the priority areas and strategic actions, ensuring that the priority needs and recommendations of stakeholders were taken into account and to verify the plan's relevance and alignment with national development needs. The Belize Education Sector Plan (BESPlan) 2021-2025 was endorsed by Cabinet on August 24, 2021.

In summary, the BESPlan is designed to do the following:
- **Build the Future**: Build on strengths within the current system of education
- **Change the Future**: Address weaknesses within the current system of education
- **Guard the Future**: Mitigate against threats that are likely to impact the system of education now and in the future
- **Shape the Future**: Leverage emerging opportunities for the benefit of the education system now and in the future

The MoECST is committed to the implementation of the BESPlan over the period 2021-2025. It will be the major policy document used by the Ministry for planning, budgeting and allocating human, material and financial resources over the next four years.

VISION STATEMENT

The Belize education system will be inclusive, of high quality, accessible and equitable, technologically driven, and capable of fostering the development of good, productive citizens. The system will be accountable and effective in providing the support necessary to allow students, regardless of individual or family characteristics, to achieve their full personal and academic potential and to contribute positively to national development.

- The Ministry of Education will be suitably organized and staffed by personnel who have the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to deliver quality and responsive education services within an organizational culture that promotes innovation and accountability.
- The Ministry of Education will have measurable impact on the social and economic development of the nation through a financing system that is based on equity, performance and merit.
- The Belize education system will be guided by a comprehensive and effective policy and regulatory framework that facilitates access, inclusion, quality and accountability.
- Belizean students will spend their time in school acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are needed for their personal development and the development of the nation.
- Science and technology resources will be widely available and effectively used to facilitate and improve the quality of teaching, learning, and decision-making.
- Belizean students will participate in a fair, valid system of assessments that allows for improvement, certification and verification of their competencies and level of achievement.
- Belizean teachers will have the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to support students in acquiring high levels of literacy, numeracy, critical thinking and personal and interpersonal skills.
- All Belizean preschool-aged children will have access to quality preschool programs and services.
- All Belizean children will have access to quality education services regardless of their unique physical, social, emotional or academic needs.
- A sense of ownership for TVET by the public and private sectors will be evident from their extensive involvement in the development and quality assurance of TVET programs and institutions.
- Belizeans will have access to high quality and relevant tertiary education programs and research provided by institutions that meet national, regional and international standards.
- Belizeans will be able to access relevant educational opportunities for self-improvement and employment throughout their life span.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In pursuing its vision for education, the MoECST is guided by the following principles and values:

❑ All our people, wherever they live and whatever their ethnicity, religious preference, political affiliation, gender or economic status, must have access to quality education.

❑ All Belizeans must be provided with an opportunity to acquire the capacity and attitudes for full and active participation in the development of the nation.

❑ Access, Equity and Quality are central to the Education Agenda from Preschool to University.

patriotism and civic pride

caring, fairness, flexibility, open-mindedness and adaptability

confidence, ambition, passion, determination and creativity

excellence and efficiency

respect for human rights, social justice and our environment

inclusivity, collaboration, transparency, responsibility and accountability

hard work, industry, productivity and innovation

Goals

The overarching goals of the Belize Education Sector Plan (BESPlan) 2021-2025 are to:

❖ increase access to all levels of education, from preschool to university;

❖ reduce gender, rural/urban and socioeconomic inequities in education;

❖ improve the quality of education provided at all levels of the system; and

❖ align the system of education to national development needs.

Policy Objectives

In order to meet its goal of developing a more accessible, equitable, accountable and effective education system, the MoECST will work in partnership with stakeholders to accomplish the following twelve policy objectives, by 2025:

1. Restructure the Ministry of Education in order to increase its efficiency and capacity to respond effectively to the needs of the education system.

2. Align the Ministry's financial resources and mechanisms with targets for improved performance, expanded access and increased equity and accountability.

3. Strengthen the legislative, regulatory and policy framework for better outcomes and improved governance and leadership of the education system

4. Reform the national curriculum so that students are able to gain the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed for personal and national development.

5. Make innovative use of science and technology to transform teaching, learning and decision-making processes.

6. Create a quality and relevant assessment and examination system that is aligned to the national curriculum and that provides meaningful information for improvements in teaching and learning.

7. Transform teacher education and development programs and incentivize quality teaching practices and performance results for improved student learning.

8. Implement early childhood policy and curricular reform and expand services in underserved areas to increase access to quality early childhood education.

9. Provide the legislation, policies, programs and resources needed to improve the inclusion and experience of all students in the education system, including those with physical or learning disabilities, psychosocial challenges and socio-economic need.

10. Strengthen partnerships with industries and the private sector to improve the quality, relevance and responsiveness of the TVET sector.

11. Implement legislation, policies and mechanisms to build the higher education sector's capacity to deliver quality programs and research services aligned to national development needs.

12. Expand access to relevant adult education programs to build Belize's human capital and upgrade the quality of the workforce.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BESPLAN

The BESPlan is organized along four domains: Domain 1-Reforming the Education System, Domain 2-Transforming Teaching and Learning, Domain 3-Prioritizing Underserved Sectors, and Domain 4-Maximizing Human Capital. Each domain has three Key Result Areas (KRA) that are related to the policy objectives described above. The domains and related KRAs are illustrated below. An overview of each domain and KRA is provided in the Strategic Priorities section of the document along with the strategic actions that the MoECST intends to take to achieve the policy objectives.

DOMAINS   **KEY RESULT AREAS (KRA)**

1. REFORMING THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION
- 1.1 Ministry of Education Reform: Becoming Fit for Purpose
- 1.2 Education Finance Reform: Getting Value for Money
- 1.3 Governance Reform: Strengthening the Foundations

2. TRANSFORMING TEACHING AND LEARNING
- 2.1 Curriculum Transformation: Learning What Matters
- 2.2 Assessment for Learning: Measuring What Counts
- 2.3 Teacher Development: Elevating the Profession

3. PRIORITIZING UNDERSERVED SECTORS
- 3.1 Early Childhood Education: Starting Strong
- 3.2 Student Welfare: Reducing Vulnerability
- 3.3 Special Education: Taking Everyone Along

4. MAXIMIZING HUMAN CAPITAL
- 4.1 TVET: Meeting the Needs
- 4.2 Higher Education: Raising the Bar
- 4.3 Adult Education: Educating for Life

TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

The MoECST recognizes that the innovative use of technology is essential to the goal of achieving a modern, effective education system. Therefore, technology is a major theme and key component of the BESPlan. Technology is integrated into all domains of the BESPlan as follows:

- Reforming the System of Education-*using technology to improve education services and decision-making and ensuring access to technology to reduce the inequities in education.*
- Transforming Teaching and Learning-*integrating science and technology concepts and approaches into the curriculum and developing tools to facilitate online learning, student assessment and professional development.*
- Prioritizing Underserved Sectors-*using technology to increase access, responsiveness and support to students in need.*
- Maximizing Human Capital: *promoting online learning and supporting students and teachers to pursue studies and research in STEM.*

RELEVANCE TO NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Belize has committed to national, regional and international goals for education that seek to increase access and equity and improve the quality of education for all. These include the National Development Framework for Belize, Horizon 2030, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Human Resource Development Strategy (HRDS) 2030, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030. Table 9 lists the major goals and outcomes of these plans and the KRAs that are relevant to each.

TABLE 9 LINKS TO DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Development Plan	Goals/Outcomes/Targets	Relevant BESPlan KRAs
Horizon 2030	Outcome 1. Strengthen management, monitoring and accountability in the education system	1.1, 1.2, 1.3
	Outcome 2. Improve Access to Education	1.2, 1.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3
	Outcome 3. Improve Delivery and Relevance of the Education Curriculum	2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3
	Outcome 4. Develop Education Support Systems and Services	1.2, 2.1, 3.2,.3.3
	Outcome 5. Develop Adult and Continuing Education	4.1, 4.2, 4.3

Development Plan	Goals/Outcomes/Targets	Relevant BESPlan KRAs
CARICOM HRDS 2030	Outcome 1: Broadened and deepened access and participation in all HRD sectors	1.2, 1.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3
	Outcome 2: Strengthened equity in the access to and provision of HRD in all HRD sectors	1.2, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3
	Outcome 3: Improved quality in delivery in all HRD sectors	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3
	Outcome 4: Assured relevance to learners' and Member States' development needs in all HRD sectors	2.1, 3.1, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3
SDG 2030	Target 4.1: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.2, 3.3
	Target 4.2: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education	1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 3.1
	Target 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university	1.2, 4.1, 4.2
	Target 4.4: By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship	2.1, 2.2, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3
	Target 4.5: By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations	1.1, 1.2, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3
	Target 4.a: Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all	1.1, 3.1, 3.2
	Target 4.6: By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy	1.1, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 4.3
	Target 4.7: By 2030, ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development	1.1, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3
	Target 4.c: By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States	1.1, 2.3, 3.1, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2

II. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

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1. Reforming the System of Education

Overview: Reforming the education system is a necessary condition for achieving successful education outcomes. The Belize Education Sector Plan seeks systemic reform in three critical areas:

- the structure and function of the Ministry of Education in order to increase its efficiency and effectiveness;
- the system of budgeting and allocation of public funds to ensure that there is accountability, value for money, and that students and areas that are most in need are prioritized; and
- the legislative, regulatory, leadership and administrative framework to ensure that the system of education can be governed effectively and that quality can be assured.

STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION OF THE MINISTRY

Section 3 of the Belize Education and Training Act, 2010, gives the Ministry of Education the mandate to:
- establish and set national education goals and policies;
- set standards for the education system;
- issue licenses to schools and other educational institutions, provided that all prerequisites to licensing are met;
- issue licenses to teachers, provided that all the prerequisites to licensing are met;
- provide support systems for the effective delivery of appropriate and equitable educational services at all levels of the education system; and

- monitor the quality and effectiveness of education at all levels of the education system.

The organizational structure that has been in operation at the Ministry of Education is depicted in Figure 12. There is no clear alignment between the current organizational structure of the Ministry of Education and its legislated functions. This results in both gaps and overlaps in the provision of services. For example, there are no assigned organizational units or established processes for the development of standards and policies. This has led to multiple units, and in some cases, individual officers, at various levels of the system developing and enforcing standards and policies that have not undergone the level of consultation, examination, harmonization or approval that would be expected before implementation.

One of the key areas that highlights these gaps and overlaps is in the important task of monitoring and supporting schools. The Education Amendment Rules outlines one of the primary functions of the District Education Centres as follows:

The District Education Centre shall…undertake the following activities… (i) regular school supervision to support and monitor school improvement and development by providing guidance and support for the development and conduct of school self-assessment, and the development and implementation of school improvement plans; (ii) monitoring and providing support and feedback to managements, schools and teachers by

identifying areas of weakness in quality of teaching including curriculum delivery, classroom practices and assessment.

(Rule 8A, EAR, 2012)

The function of school supervision is nonetheless dispersed across various units of the Ministry and, in many cases, the nature of such supervision does not reflect the content of Rule 8A. For example, DECs are currently responsible for supervising schools at the pre-primary and primary levels of education only and the nature of the monitoring has been primarily in the form of adherence to checklists that focus on basic provisions for school operation. There has been little support in recent years for school self-assessment or for in-depth identification and support in areas of weaknesses.

The Ministry has made several attempts to institutionalize such processes, starting with a Quality Child Friendly School Initiative (QCSF) in 2009 and later with a School Self-Assessment and Improvement Planning (SSA&IP) process and accompanying school supervision reform between 2013 and 2018.

The QCSF initiative proved to be problematic to implement on a large scale and also had validity issues with the instruments used. The SSA&IP process was implemented in about 50% of primary schools as a prerequisite to a teacher professional development project and was expected to continue in the remaining primary schools under the District Education Centres but was never pursued beyond the project.

FIGURE 12 CURRENT ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE
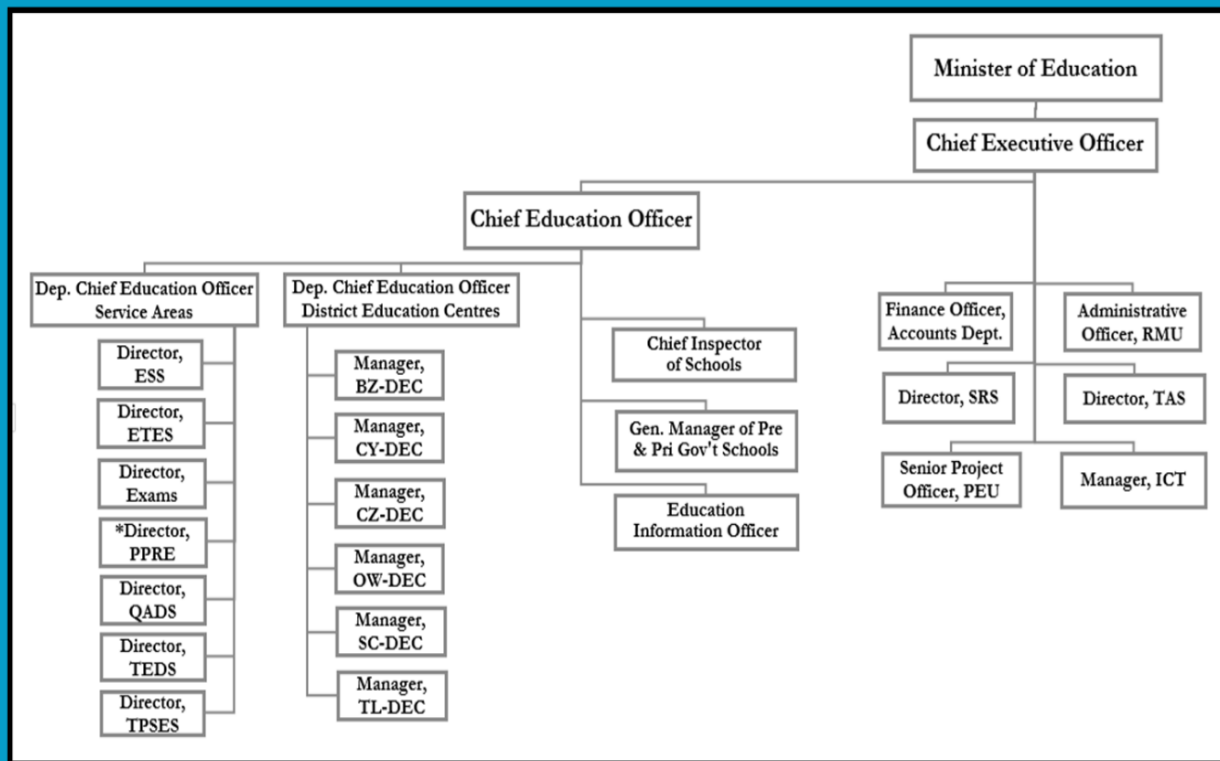
As noted by a recent study, "while substantial monitoring is completed, there is little opportunity to support teachers and principals to build the capacity identified by the monitoring" (Strengthening System Leadership Consultancy, 2018). DECs have cited the burden of administrative and routine tasks and resource limitations as reasons for their inability to provide more support to schools. The result is that, with no appropriate interventions, poor performing schools continue to be poor performing schools.

Supervision of the other sectors of education is done by various other units. A two-person unit embedded within the Quality Assurance Development Services (QADS) is responsible for supervising secondary schools. In addition to training and providing guidance to secondary schools in school-self-assessment and improvement planning, officers within this unit are assigned various tasks related to the mandate of QADS which is primarily curriculum development; therefore, limited day-to-day monitoring of secondary schools is actually done.

The Employment Training and Education Services (ETES) is responsible for supervising Technical and Vocational Education and Training institutions. ETES's focus is almost entirely on the country's six ITVETs, meaning that very little supervision of other skills training institutions occurs. ETES coordinates all key functions for the TVET sector: program development, assessment, professional development and supervision. Within ETES there is also an Adult and Continuing Education (ACE) coordinator whose responsibility it is to supervise ACE programs and institutions.

In many cases, functions are assigned to a single officer or small units with other responsibilities that take precedence over what should be their core function. Such is the case with the Tertiary and Post-Secondary Education Services, where staff focus more on the processing of financial assistance than they do on quality monitoring and support of the tertiary sector.

Another area of ambiguity is the role of the Office of the Inspectorate. The lack of clarity between the purpose of school supervision visits by DECs and other units and inspections conducted by the Inspectorate is a perennial issue. Attempts to establish clarity and collaboration have been met with limited success. The Inspectorate was established to conduct inspections of schools in accordance with provisions in the Education and Training Act which states the following:

> "The Chief Education Officer shall carry out a triennial inspection of each school and continuance of permission to operate the said schools will be dependent on the results of the said evaluation"
> (Section 42.3, BETA, 2010).

However, the Inspectorate has been unable to reach the required number of schools, partly due to the time and resource-intensive processes used to derive the quality assessment. The usefulness of the exercise has also been questioned as inspection reports fall short of making recommendations on either school improvement or school closures.

A 2018 report from the Ministry of Public Service on Job Classification and Compensation further highlighted the weaknesses in how the Ministry is currently structured in relation to the mandate with which it is charged. Several of the major findings are highlighted below:

- positions with high supervision density and span of control, rendering them ineffective;
- supervisors on the same organizational level as those they supervise;
- single individuals being responsible for major functions or subsectors;
- individuals performing tasks either above or below what their job title indicates;
- entire subsectors subsumed by others;
- lack of rationalization for the number of officers assigned to various units/centers;
- inconsistencies in titles and actual roles and responsibilities performed;
- inconsistencies in roles and responsibilities for individuals with the same titles;
- inconsistencies in organizational structure from one district to another;
- unnecessary specializations in roles and responsibilities in some areas and lack of delineation in roles and responsibilities in areas where it is needed; and
- insufficient IT support.

One of the major issues highlighted by the report is the need to clearly delineate what it calls "head office functions" such as policy formulation, macro-level planning and programming, national-level performance monitoring and evaluation and creation of feed-forward and feed-back loops from the "district office functions" which should be restricted to policy interpretation and application, district-level planning, programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and closing feed-back loops.

Another major factor cited by the study is the lack of or inadequacy of job descriptions for many of the positions within the Ministry. This is considered as a serious weakness as the report notes,

"there can be no effective recruitment and succession planning if the qualifications, knowledge and experience required to perform the job are not identified and there can be no effective performance management where roles and responsibility are not set out with utmost clarity"
(Job Classification & Compensation Project, Round-2 Report, 2018).

The report made several recommendations for revising the structure of the Ministry of Education to increase its organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

KRA 1.1 Ministry of Education Reform: Becoming Fit for Purpose

Objective: Restructure the Ministry of Education in order to increase its efficiency and capacity to effectively respond to the needs of the education system.

Expected Outcome: The Ministry of Education will be suitably organized and staffed by personnel who have the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to deliver quality and responsive education services within an organizational culture that promotes innovation and accountability.

Key Challenges: unclear mandate, overlaps and gaps in services and roles, skill gaps, poor channels of communication

Strategic Actions:

1.1.1   Update the mission and organizational structure of the Ministry of Education to enable better communication and collaboration within the Ministry and greater efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery.

1.1.2   Develop terms of reference for each position, office and area of service to provide clarity in roles and responsibilities.

1.1.3   Develop a performance-based appraisal and recognition system for Ministry staff and service teams and address identified professional development needs.

1.1.4   Implement a comprehensive rebranding and communication strategy to build the Ministry's public image and capacity to inform and engage internal and external stakeholders.

1.1.5   Maximize the use of BEMIS and other technologies to modernize and simplify the Ministry's processes and services.

COST AND FINANCING OF EDUCATION

Belize has one of the highest rates of government expenditure on education in the world. Figures from the World Bank show increasing allocations to education over recent years, reaching 7.6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2018 as shown in Figure 13.

FIGURE 13 GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION AS A PERCENTAGE OF GDP, 2014-2018
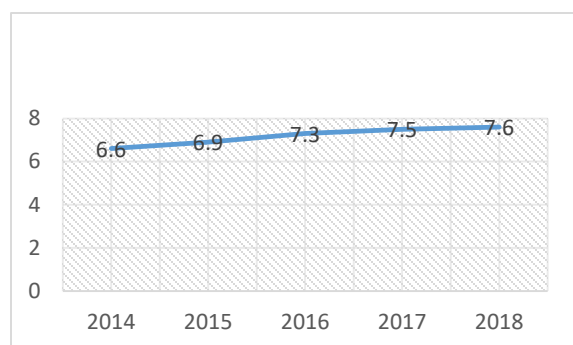
Source: World Bank

As seen in the comparison in Table 10 below, this rate of spending on education is significantly higher than the average rate in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) Region and also atypical of similar Upper Middle Income (UMI) countries.

TABLE 10 GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION AS A PERCENTAGE OF GDP BY COUNTRY, 2018

Country/Region	% of GDP
Barbados	4.4
Belize	7.6
Costa Rica	7.0
Guatemala	3.2
Guyana	5.5
Honduras	6.1
Jamaica	5.2
Mexico	4.5
LAC Region	4.5
UMI Countries	4.1

Source: World Bank

Figure 14 shows that over the last four fiscal years, the Ministry of Education received an average annual budget of BZ$270,000,000. This is roughly one-fourth of the government's recurrent expenditure and second only to the allocation for the Ministry of Finance, which includes public debt servicing and pensions.

FIGURE 14 PORTION OF RECURRENT EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION, 2017/18-2020/21
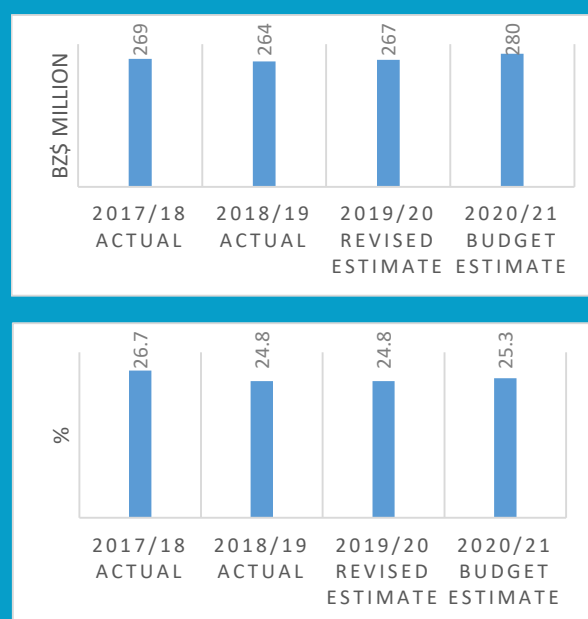
Source: Ministry of Finance

Table 11 shows the budgeted expenditures for fiscal year 2020/21. The largest portion of the budget goes to personal emoluments for those teachers whose salaries are paid directly by the government; however, all or a substantial portion of the salaries of other teachers and school personnel are paid by schools from public grants received through the country's grant-in-aid system. This essentially brings the total portion of the budget spent on salaries to around 89%.

Expenditure Type	Amount	%
Personal Emoluments	$141,199,185	50.4%
Grants	$107,969,105	38.6%
Training	$11,199,317	4.0%
Operating Cost	$9,440,960	3.4%
Contracts & Consultancies	$4,821,722	1.7%
Materials and Supplies	$2,434,722	0.9%
Maintenance	$1,182,240	0.4%
Travel and Subsistence	$883,465	0.3%
Public Utilities	$765,910	0.3%
Contributions and Subscriptions	$13,000	0.0%
Total	**$279,909,626**	100.0%

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF FINANCE

The remaining funds are used to cover training, including student scholarships and financial aid and professional development for teachers and Ministry staff; materials, supplies, utilities and various operating expenses for Ministry departments and government schools; contracts and consultancies, including school meals, transportation and examinations; maintenance of facilities; travel and subsistence expenses for field work; and a small portion for contributions and subscriptions.

The budget is managed through various programs and cost centers. The primary education program, with its relatively large teaching force and student enrolment, gets the biggest portion of the budget, 45%, followed by secondary education at 27% and

tertiary at 10%. Pre-primary, TVET and Adult Continuing Education combined receive 5% of the total budget and another 4% goes to Youth and Sports programs and Library Services. The remaining 9% is used by central administration for planning, monitoring and providing support services to students, teachers and schools.

Figure 15 shows the changes in budgetary allocations to the three major programs of the Ministry and Figure 16 shows the resulting per capita spending over the period 2012/13 to 2019/20. While enrolment in the combined pre-primary and primary sectors declined by 5% over that period, the budget increased by 29%, resulting in spending of $1,764.55 per student, a 36% increase. At the secondary level, although enrolment only increased by 8%, the budget for that sector grew by 45%, ending with a per capita spending of $3,564.33, a 34% increase from the start of the period. On the other hand, although tertiary enrolment grew by 20%, budgetary allocations declined overall by 1%, resulting in a per capita spending of $2,549.49, a 16% decrease.

FIGURE 15 BUDGETARY ALLOCATIONS BY LEVEL, 2012/13-2019/20
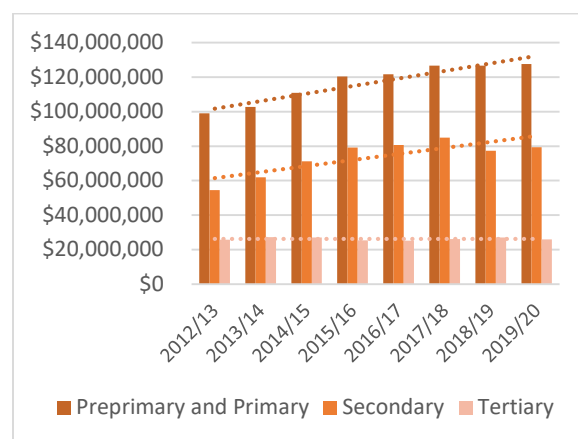
Source: Ministry of Finance

FIGURE 16 PER CAPITA SPENDING BY LEVEL, 2012/13-2019/20
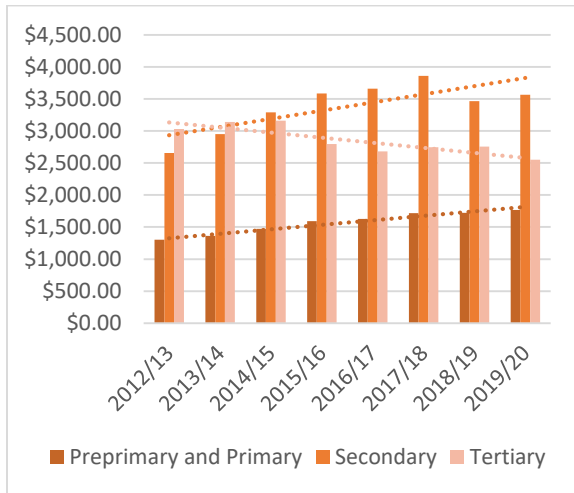
Source: Ministry of Finance

Increases in allocations at the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels were influenced by increased numbers of trained teachers, as well as union-negotiated salary increases, which resulted in a higher wage bill. However, the major factor driving per capita spending at the secondary level was the introduction of a Secondary Finance Reform initiative which changed the way secondary schools were funded from a salary-based to a per-capita formula-based system, with additional funding for socio-economic and academic needs. Failure to implement the system as planned and to ensure accountability mechanisms were in place led to unsustainable increases in allocations. A recent study on governance pointed to the lack of accountability for government funds as one of the major systemic challenges. Despite the substantial investments in education, access remains inequitable. MICS 2015-16 provided insights into disparities based on wealth. As Figure 17 demonstrates, children from families falling into the lowest wealth quintile are significantly disadvantaged in their levels of participation at the preschool, primary and secondary levels of education.

Although the Government of Belize covers the full salary for teachers in government and government-aided schools at the primary level and a substantial portion of salaries for teachers at the secondary and preschool levels, there are additional factors that drive up the out-of-pocket expenses for families. Education regulations give proprietors the responsibility of ensuring that the schools they own have the necessary material resources to deliver quality education services. As a result, schools are allowed to raise funds and charge fees to supplement public funding. Families need to meet the cost of these fees as well as provide school supplies, uniforms, and, where not provided publicly, meals and transportation.

FIGURE 17 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE BY WEALTH QUINTILE, 2015
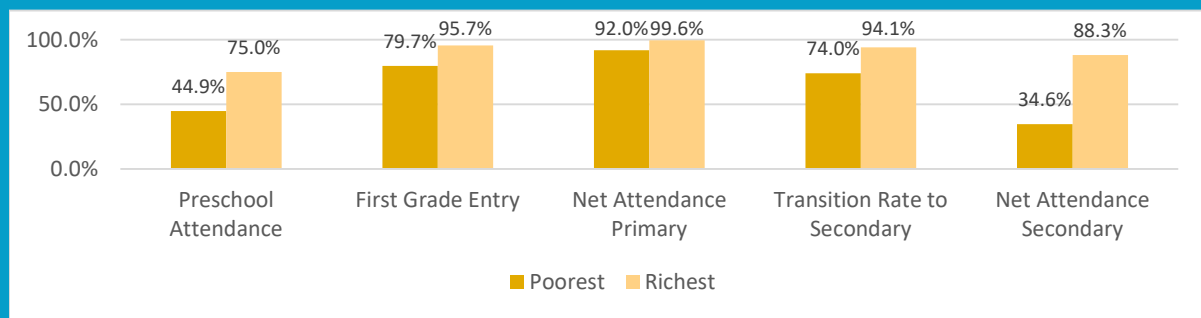
Source: MICS5, SIB

These expenses place education, particularly at the pre-primary, secondary and tertiary levels, beyond the reach of some families. The serious implications were highlighted by the following respondents from the Out of School Children Initiative Study conducted in 2017:

"100% would finish Standard 6 but only 10% go to first form. This year only 6 out of 19 will go to high school."
(School Community Representative)

"There are children who have the capacity of excelling but due to financial issues they only get to complete their primary education."
(Principal)

"It has been a problem sometimes because when school started my parents did not send me to school for a week because they did not [have] money to buy my school supplies and uniforms." (Student)

(Out of School Children Initiative Study, 2017, pp. 48-51)

Rural children are one of the groups most affected by this disparity. The figures in Table 12 highlight the significant disparities in attendance between urban and rural populations. As shown, urban children are far more likely to access early childhood education, start primary school on time and attend both primary and secondary school.

Rural primary school children are almost twice as likely to repeat and three times more likely to drop out of school than urban children. Those who remain in school also score lower on standardized tests. A similar pattern in achievement is seen at the secondary level. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated disparities in education access. As shown in Table 13, rural students are less likely to have access to internet service and digital learning devices such as a tablet or computer.

TABLE 12 SCHOOL ATTENDANCE BY AREA, 2015

Indicator	National	Urban	Rural
Attendance to Early Childhood Education	54.8%	66.1%	48.1%
School Readiness	63.3%	74.5%	55.3%
Net Intake Rate in Primary	87.7%	95.7%	82.6%
Primary School Net Attendance Ratio	96.3%	98.6%	95.0%
Secondary School Net Attendance Ratio	60.0%	70.1%	53.8%

Source: MICS, SIB

TABLE 13 SCHOOL ACCESS TO TECHNOLOGY BY LEVEL AND AREA, 2020

	Access to Home Internet Service			Access to Digital Device		
Education Level	Rural	Urban	Country	Rural	Urban	Country
Preschool	49%	69%	59%	43%	65%	54%
Primary	38%	53%	45%	36%	50%	42%
Secondary	42%	66%	59%	40%	62%	56%

Source: MoE School Readiness Study, June/July 2020; PPRE Unit

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

KRA 1.2 Education Finance Reform: Getting Value for Money

Objective: Align the Ministry's financial resources and mechanisms with targets for improved performance, expanded access and increased equity and accountability.

Expected Outcome: The Ministry of Education will have measurable impact on the social and economic development of the nation through a financing system and programs that are based on equity, performance and merit.

Key Challenges: budget misalignment, inefficiencies, lack of accountability, high rates of poverty, inequities in access to services and resources, poor student outcomes

Strategic Actions:

1.2.1   Review and rationalize school financing policies and mechanisms at all levels of the education system to increase equity and incentivize performance, achievement and continuous improvement.

1.2.2   Provide free access to education from preschool to junior college.

1.2.3   Establish a Rural Education Grant Fund to increase access to education for students from rural areas.

1.2.4   Ensure that all students and teachers from Standard 4 to Form 4 have access to high speed internet or an alternative wireless service and to an appropriate digital device.

1.2.5   Establish an Audit Unit within the Ministry of Education to ensure accountability for public funds.

Administration and Regulation of the System

The system of education in Belize is described as a church-state system since the majority of educational institutions (approximately 60% currently) are owned and managed by various religious denominations. These institutions, along with those owned by the government, community organizations and private entities, are regulated through three legal instruments: 1) the Belize Education and Training Act (BETA) of 2010; 2) the Education Amendment Rules (EAR) of 2012; and 3) the Education Rules 2000, which was revised in 2003. The Act sets the legislative framework for the system of governance as shown below:

> The Ministry, under the general direction of the Minister, shall work in partnership, consultation and cooperation with churches, communities, voluntary and private organizations, and such other organizations and bodies which the Ministry may identify and recognize as education partners for the sufficient and efficient provision of education in Belize.
>
> *(Section 3.1, BETA, 2010)*

The 2010 Act lays out the terms of reference for a National Council for Education (NCE), a National Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NCTVET) and District Education Councils, which are designed to facilitate stakeholder input into decision-making. Although these advisory bodies have been active to varying degrees over the last decade, they have not always been consulted in relation to major policy decisions of the Ministry.

The Act also introduced three statutory bodies aimed at improving the regulation and training of the teaching force: 1) the Belize Teaching Service Commission (BTSC); 2) an Appeals Tribunal; and 3) the Belize Board of Teacher Education (BBTE). The efficiency, effectiveness and relevance of these various bodies have come under scrutiny in recent years due to several issues, including substantial delays in processing of employment matters, protracted judgements and a perceived lack of impact on system improvement.

The Act mandates that proprietors appoint Managing Authorities for each of the schools that they own. These take the shape of either individual local and general managers, which is the prevailing system at the preschool and primary levels, or groups such as Boards of Management, which is the typical structure at the higher levels of education. The composition of Boards varies depending on the type of institution, but generally includes parent, staff, feeder schools and community representatives with school administrators acting in an ex-officio capacity. The Act gives Managing Authorities substantial responsibilities as shown below:

> (a) the proper and efficient organization and management of schools or institutions,
> (b) the formulation of policies and internal regulations for the efficient and effective conduct of schooling, student discipline and behaviour, and student attire in accordance with Rules made under this Act, and
> (c) the adequate provision of such support systems required to deliver appropriate education to all students enrolled in schools under their management.
>
> *(Section 40.1 BETA, 2010)*

Managing Authorities are also responsible for the recruitment and selection of persons to fill vacant teaching and administrative posts and are able to make some decisions regarding the release, transfer and disciplining of teachers. There are currently no established criteria for the selection of local and general managers or board members, beyond belonging to the group that they represent on the board.

A recent study on the system of governance highlighted several challenges with the current arrangements for management of schools, most of which pointed to Managing Authorities:

- No clear communication policies between Managing Authorities, District Education Centres and Schools
- Confusion among principals as to whom they report (Managing Authorities and/or DECs)
- No accountability for education quality. While the Ministry has excellent education initiatives, they cannot hold principals accountable for ensuring that the education is delivered in the manner in which it is designed,
- Little accountability for the expenditure of Government funds,
- The possibility of undersubscribed schools resulting from two or more Managing Authorities operating schools in the same location,
- Lack of sufficient technical expertise within the Managing Authorities and School Boards necessary to ensure that the curriculum and education initiatives introduced through the Ministry are executed successfully,
- Lack of sufficient time and expertise among school board members who are tasked with overseeing the

performance of secondary school principals,
- Some of the local managers do not have sufficient time to dedicate to education
(Strengthening System Leadership, 2018, pp. 16-17)

Approximately 50% of the text of the 2010 Act addresses the composition and functions of national level advisory and statutory bodies and the establishment of District Education Councils. The remaining half covers the general functions of the Ministry of Education and Chief Education Officer, Teaching Services, Establishment and Management of Schools, Schooling and School Attendance. Grant-In-Aid, Higher and Further Education and Scholarships and Bursaries are only treated briefly. However, even those sections that are treated more extensively need to be reconsidered.

The area of school attendance is one example. The current Education Act states the following:

Every person having control of a child, who is five years old by the first day of September and who has not exceeded the age of fourteen, shall cause the child to regularly and annually attend some public or nonpublic school… until the child reaches the age of fourteen years, unless the child has graduated or is excused as provided in sections 60 (2) (a) and 61 (2) (a), (b) and (c).
(Section 59, BETA, 2010)

However, Belize has made national, regional and international commitments to compulsory education up to the secondary level as shown below:

Horizon 2030:
National Development Framework for Belize

- The most important goal is to provide quality education that is free and compulsory to at least the secondary school level.

CARICOM
Human Resource Development Strategy 2030

- Provide universal access for enrolment and completion in Basic Education.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

- By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education
- By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.

The effect of outdated legislation such as the provisions in the Act for school attendance results in practices that are counterproductive, as was made clear in this comment from an OOSCI respondent:

"…here in our community, they are well aware that once the child is 14 years of age they can stop attending school if they do not want to continue or if they are not performing well academically."
(Primary School Administrator, OOSCI, 2017, p. 45)

Education Rules and Policies

The Education Rules are meant to further articulate the provisions of the Act. The most recent one, the EAR of 2012, focuses primarily on recruitment, licensing, employment and duties of professional staff (teachers and principals). Regulations regarding the management of schools, including ownership and licensing, facilities and health conditions, composition and functions of School Committees and Boards of Management, school records, inspections and financing and areas of schooling such as curriculum, instruction and certification, have remained untouched since 2003.

Education Rule 32 from the EAR, 2012, gives Managing Authorities major responsibilities for the formulation of policies and internal regulations including in the following areas:

- curriculum and instruction *(including teaching and learning practices and assessment)* learning environment and support for students *(including discipline, admission, inclusion, health, safety and security of staff and students including children with disabilities)*
- conduct and professional obligations of the administrative, teaching, support and ancillary staff of the school
- physical plant use and maintenance
- use, management and accounting of financial resources of the school
- quality assurance including school self-evaluation and improvement planning, implementation and monitoring.

The approach to policy development envisioned is one where the Managing Authority consults and engages the school administration, teachers and staff, parents, and students and where school policies are developed in accordance with the policies

and directives of the Ministry and with the Education Act, Rules and other existing legislation. However, there have been a number of legal cases where school rules were found to be in violation of the constitutional rights of students and teachers. Notably, one of the functions of the District Education Councils is to review school rules and policies for the institutions in their districts. Additionally, the Handbook of Policies and Procedures, which should provide guidance to schools in formulating their own policies, has not been updated since 2003. This sometimes results in incoherent and conflicting policy decisions and interpretations by schools.

Overall, there are noticeable gaps and challenges in the current policy and legal framework, including outdated provisions in the Education Act, regulations and policies; the need for provisions to effect greater accountability in school management and administration; the rights of parents and a system to represent their interests; legal provisions for the inclusion of students with special needs; and policies and legislation to address the unique needs of the pre-primary, [6]TVET, tertiary and ACE sectors.

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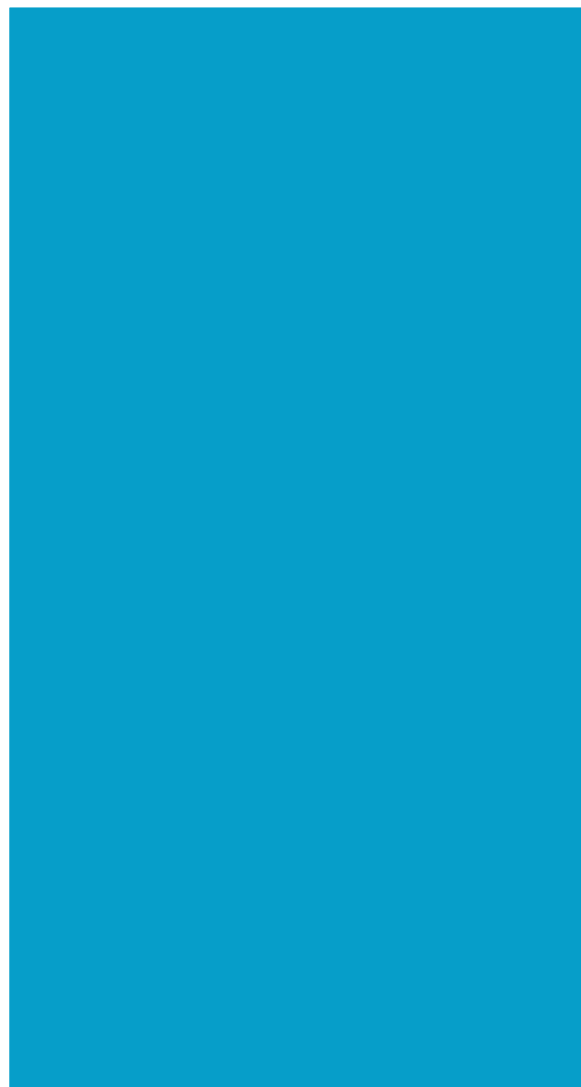
[6] For example, there are no provisions for the composition and function of Boards of Management of ITVETs or for the duties of Managers of ITVETs.

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

KRA 1.3 Governance Reform: Strengthening the Foundations

Objective: Strengthen the legislative, regulatory and policy framework for better outcomes and improved governance and leadership of the education system.

Expected Outcome: The Belize education system will be guided by a comprehensive and effective policy and regulatory framework that facilitates access, inclusion, quality and accountability.

Key Challenges: bureaucratic structures and processes, outdated policies, regulation gaps, unclear roles and responsibilities, minimum monitoring and enforcement of standards

Strategic Actions:

1.3.1   Conduct a comprehensive review and revision of education legislation, regulations and policies, including those related to education councils, commissions and boards, to increase effectiveness in the governance of the education system.

1.3.2   Expand the compulsory school age to include students at the preschool and secondary levels of education.

1.3.3   Introduce a mechanism for the empowerment and meaningful participation of parents in school-level and national-level decision-making on education issues.

1.3.4   Establish standards and school monitoring and support systems for pre-primary, primary and secondary institutions to ensure delivery of quality services and continuous school improvement.

1.3.5   Ensure that all managing authorities and principals receive relevant leadership training in areas such as education regulations, clinical supervision, financial management, school self-assessment and improvement planning.

2. Transforming Teaching and Learning

Overview: Curriculum is the foundation of education. On the surface, it is comprised of a list of topics, objectives and strategies that are used by teachers to deliver content and assist students in developing a prescribed set of skills; on a deeper level, it is society's way of imparting the knowledge, capacities, beliefs and attitudes that will lead to a desired social and economic state. Therefore, when there is no alignment between the curriculum being delivered and the aspirations of a country, education becomes irrelevant and national development is compromised.

The world changes at a rapid pace and so what we teach and learn and how we teach and learn must constantly evolve. This reality calls for building adaptability, innovation and resilience. Therefore, curriculum, instruction and assessment must go beyond rote memory and general knowledge; they must be designed to promote deep learning, to focus on what students are able to do with the knowledge that they acquire and the extent to which they are able to think critically and to solve problems in a healthy, productive and sustainable manner. Furthermore, curriculum, instruction and assessment must be aligned to each other, they must integrate technology to increase impact, and they must be relevant to the needs of students and to national development.

The State of the National Curriculum

[7]Curriculum Development

Section 53 of the Belize Education and Training Act (2010) gives the Chief Education Officer the authority to "prescribe areas of study" and "issue curriculum guidelines and require that courses of study be developed therefrom" for all government and government-aided preschools and primary schools, secondary schools and ITVETs. The Handbook of Policies and Procedures for School Services, 2000 includes information on the philosophical orientation, national goals, policies and structure of the National Comprehensive Curriculum. The Ministry's [8]Quality Assurance Development Services (QADS) is the unit within the Ministry of Education which has been charged with the task of articulating the national curriculum at the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels of education.

The preschool curriculum that is currently in use has been in place since 2006. Work on revising this curriculum is ongoing. Efforts so far include the establishment of a preschool curriculum working group made up of QADS personnel, preschool teachers and other stakeholders. The group has reviewed the curriculum and recommended a play-based curriculum and instructional methodologies that will develop the skills and capacities of 3 and 4 year olds along the physical, social-

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[7] Mr. John Newport and the staff of the Quality Assurance Development Services made significant contributions to this section of the analysis.

[8] The Employment Training and Education Services (ETES) has program and curriculum responsibilities for the TVET Sector.

emotional, visual, spatial and linguistic domains.

The Handbook of Policies and Procedures for School Services, 2000 also included a National Primary Curriculum and Syllabus. The syllabus encompassed four areas of studies:

1) **Area 1**: **Language** (English and Spanish); **Area 2**: **Mathematics, Science, Work & Technology** (aspect of technology relating to production); **Area 3**: **Social Studies and Personal Development** (aspect of personal development relating to social/cultural, spiritual, economics); and **Area 4**: **The Expressive Arts, Physical Education, Health** (including the physical aspect of personal development).

The current core curriculum at the primary level includes eight subjects—English, Spanish, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Health and Family Life Education, Physical Education and Expressive Arts. Most primary schools also teach some form of Religion.

Areas of the core curriculum have been updated periodically since 2000 to improve the organization, coherence and hierarchical sequencing of learning outcomes. The most recent efforts include a comprehensive review, streamlining and updating of the Mathematics curriculum. There has also been comprehensive revisions and improvements to the Spanish, Expressive Arts and Physical Education curricula, which are areas often neglected by schools. There are also plans to expand and improve the teaching of African and Mayan history, which are considered crucial to fostering

respect and understanding of the Belizean identity.

Over the years, several attempts have also been made to add gardening and agriculture into the curriculum. One notable effort was the Rural Education and Agriculture Project (REAP). REAP began in the 1970's and expanded to include as many as sixty primary schools; however, the effort faded in the 1980's as external funding ended. Current efforts, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Food and Agriculture Organization, involve the establishment of school gardens in connection with school feeding programs.

The most recent national guidance on curriculum has come from the country's National Development Framework, Horizon 2030, which suggests the following strategies to increase the relevance of the curriculum:

Educate to Build Character by:
• Integrating a strong civic education curriculum to teach leadership, foster participation and conflict resolution; Integrating the expressive arts, music, sports and physical education

Educate to build social cohesiveness by:
• Fostering acceptance of Belize's ethnic and cultural diversity; Exploring and demystifying gender awareness and gender issues

Educate to emphasize respect and appreciation for the natural environment by:
• Re-introducing gardening and agriculture into the primary and secondary school curriculum; Integrating environmental education within the school system and

> providing children with access to Belize's natural wonders through field visits and hands-on experiences.
>
> (Horizon 2030, p. 23)

National curriculum standards for secondary education were developed in 2004 through a collaboration with the Central American Integration System (SICA). The effort yielded a set of lower secondary national curriculum documents in several subjects; however, a comprehensive national curriculum has never been fully developed or implemented at the secondary level. This has led to a wide range of subjects and subject content and heavy reliance on examinations syllabi from the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). QADS has been leading an initiative to standardize the secondary curriculum. The first step was the implementation of a project called Rationalization and Diversification of the National Secondary Curriculum. This led to the development of a *Profile of the Ideal Secondary School Graduate.*

The development of the profile and curriculum framework are in line with recommendations by UNESCO and the International Bureau of Education (IBE). Part of this work has been to develop overarching and subject specific curriculum frameworks which define the scope, goals and content of subjects. They also allocate instructional time and provide philosophical guidelines related to the subject's contribution to individual and national development, beliefs about knowledge, and key principles of learning, instruction and assessment. In addition to the profile, a curriculum for Belizean Studies was developed and is now in its third year of implementation. Work on completing the development of curriculum in other core subjects continues.

Profile of the Ideal Belizean Secondary School Graduate

The ideal Belizean secondary school graduate will be a national and global citizen, a productive economic agent and a socio-cultural individual.

As a national and global citizen, he or she will be: patriotic, nationally and globally aware and responsive; receptive to democracy, citizenship, human rights and diversity; environmentally conscious and responsible. He or she will be empowered to contribute to national and global communities and will be imbued with the necessary skills and desires to engage in activities, at the local, national and global levels, that promote justice and the common good.

As a productive economic agent, he or she will be productive, innovative, diligent, reliable, responsible, skilled and knowledgeable. Equipped with socio-emotional attributes relevant for the world of work, he or she will be empowered to earn and contribute to national, regional and international development and economic growth.

As a socio-cultural individual, he or she will be self-aware, rational; and, socially competent. He or she will be able to demonstrate a set of individual core values and beliefs that indicate respect for social norms and values that include tolerance for and acceptance of other's rights, values and beliefs. He or she will be empowered to engage in a rational reassessment of and challenge to social norms.

Learning Resources

The availability of educational resources goes hand in hand with curriculum. The Ministry of Education has implemented a free National Textbook program which provides all primary school students with access to learning resources. Efforts have been made to align textbooks with the national curriculum. Some successes have been achieved at the primary level with the introduction of the *My BZ Phonics, My BZ Math* and *Living Together* textbooks. Alignment of textbooks with the content at other levels and in other subject areas is also necessary.

There is currently no national textbook program for the secondary level, so high schools determine what textbooks and other learning resources their students require. The result is a wide variety of textbooks across the system with varying content, quality and costs. A 2020 survey of thirty-five high schools found five different textbooks in use for Math and Science, six different textbooks in use for English and Social Studies, seven different textbooks in use for Information Technology, and nine different textbooks in use for Spanish, just among those schools.

Another problem is that schools do not normally sell the required textbooks and rely on the government or private bookstores to procure and retail them. It is not uncommon for these books to become available only after classes have started or not to become available at all. Some high schools have assisted by making the investment of purchasing and then renting textbooks to students at a reduced rate. While this lowers the cost for students, for some schools, it

becomes a continued revenue stream and so they are less inclined to update textbooks. The Ministry is seeking alternative solutions. For example, a Belizean Studies website has been developed with teaching and learning resources for that subject.

Additional Considerations

In addition to relevance of the curriculum and availability of resources, there is the issue of curriculum overload at both the primary and secondary levels of education. Overloading includes having an excessive number of subjects as well as having an excessive number of learning outcomes within subjects. The result is diminished returns, possibly evidenced by the poor performance on examinations. The solution is to streamline the curriculum while at the same time ensuring that those learning outcomes that are key to cognitive, emotional, physical and spiritual development are embedded and given adequate attention.

Other critical concerns include the fact that English, which is the official language of instruction, is not the first language of the vast majority of students. Training of teachers in effective delivery of the curriculum, training of principals in instructional leadership and proper monitoring of curriculum delivery are also lacking. All of these issues must be addressed if students are to have a fair chance of achieving the goals and aspirations that they, their families and the nation have set and that are articulated in curriculum documents.

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

KRA 2.1 Curriculum Reform: Learning What Matters

Objective: Reform the national curriculum so that students are able to gain the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed for personal and national development.

Expected Outcome: Belizean students will spend their time in school acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are needed for their personal development and the development of the nation.

Key Challenges: unclear purpose of education, curriculum overload, misalignment with national goals and priorities, outdated content, reliance on examination syllabi, incoherence between and within levels of education

Strategic Actions:

2.1.1   Develop a National Curriculum Reform Framework, based on International Bureau of Education and UNESCO standards, to guide the development of national curriculum at the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels of education with a focus on student competency.

2.1.2   Use the National Curriculum Reform Framework to streamline the curriculum at the primary and secondary levels and to allow for in-depth acquisition of the literacy, numeracy, technological and critical thinking skills needed in the 21st Century.

2.1.3   Ensure that subjects which promote physical and mental wellness and sustainable human development, including the expressive arts, physical education, civics, Belizean, African and Mayan History, gardening, agriculture, environmental education and entrepreneurship, are integrated into the national curriculum at all levels.

2.1.4   Develop a National School Portal and learning platform with quality resources for teachers and students to facilitate remote learning and appropriate implementation of the national curriculum.

2.1.5   Implement a revised and expanded national textbook program at the primary and secondary levels of education with free learning resources that are aligned to the national curriculum.

[9]THE ORIGIN AND STATUS OF NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

Origins of Student Assessments

The practice of assessing student learning in Belize has existed in some form almost from the inception of schooling in the colony in the early 1800s. These assessments served several purposes: 1) a political and economic desire to regulate education, 2) a means for improving the education itself, 3) for certification of students at the end of their studies, and 4) to select who would proceed to access a higher level. In the late 1870's only 14 schools existed. In 1877, the Executive Council of the colony passed the Regulations of 1877 for the guidance of government-aided schools and as such the church-state system was institutionalized. To motivate the schools to compete and boost attendance, British-based examinations were administered with schools receiving increased funding as an incentive based on the number of students passing these exams. The Executive Council also paid a bonus to teachers based on student results in the annual examination.

In 1894, the Inspector of schools (also the Secretary to the Board) enacted the Board Education Rules, 1892. The Inspector paid grants to schools approved by the Board and visited schools to inspect and administer individual examinations to students. The 1935 Easter Report prompted a new education policy which ceased individual examination of students and introduced a School Leaving Certificate. In 1937, the Dixon report abolished the individual examination

and payment by results. The role of the Inspector as examiner and fault finder changed to that of coordinator, consultant and leader. The Jeanes Teacher system of school supervision was also introduced.

In 1946, the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) was instituted as a credential for primary school leavers (Standard VI) seeking employment or desiring entrance to secondary schools. The examinations consisted of tests in verbal reasoning, English, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science. In 1964, Belize attained self-government and so control of education began to be managed locally. Nationalistic movements pushed to increase secondary school participation, creating the need to have more examinations. At the end of the primary course in the 1960's, students sat one, two or three examinations: The Primary School Certification Examination, the Government Scholarship Examination, or the Common Entrance Examination.

In 1965, the Roman Catholic Board of Management used a common entrance examination for all its secondary schools and employed standardized tests produced by school testing agencies in the United States. In 1969, the Government Scholarship Examinations were open to Belizeans between the ages of 11 and 13. The tests consisted of items in verbal reasoning, English and Arithmetic.

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[9] The Director and Staff of the Examinations Unit (Ms. Luana Sosa, Ms. Shannon Solis, Ms. Lisa Claire and Ms. Janellie Adolphus) made significant contributions to this section of the analysis.

The first 75 candidates in order of merit were granted scholarship awards. Due to demand, this was eventually increased to 200 scholarship recipients. In 1973, the Belize Association of Principals of Secondary Schools (BAPSS) agreed to abolish the multiplicity of admissions examinations to secondary schools and to adapt the American Common Entrance Examination which had previously been used by Catholic schools. In 1979, an educational advisor to the British Government provided some assistance in the improvement of the Primary School Leaving Examination by training Education Officers in the writing of objective tests aligned to the new curriculum guides in English, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science.

The Belize National Examination (BNE), introduced in 1980, was the first attempt to replace the Common Entrance Examination. In 1982, the Belize National Selection Examination (BNSE) replaced the BNE. The Ministry of Education administered the test, which was compulsory for all Standard VI students and tested students' abilities in six areas: English usage and comprehension, Composition, Mathematics, Social Studies, Science and Learning Potential. This was eventually reduced to only four subjects: English Language, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science.

Between 1992 and 1997, the capacity of the Assessment and Evaluation Unit was strengthened under the Belize Primary Education Development Project. The BNSE was revised in 1993 and items were developed, piloted and administered. The Belize Junior Achievement Test (BJAT) was added in 1994 and administered to students

at the end of Standard III as a tool to assess performance in English and Mathematics so that appropriate remediation could take place. In 1999, the BNSE was changed to the Primary School Examination (PSE), retaining the four subject areas: English Language, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science, but with a change from norm referenced to criterion referenced reporting of results. The PSE was first administered in 2000 and PSE provides primary school ending certification. A few secondary schools use the results for admission purposes, while most use the results to determine need for placement in remedial classes. PSE results are also used by the Ministry to measure the quality of education offered by schools and trends in performance over time.

Performance on the PSE has remained relatively stable over the last ten years. The mean scores for both English and Math have fluctuated mainly between 50 and 60 points out of a possible 100 (see Figure 18).

FIGURE 18 MEAN PSE SCORES IN ENGLISH AND MATHEMATICS, 2010-2019
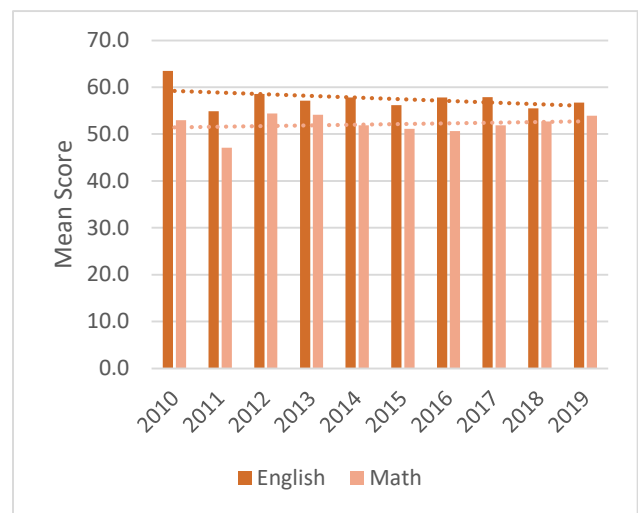
SOURCE: EXAMINATIONS UNIT-MoECST

Except for the top 25 students, performance on the PSE is not reported publicly. This limits the use of the exam for public decision-making and accountability. Schools that happen to have a student place in the top 25 tend to be regarded as "quality" schools by the public. This is reinforced through ceremonies and media coverage focusing on the top students. Roughly half of the top 25 performers normally come from a few private schools in Belize City. Government and government-aided schools that perform consistently well with most or all of their students achieving passing scores, but who fail to have a student place in the top 25, do not receive such public recognition.

Attempts to provide a more balanced picture of school performance have been made in recent years. This includes development of a measure called the School GPA which takes into account the performance of all students at the school, not just the top performers. The measure has been used to recognize schools that make significant improvements in student performance. Nonetheless, there has been reluctance to share performance information publicly on all schools for fear of stigmatization of students and schools. The result is very little accountability by schools for student performance, even those with consistently low performance and no improvement.

Belize has no [10] national standardized assessments in place for students in secondary or higher levels of education. The Examinations Unit, however, administers various international and regional examinations annually. The most commonly sat exam among these is the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examination, which is offered in approximately 30 subject areas. Most high school students take one or more CSEC examinations during their final year of high school; however, unlike most other Caribbean territories, CSEC is not used as an entry requirement by local tertiary institutions.

Table 14 shows the number of graded entries (units of subjects taken which were graded) and the number and percentage of entries that earned Grades I to III, which are considered satisfactory level performance (SLP) in CSEC. Over the last six years, an average of 73% of entries earned a satisfactory grade.

Similar to the PSE, there are fluctuations from year to year in the areas of English and Math, with students performing better in English than in Math. Figure 19 shows the

TABLE 14 PERFORMANCE ON CSEC EXAMINATIONS, 2014-2019

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Grades I-III	18,878	20,968	24,575	23,768	25,211	23,827
Graded Entries	14,437	15,288	16,790	16,602	19,501	17,696
% SLP	76.5%	72.9%	68.3%	69.9%	77.4%	74.3%

Source: Caribbean Examinations Council

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[10] The Association of Tertiary Level Institutions in Belize (ATLIB) offers an exam in Math and English which is used by some tertiary institutions for placement of students into college Math and English courses.

percentage of students who earned Grades I, II, or III) on the English A and Mathematics CSEC Examinations. Of note, in 2019, while the vast majority of final year primary school students (96%) took the PSE, only 74% of final year secondary school students took the English A CSEC exam and 72% of them took the Math exam. As is the case with the PSE, top students and schools are recognized, but school-based performance is not reported publicly.

FIGURE 19 PERCENTAGE OF SITTERS WITH SLP ON CSEC ENGLISH A AND MATH, 2010-2019
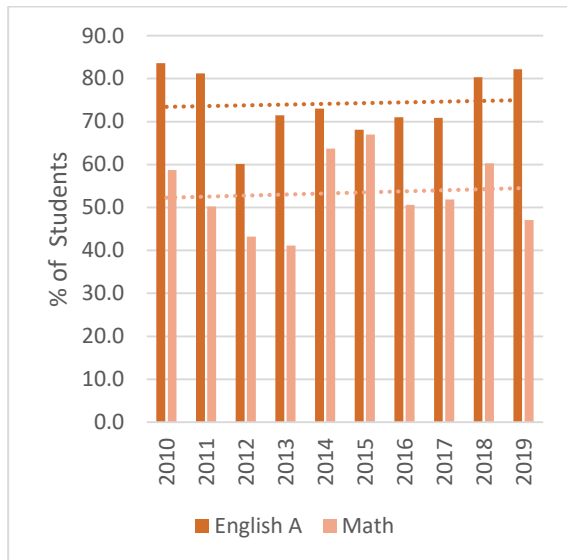
Source: Caribbean Examinations Council

Recent developments in the area of measurement and evaluation include the preparation of more detailed diagnostic reports for schools based on BJAT and PSE results, the publication of a manual to guide schools in using diagnostic data for improvement planning and intervention, and the introduction of a new test, the Belize Diagnostic Achievement Test (BDAT. The BDAT is intended to give teachers and school administrators information on how well their interventions have worked to improve

student learning. In response to the need to assess learning loss due to COVID-19 school closures in 2020, the Belize Diagnostic Achievement Test (BDAT) was expanded to include tests at every level from Infant I to Std. VI. The tests were to be administered at the start of the 2020-21 school year; however, schools remained closed for much of that school year.

Both the PSE and CSEC have been criticized as being outdated and irrelevant, placing too much pressure on students and teachers, and even causing damage to the self-esteem of students and the reputation of schools. Ensuring that national examinations are aligned to changes in the national curriculum and to the expected learning outcomes at each level of education are also areas of concern. There are no clearly defined end-of-program benchmarks. These would serve to define the expected level of achievement at the end of the primary, lower secondary and upper secondary levels and would provide the basis on which relevant assessments could be developed.

Advocates for a discontinuation of the PSE and CSEC exams have argued for them to be replaced with school-based examinations or more authentic types of measures such as successful transition to and performance in further education and employment. Despite the criticisms, standardized assessments do have a role in tracking system improvements (or lack thereof) and in making regional and international performance comparisons. The ability to make such determinations though, depends on the design and quality of the exam and the strategic use of examination results for decision-making.

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

KRA 2.2 Assessment for Learning: Measuring What Counts

Objective: Create a quality and relevant assessment and examination system that is aligned to the national curriculum and that provides meaningful information for improvements in teaching and learning.

Expected Outcome: Belizean students will participate in a fair, valid system of assessments that allows for improvement, certification and verification of their competencies and level of achievement.

Key Challenges: misalignment between curriculum, instruction and assessment, low quality of examinations, inadequate use of examination results

Strategic Actions:

2.2.1   Develop a national student assessment policy and scheme for the Belize education system, including a mechanism for the effective use of assessment results to impact education policies and practices at both the school and system levels.

2.2.2   Strengthen the expertise within the Curriculum and Assessment Unit to develop quality diagnostic and standardized assessments.

2.2.3   Upgrade the technology and infrastructure used in the administration and analysis of examinations to improve timeliness and usefulness of results.

2.2.4   Develop a suite of appropriate screening tools, diagnostic tests and standardized examinations that are aligned to national curriculum benchmarks at all levels and in accordance with the new assessment policy and scheme.

2.2.5   Develop teacher resources and provide training to teachers in administering screening tools and diagnostic tests and in the use of appropriate assessment strategies to promote learning.

[11]DEVELOPMENT AND STATUS OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN BELIZE

Teacher training in Belize began in 1954 with the establishment of two institutions, the St. John's Teachers' College and St. George's Teachers' College. Prior to the establishment of these institutions there were limited in-country training opportunities. In 1965, the two colleges merged to form the Belize Teachers' Training College (BTTC). From 1965 to 1991, BTTC offered the 'Two Plus One' Certificate Program for primary school teachers, which included one year of internship. That program was replaced with a three-year Certificate in Teaching Program (Level I and Level II), part of which was delivered through distance learning. In 2000, the BTTC was merged with four other institutions to establish the University of Belize (UB). UB thus became the single local provider of teacher education programs in the country.

To increase the number of trained teachers at the primary level, the Ministry of Education supported the development and delivery of an Associate of Arts in Primary Education Program (AAPE) in junior colleges. The AAPE was piloted by St. John's College Junior College in 2003 and was subsequently rolled out to other institutions across the country. Three additional programs were subsequently developed: 1) a [12] Certificate in Primary Education, 2) an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education, and 3) a Certificate in Early Childhood Education. Leadership certificate programs for primary and secondary school principals have also been developed.

Five junior colleges now offer Associate degrees and certificates in teacher education. The University of Belize offers the AAPE, a Bachelor's degree in Primary Education, several Bachelor's degrees in Secondary Education with subject concentrations, and a Diploma in Education for secondary school teachers. The institution also recently added a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership and has delivered two European Union-funded teacher education projects, one targeting teachers in the "banana belt" in the south and the other for teachers in the "sugar belt" in the north. Bachelor's and Master's degree programs in teacher education are also now available through Galen University and online through the University of the West Indies Open Campus.

Figure 20 shows that there has been a significant increase in the level of trained teachers over the last 15 years. Between 2005 and 2019, the percentage of trained teachers rose from 8.9% to 57.8% at the preschool level, from 46.7% to 86% at the primary level, and from 34.2% to 69.5% at the secondary level.

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[11] The Director, Mrs. Jeannie Garbutt-Franklin and Staff of the Teacher Education and Development Services made significant contributions to this section of the analysis.
[12] The certificate and diploma programs are designed for persons with degrees in areas other than education.

FIGURE 20 PERCENTAGE OF TRAINED TEACHERS BY LEVEL, 2005/06-2019/20
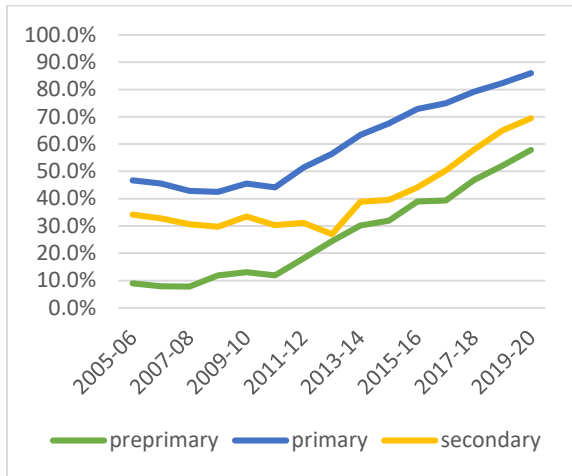
Source: PPRE Unit-MoECST

The increase in the percentage of trained teachers came as a result of the expansion of and increased access to teacher education programs, as well as the introduction and enforcement of legislation and regulations for teacher licensing. The Education and Training Act, 2010, established the Belize Teaching Services Commission (TSC), whose functions include the enforcement of standards for entry into the teaching profession. The Education Amendment Rules 2012 provided further guidance regarding requirements for the licensing of teachers. Teachers were initially provided with a grace period to comply with requirements and in 2016 legal instruments were passed to give teachers who met certain criteria additional time to become compliant. The TSC has since enforced licensing requirements, resulting in some untrained teachers losing their jobs. Requirements for leadership certification of principals and vice-principals are also now being enforced, as the crucial roles that principals play in providing clinical supervision and support for teachers and managing school improvement efforts are recognized.

The progress made in increasing the number of trained teachers in the system is sometimes overshadowed by criticisms of the quality of teachers, of teacher training programs and of the institutions offering those programs. The Belize Board of Teacher Education (BBTE) has the responsibility for assuring the quality of teacher education and training programs. This task is supported by the Ministry's Teacher Education and Development Services (TEDS) unit which was established in 2006. Development of Standards of Practice for Teachers and Teacher Education Programs started in 2010, but it was not until 2016 that these were formalized. The Standards are now under review for alignment with regional standards. In a recent evaluation of the AAPE program, researchers concluded that the AAPE did contribute to the growth in certified teachers as was intended. Interns and graduates also felt that the program had adequately prepared them to teach. However, the same study found several weaknesses in the program and how it is being delivered. These include the following:

- omissions, gaps, and weaknesses in coverage of several Standards of Performance;
- weak coherence and integration across courses and with the National Primary Curriculum;

- insufficient and unclear documentation of policies and guidelines;
- limited exposure to a variety of authentic classroom settings and insufficient opportunities for gaining authentic teaching experience especially in multi-grade settings;
- insufficient modeling of a variety of assessment strategies by instructors;
- inadequate qualifications and experience by program instructors and supervisors; and
- insufficient resources for teacher educators to deliver the program

Principals indicated that graduates of the AAPE did not sufficiently demonstrate the "competencies (knowledge, skills, and dispositions) outlined in the graduate profile and effective grasp of content and pedagogy in the four core areas of the NPC". The researchers also concluded that "the programs' goal of preparing teachers for all divisions in the primary schools and with preparing them with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to deliver the primary curriculum were not met." The study also indicated that the program may have already achieved market saturation, given the large number of graduates not in the system and the steady decline in the number of students pursuing the program.

The fact that the vast majority of primary school teachers are already trained means that addressing the identified shortcomings must be done, not only through revision of current teacher education programs, but through targeted and impactful in-service and continuing professional development courses. The Ministry of Education recently

attempted to do so through the Education Quality Improvement Project (EQIP). Between 2015 and 2019, teachers and school administrators in about 50% of government and government-aided primary schools were trained in inquiry and problem-based pedagogy. The long term impact of such programs on teaching practices and student outcomes is yet to be determined. The Ministry has also tried to strengthen the skills of newly qualified teachers through the introduction of a one-year induction program which provides them with mentoring and support. Teachers with an AAPE or Certificate in Primary education who successfully complete the program are moved from pay scale 9 to 12. However, on average, only 60 teachers enroll in the induction program annually.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the need for teachers to be versed in areas such as the use of digital platforms, applications, and devices, but there are long standing challenges that need to be addressed as well. The poor performance of students in core subject areas such as Math and English was already mentioned. The disparity in education attendance between urban and rural populations was discussed as well. Rural primary school students are also outperformed by their urban counterparts on examinations. Although these results may be influenced by the greater levels of poverty found in rural areas, the prevalence of multi-grade schools in rural areas and the inadequate preparation of teachers to teach in such settings could be important contributing factors as well.

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

KRA 2.3 Teacher Development: Elevating the Profession

Objective: Transform teacher education and development programs and incentivize quality teaching practices and performance results for improved student learning.

Expected Outcome: Belizean teachers will have the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to support students in acquiring high levels of literacy, numeracy, critical thinking and personal and interpersonal skills.

Key Challenges: outdated pedagogy, shortage of quality and relevant professional development opportunities, lack of incentives for good performance

Strategic Actions:

2.3.1   Upgrade the teacher education programs at all levels to ensure that teachers have the specialized content knowledge and pedagogical skills needed to deliver the national curriculum effectively to all students.

2.3.2   Ensure that teachers at the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels of education and teacher educators and professional development facilitators are appropriately trained.

2.3.3   Establish a Teacher Learning Institute to provide structured, comprehensive, year-round professional development programs based on identified needs of teachers and school leaders.

2.3.4   Establish a STEAM Laboratory School to promote effective and innovative teaching in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics.

2.3.5   Revise the appraisal system for teachers and school leaders and introduce a performance-based incentive system to promote school improvement and student achievement.

3. Prioritizing Underserved Sectors

Overview: Despite the gains in increasing access to education for Belizeans over the last several decades, access to quality early childhood education, special education and student support services remains relatively low. The Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI) Study, 2017, found that children who are out of school in their preschool and early primary years were mostly rural, poor and disabled children. The percentage of trained teachers serving these areas is also less than at the primary and secondary levels and while there have been recent and ongoing efforts to address the curriculum at the primary and secondary levels, not as much attention has been paid to addressing those needs in the early childhood and special education sectors. The education system must address these currently underserved sectors and students to achieve the goals of universal quality education.

[13]**STATUS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

The term Early Childhood Development (ECD) refers to

> the physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development of young children. The definition of ECD includes children up to age 8 on the premise that a successful transition to primary school depends not only on the child's school readiness, but also on the readiness of schools to adapt to the specific needs of young learners in the early grades. ECD
>
> and development (ECCD) and encompasses early childhood education (ECE), early childhood care and education (ECCE), and other designations.
>
> *(Naudeau et al. 2011)*

The importance of ECD to long term educational, social and economic development is well established. Adequate provision of ECD services requires an integrated and multidisciplinary approach. It is for this reason that the Ministry of Education collaborated with the ministries responsible for health and human development to implement the National ECD Strategic Plan 2017-2021. The Ministry of Education's particular role is in the area of ECE, which serves the 3 to 8-year age group and spans the preschool (Year 1 and 2) to lower primary (Infant 1 to Standard 1) education grades.

Access and Equity

Preschool education in Belize is a two-year non-compulsory program designed for children from two years and nine months of age to four years and nine months of age. Most of the schools serving this sector are government-aided and private preschools. Some 62% of preschools are attached to a primary school. In the 2019-20 school year, there were 229 preschools country-wide with a total enrolment of [14] 7,312 students. This translates into a Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of 46.6%.

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[13] The Staff of the Early Childhood Unit, Mrs. Lurleen Betson-Gamboa, Ms. Nadera Ross and Ms. Rosiemae Mangar, made significant contributions to this section of the analysis.

[14] Preliminary figures for the 2020-21 school year show that enrolment is down to 5,347 students, a 26% decline, the highest of any education sector during the pandemic.

Trends show that parents are almost [15] four times more likely to send 4-year olds to school than they are to send 3-year olds. Data also show that participation rates of children belonging to urban and higher socioeconomic status households are much higher than for those children from rural and lower socioeconomic status households. One of the contributing factors is that there are no preschools in some rural communities. The low population density in some areas makes establishment of preschools impractical. As a result, only parents who are able or willing to bear the cost of traveling to neighboring communities with preschools can access such services.

Participation in lower primary is much higher than participation in preschools, with the vast majority of students entering primary school by the age of five. Nonetheless, students from rural areas, poor households and those with disabilities are much more likely to start late. The OOSCI Study, 2017, found that one of the reasons for late entry, particularly in rural areas, is that sometimes there are insufficient spaces in the primary schools closest to where students live. These students are also less likely to be prepared for primary school having not gone to preschool, placing them at increased risk for repetition and dropout.

As was discussed previously, one of the major barriers to school attendance is cost. At the primary level, the government of Belize pays the salaries of teachers at government and government-aided

schools and also has a free text-book and a free school transportation program in place. At the preschool level, government also pays the salaries for teachers at government and government-aided schools. Additionally, a grant to assist with school snacks and other operational costs is provided to 62% of preschools. There is, however, no regulation on the amount of fees that preschools can charge.

The result is a wide variation in preschool registration and monthly fees. The Preschool Status Report, 2020, found average fees ranging from as low as $28 for registration and $9 monthly, in attached government preschools, to as high as $185 for registration and $360, monthly in attached private preschools. High fees create a barrier to access for poor families in communities where the number of preschools is limited.

Quality

Information on the quality of early childhood education is currently lacking, since there are no established standards of quality for early childhood education institutions or programs and there is no formal student assessment reporting system in place. The only available information on the developmental status of 3 and 4-year-old children comes from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). MICS calculates a measure called the Early Childhood Development Index (ECDI). The index measures whether children are developmentally on track in four areas:

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[15] In 2019/20, only 18% of enrolled students were 3-year olds, 66% were 4-year olds and 16% were 5-years or older.

- **Literacy-numeracy:** ability to recognize letters and numbers;
- **Physical well-being:** health and mobility;
- **Social-emotional well-being:** ability to focus and get along with peers; and
- **Learning:** ability to follow directions and do tasks independently etc.

Results from the two most recent MICS, 2011 and 2015, are shown in Table 15 below. It shows that ECDI was greater in 2011 than in 2015. Children fell behind in the physical, socio-emotional and learning domains but made gains in the literacy-numeracy domain. Even so, the data indicate that only 52.5% of children scored adequately in that domain.

The preschool curriculum that is currently in place was implemented in 2006. Field visits conducted in preparation for the Preschool Status Report, 2020, revealed the following:

- 90% of the preschools have access to both the Level 1 and Level 2 Preschool Curriculum Guides produced by the Ministry;
- only 60% of the schools had updated annual and unit plans readily available;
- in many instances, teachers only developed lesson plans for Level 2 students and used those same plans for Level 1 students;
- in some instances, lesson plans were incomplete; and
- alternate curricula such as, Montessori and ELLM, are in use, mainly in private schools concentrated in the Belize, Cayo, and Stann Creek districts.

TABLE 15 EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT INDEX, 2011 AND 2015

	Literacy-numeracy	Physical	Social-Emotional	Learning	ECDI
2011	45.9	99.0	78.5	98.4	**87.5**
2015	52.5	96.8	76.9	93.3	**82.5**

Source: MICS, SIB

TABLE 16 NUMBER OF TRAINED AND UNTRAINED PRESCHOOL TEACHERS BY DISTRICT, 2019/20

District	Trained		Untrained	Total
	ECE	Other		
Belize	27	32	77	136
Cayo	0	37	42	79
Corozal	10	29	8	47
Orange Walk	4	35	4	43
Stann Creek	3	29	30	62
Toledo	0	32	13	45
Total	**44**	**194**	**174**	**412**

Source: PPRE Unit, MoECST

The Ministry has recognized the need to update the 2006 curriculum to prioritize play-based instructional learning and to incorporate new research-based improvements in content and approaches. Equally important is ensuring that teachers are appropriately trained to deliver such a curriculum. Education regulations allow for early childhood teachers in preschools and lower division of primary schools to hold degrees in Primary Education. Therefore, although 58% of preschool teachers are counted as trained, only 11% have actual qualifications in ECE (see Table 16). At the lower primary level, 82% of teachers are trained but only 2% have a degree in ECE.

Although the regulations stipulate that ECE teachers without an ECE degree must supplement that shortcoming through professional development courses in ECE, this provision is not currently enforced. The result is that these teachers may not have the appropriate knowledge, skills and orientation and instead use strategies more appropriate for older children. Principals, especially those in primary schools that have attached preschools, have to guard against preschool and lower division instruction becoming more academically inclined instead of play-based.

The availability of appropriate facilities for the delivery of early childhood programs is another important consideration. Field visits conducted in preparation of the Preschool Status Report found that buildings and classrooms, classroom spaces, bathroom units, hand-washing facilities, potable water supply and electrical installations were mostly adequate and appropriate for delivery of services. Areas found inadequate

include accommodations for students with special education needs, appropriateness of playground and other educational spaces and outdoor security. It must also be noted that, though not the majority, there are some preschools that are too overcrowded and some that have facilities that are in dire need of repairs and renovations.

The current arrangements for coordinating, monitoring and supporting early childhood education also need attention. The Ministry has an Early Childhood Education Development Center which falls under the Quality Assurance Development Services (QADS). The Centre is staffed by three officers with Master's degrees in Early Childhood Education who coordinate much of the national-level tasks and inter-ministerial activities. Each District Education Centre also has an ECE officer whose primary task is to supervise preschools. This arrangement results in wide disparities in workloads for ECE officers. The number of preschools to supervisor is 26 to 1 in the Orange Walk District but doubles to 52 to 1 in the Belize District. This limits the frequency of contact and quality of support that can be provided. Additionally, responsibility for policy development in the sector needs to be clarified and collaboration between officers in the ECEDC and DEC in coordinating ECE services can be improved.

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

KRA 3.1 Early Childhood Education: Starting Strong

Objective: Implement early childhood policy and curricular reform and expand services in underserved areas to increase access to quality early childhood education.

Expected Outcome: All Belizean preschool-aged children will have access to quality preschool programs and services.

Key Challenges: limited access in rural areas, absence of standards, outdated curriculum, lack of public awareness of the importance of early childhood education, limited coordination, monitoring and support

Strategic Actions:

3.1.1   Collaborate with relevant line Ministries to develop an updated national policy for Early Childhood Education and Development in Belize.

3.1.2   Establish a comprehensive, play-oriented preschool and lower primary education curriculum which includes reading, visual arts, dancing, planting, music, civics and an introduction to technology.

3.1.3   Expand access to preschool education for 3 and 4 year olds by building new preschools and attaching preschools to existing primary schools where possible.

3.1.4   Develop alternative preschool programs in areas where traditional preschools are not feasible.

3.1.5   Develop an ECE public awareness campaign with key messages including the importance of early childhood stimulation, education and development.

[16]STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Social and economic factors can produce negative impacts on student learning, retention and achievement. Therefore, to be successful, the education system must be able to identify and respond, not only to the academic needs of students, but to their social, emotional and economic needs as well. Several programs currently exist within the MoECST that are aimed at addressing these issues; however, there is much room for improvement in terms of their coverage and effectiveness in meeting the needs of students. There is also a need for increased collaboration with other Ministries and social partners, since some of the challenges and solutions are beyond the mandate and capacity of the MoECST.

School Feeding Programs

> "Many of the students come to school with no food, they come with their stomach empty. That is one of the reasons they get discouraged because when they have to work and study with no food in the stomach it is so hard." (Teacher)
>
> *(Out of School Children Initiative Study, 2017, pp. 48-51)*

Around half (47%) of primary schools and almost all high schools offer some type of feeding or nutrition support program, but in most cases, this is only for a limited number of students and do not cover all who are in need. These programs usually consist of one meal, usually lunch, which is provided either through a school cafeteria or lunch program. Most programs rely on donations from parents, teachers, community organizations or religious groups.

In 2011, the Ministry of Education established a free school meals program in conjunction with the amalgamation of several primary schools in the Belize River Valley. One of the effects of the amalgamation was that students who traditionally went home for lunch were no longer able to do so if the school they were attending was in another village. The program was expanded in 2013 to include 25 primary schools in Belize City and 6 schools in Dangriga Town. Approximately 1,300 students benefited from the program annually. The program was intended to alleviate short-term hunger, decrease absenteeism, improve student performance and assist children in making better food choices. An evaluation of the impact of this program is pending.

More recent developments to increase coverage include several initiatives in partnership with the Ministries of Health and Agriculture and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Results of this collaboration include:

- publication of a guidebook called *National Menus for School Feeding Programs;*
- implementation and expansion of a school feeding and gardening program that includes the purchase of kitchen equipment, training, construction of greenhouses and purchase agreements with local farmers in several rural schools; and

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[16] The Director, Dr. Candy Garnett, and Staff of the Education Support Services, including Ms. Kalee Young made significant contributions to this section of the analysis.

- establishment of a National Sustainable School Feeding Technical (NSSFT) Committee.

The goals of the NSSFT are to reduce and prevent hunger, obesity and other forms of malnutrition in vulnerable children and to help keep such children in school. The NSSFT Committee plans to provide guidance and support for the expansion of school feeding, gardening and nutrition education programs. Expansion of this program to meet the needs of all students and communities is a core commitment of the MoECST and the Government of Belize.

Psychosocial Support

Psychosocial support is another area of great need. The MoECST provides funding for one or more counsellors at each secondary school. A secondary school counsellor's workload usually includes personal and group counseling as well as the teaching of Life Skills courses and planning of school-wide events. The vast majority of primary schools do not have an assigned counsellor. Those primary schools that do have some access to counselling services are typically served by counsellors who are hired to support multiple schools under a particular school management. The need for counselling services at the primary level is great given the country's high levels of crime and violence in homes and the wider community, the exposure of children to trauma and abuse, and students' unmet mental health and social needs.

The MoECST has a small Counselling and Care Unit (CCU) which is responsible for addressing issues related to healthy behavior and mental health of primary school children. One of the main areas of focus for the CCU is supporting schools in developing positive systems of behavior management and support, especially since the abolition of corporal punishment in schools in 2010. The CCU's response has been to help schools employ a school-wide approach to manage student behavior using a Positive Behaviour Interventions and Supports (PBIS) System. PBIS is an approach that emphasizes positive and proactive behaviour management that respects the rights and dignity of the child. So far, the program has reached 39 primary schools and approximately 14,000 students. Schools where the program has been implemented report decrease in problem behaviour inside and outside of the classroom and increase in attendance rates of both teachers and students. The [17] shortage of human resources within the CCU has limited the expansion of the program.

The CCU also works closely with the Belize School Counsellor Association to support and improve the practice of school counselling and directly with schools to develop mental health care plans for students with emotional/behavioral issues. Additionally, the Unit organizes the Ministry's response to support students and teachers in times of crisis and provides, to a limited extent, individual, small group, and large group counselling services.

The Ministry has also had small initiatives to introduce restorative practices and

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[17] The MoECST currently has one counsellor employed and one vacancy for a second counsellor in the CCU.

mindfulness in schools. A Mindfulness in Schools Program was launched in 2018 in collaboration with local mindfulness coaches. The two-year program resulted in the training of twenty-four teachers and counsellors at the primary and secondary levels in mindfulness practices. Each teacher was responsible for sensitizing their school staff and implementing mindfulness projects in their classrooms in the 2019/20 school year. The implementation and evaluation of the projects were negatively impacted by the school closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

School Community Liaison and Security Program

As noted previously, Section 61 of the Education and Training Act 2010 makes legal provisions for school attendance. The Act also provides for the appointment of School Community Liaison Officers (SCLOs) and lays out the primary duties of such officers. These include reporting on parents of children of compulsory school age who are not registered or regularly attending school without a justifiable reason as provided for in the Act and enforcing the provisions of the Act including prosecuting those who are not in compliance with attendance provisions.

Structures for truancy management predate the 2010 Act. The Ministry's current School Community Liaison and Security Programme (SCLSP) has its origin in a Truancy Initiative in 1998 to address the high rate of non and irregular school attendance of children 5 to 14 years of age. The program employed Truancy Officers to monitor, report and assist children found not attending school. A year later, the security component, in the form of wardens stationed at schools, was added following a series of child abductions and murders. The SCLSP seeks to "ensure that all school-aged children living in Belize attend safe and secure schools regularly so as to provide themselves with the opportunity to learn and participate constructively in the development of Belize as well as their own personal development".

There are currently 19 SCLOs and approximately 200 school wardens. The majority of school wardens (75%) work in Belize City. The caseload of SCLOs (see Table 17) and the qualifications and training of both SCLOs and school wardens are matters of concern. Most SCLOs hold a high school diploma as their highest level of qualification, although their duties include high level tasks such as interpreting legislation, navigating the legal process,

TABLE 17 DISTRIBUTION OF SCLOs BY DISTRICT

District	# SCLOs	# of primary schools	# of primary students	# of schools per SCLO	# of students per SCLO
Belize	7	68	15,300	10	2186
Cayo	2	75	17,009	38	8505
Corozal	2	42	7,607	21	3804
Orange Walk	2	42	9,125	21	4563
Stann Creek	4	34	7,258	9	1815
Toledo	2	56	7,587	28	3794

Source: Records Office, MoECST

communicating with sensitivity and writing reports. School wardens typically hold minimum qualifications such as a primary school certificate. Both SCLOs and wardens receive limited training for the duties that they perform. There is also a wide variation in the number of SCLOs serving the districts and no clear rationale for the allocation of officers by number of schools or students and the prevalence of truancy. Of note, the Cayo District, to which only 2 SCLOs are assigned, has had the highest primary school dropout rate over the last two years.

Resources for monitoring, such as fuel and transportation to access remote rural areas, are also limited. In recent years, several of the SCLOs have participated in exercises to assist schools in updating student data in the BEMIS database. This is a potential useful resource for the SCLOs; however, few schools are currently using the attendance feature of BEMIS. As well, teachers and principals, who have a legal responsibility to report absences, do not always comply with this requirement. The use of BEMIS and a proactive approach from schools would reduce the need for SCLOs to visit schools and lead to early identification and more timely response by SCLOs to truancy cases. There is also no case management software or formal system in place that links truancy with police or social services departments. These links are especially crucial in areas such as refugee communities, popular tourist destinations, farming communities and impoverished urban areas, where child labour, child sexual exploitation and use of children in illicit drug activities are more prevalent.

Additional Programs

Schools have benefited from a number of additional school-based and community-based programs. One such program was the Early Warning and Responsive Management System (EWS) which was launched in 2015. The EWS was a UNICEF-funded program involving the Ministries of Education, Human Development and the RESTORE Belize unit. EWS was designed to ensure early identification and support of students at-risk of dropping out of primary school. The program used a whole-school approach and an Attendance, Behaviour, and Coursework (ABC) framework to identify students at risk and to provide the necessary support for them to remain in school. Interventions included instructional support, counselling and material support. There was also a family support component. The program eventually reached 5 schools in Belize City. In 2017, responsibility for coordination of the program moved from RESTORE Belize to the Ministry of Education.

As mentioned previously, being male is a primary determinant of risk for school dropout. Females tend to perform substantially better than males in school and on examinations. Figure 21 shows that males also have much higher repetition and dropout rates than females at both the primary and secondary levels of education and are twice as likely as females to repeat in high school. Creating a supportive environment for boys through appropriate curriculum design, delivery and assessment is critical not only for boys but for the education system and the country as a whole. The goals and vision for education cannot be accomplished if boys continue to be left behind.

One notable UNICEF-funded student support program from RESTORE Belize, called Metamorphosis, attempted to provide such an environment. The program focused exclusively on high risk adolescent males and their families living in gang-affected communities in Belize City. It provided participants with individual counselling, remedial academic classes, mentorship, extracurricular activities, and retreats. Additionally, there were parenting sessions, social work support for families and regular home visits. Meetings and training sessions with school personnel were also conducted to increase support for the boys at school. By 2018, three cohorts of students had completed the program.

The Gang Resistance Education And Training (G.R.E.A.T.) Program was another effort aimed at reducing gang activity by early intervention and engagement of vulnerable youths. G.R.E.A.T originated in the United States and has been implemented in several Central American countries. The program is coordinated by the Police Department and delivered by community police officers trained through the U.S. Embassy's International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs section. The program, which uses a skill-based curriculum, targets children who are at an age immediately before the usual induction into gangs and delinquent behavior. Over 200 officers and more than 17,000 primary school students benefited from the program by 2018.

Several of the programs that have been described continue but on a much reduced scale. Although programs of these types are clearly needed, sustaining and expanding coverage requires dedicated allocations of human and financial resources.

FIGURE 21 SECONDARY REPETITION AND DROPOUT RATES BY GENDER, 2014/15-2018/19
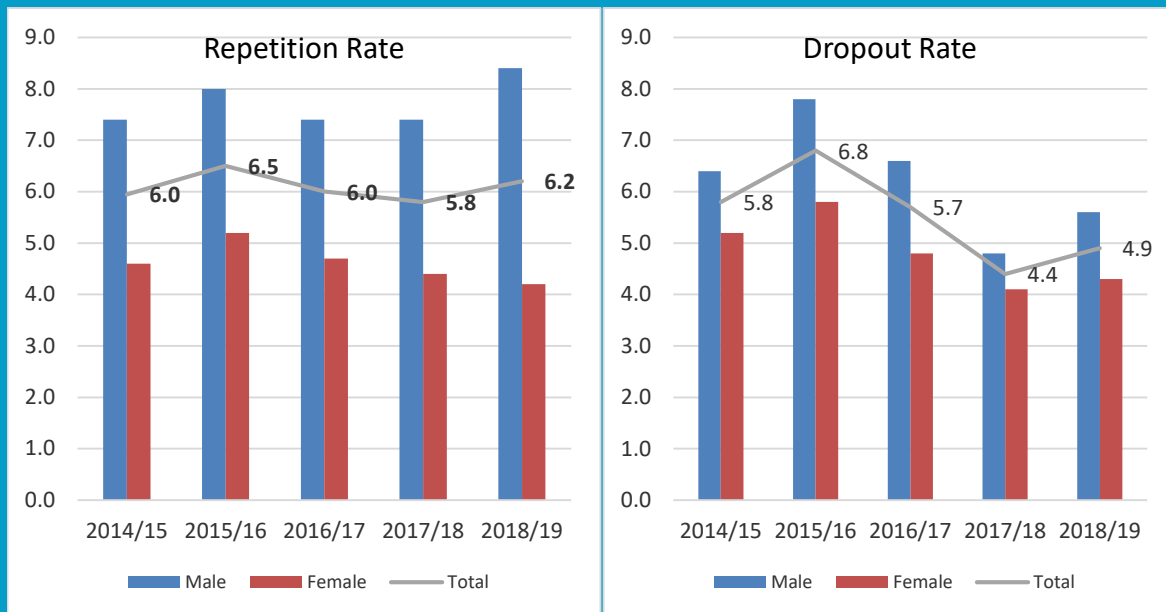
Source: PPRE Unit-MoECST

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

KRA 3.2 Student Welfare: Reducing Vulnerability

Objective: Provide resources and programs to support students with social, economic and psychosocial challenges.

Expected Outcome: All Belizean children with socio-economic and psychosocial needs will be identified and appropriately supported.

Key Challenges: high rates of poverty among children, shortage of school counselors, child abuse and trauma, weak links with social services, dropout and underperformance of boys

Strategic Actions:

3.2.1   Establish a National Healthy Start Feeding Program with a school gardening component to provide nutritional support for students from low income families.

3.2.2   Increase the availability of trained school counsellors at the primary level to address the psychosocial needs of students.

3.2.3   Design and implement school-wide programs that promote social and emotional learning and encourage positive discipline and restorative practices at school and in the home.

3.2.4   Work with social service organizations to strengthen the system for identifying and supporting children with social barriers to inclusion and learning, including refugees, students living in poverty and those from remote rural areas.

3.2.5   Design and implement support programs that target increased retention and achievement of students in primary and secondary schools, with particular attention to boys.

[18]SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

The Ministry of Education's mission states that "All Belizeans should be given the opportunity to acquire those knowledge, skills and attitudes required for full and active participation in the development of the nation and for their own personal development". Belize is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Meeting these obligations requires that appropriate systems and services are put in place to accommodate students who are disadvantaged in some way. The Education Act and Rules do not include a definition for Special Education, but the concept currently in use aligns with the definition from the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) which is as follows:

> Education designed to facilitate the learning of individuals who, for a wide variety of reasons, require additional support and adaptive pedagogical methods in order to participate and meet learning objectives in an educational programme.
> *(ISCED, 2011)*

Students requiring special education services include those with physical, behavioural, intellectual, emotional and social disadvantages. These students may need support in the form of diagnostic services, special education teachers or paraprofessionals, counsellors, modified curriculum, individualized education plans or assistive technology. Students with special education needs (SEN) may be accommodated in special schools, in special classrooms attached to traditional schools, or in traditional classrooms that accommodate both SEN and non-SEN students. This latter arrangement promotes inclusive education which UNESCO defines as "a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion from education and from within education".

The Education Support Services (ESS) arm of the Ministry is responsible for coordinating the provision of such services. ESS supervises four units: 1) National Resource Center for Inclusive Education (NaRCIE), 2) Counseling and Care Program, 3) School Health and Nutrition Program, and 4) School Community Liaison and Security Unit. Services offered through NaRCIE include:

- academic assessments to identify learning needs;
- support to teachers in developing learning intervention plans and inclusive education programs;
- training of teachers in learning how to assess students' level of performance and specialized methods to help students succeed at their own level;
- accommodations for students to sit national and regional exams; and
- various types of support to students and their parents.

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[18] The Director, Dr. Candy Garnette, and Staff of the Education Support Services made significant contributions to this section of the analysis.

Delivering such services requires collaboration with school personnel, families, and religious, government and non-governmental organizations.

Access and Enrolment

Presently there are two special schools and ten schools with one or more [19] special classrooms across the country. Table 18 shows [20] enrolment in special schools and classrooms in the 2019/20 school year. The majority of students with SEN, though, are included in traditional classrooms, both at the primary and secondary levels of education. Table 19 shows the number of students who were [21] clients of NaRCIE in 2019/20 by category of need and type of learning environment.

TABLE 18 ENROLMENT IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS AND CLASSROOMS BY DISTRICT, TYPE AND GENDER, 2019/20

District	Name of Institution	Type	Male	Female	Total
Belize	Stella Maris School	Special School	68	36	104
Cayo	Garden City Primary	Special Classroom	13	4	17
	Santa Elena RC Primary	Special Classroom	3	5	8
	United Evergreen Primary	Special Classroom	9	2	11
Corozal	Chunox RC Primary School	Special Classroom	3	0	3
	Mary Hill RC Primary School	Special Classroom	9	2	11
	San Narciso RC Primary	Special Classroom	5	3	8
Orange Walk	St. Peter's Anglican Primary	Special Classroom	14	10	24
Stann Creek	Holy Ghost RC Primary	Special Classroom	9	7	16
Toledo	Forest Home Methodist Primary	Special Classroom	5	1	6
	Punta Gorda Methodist Primary	Special Classroom	1	2	3

Source: PPRE Unit, MoECST

TABLE 19 ENROLMENT OF STUDENTS WITH SEN BY CATEGORY OF NEED AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT, 2019/20

Category	Special SCH/CR	High School	Primary School	Total
Attention Deficit Disorder/ADHD	6	12	52	**70**
Autism Spectrum Disorder	37	8	44	**89**
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	10	6	20	**36**
Emotional Behavioural/Social Disorder	10	2	12	**24**
Health Disorder	2	10	17	**29**
Intellectual Impairment	108	10	66	**184**
Learning Disability	3	30	131	**164**
Physical Disability	19	10	37	**66**
Visual Impairment	3	12	28	**43**
Pervasive Developmental Disorder	2	4	5	**11**
Speech Language Disorder	11	0	12	**23**

Source: NaRCIE, MoECST

[19] SEN students in special classrooms spend at least part of the day interacting with non-SEN students.
[20] An additional 12 students were enrolled in the Cayo Centre for the Deaf, one of the two special schools.

[21] It must be noted that these are likely not all the students with special education needs in schools and the number of children with special needs who do not enter schools is currently unknown.

Achievements and Challenges

Over the past two decades, special education services have expanded countrywide and there has been a change in approach from providing separate and specialized learning environments for students with special education needs to providing resources and support to students in the least restrictive environment. This was a paradigm shift and a critical move that concentrated efforts to promote and support inclusive education. Other recent developments include:

- increased access to support services for students who are deaf/hard of hearing (such students are now supported by an interpreter);
- transition from services being provided by temporary Itinerant Resource Officers to sixteen permanently established Special Education Officers;
- identification and training of School Inclusion Coordinators at primary schools; and
- building the capacity of teachers and special education officers through formal and informal programs.

In 2019, the Ministry, in partnership with the University of the West Indies, launched a Masters' Degree Program in Inclusive and Special Education. The program includes courses on learning disabilities, assessment of young children with special needs, early intervention, planning for, and supporting infant and toddler development, measurement of psychological and educational constructs and policy and practice in inclusive classrooms. There is also a strong research component. Thirty-six teachers and Special Education Officers are

expected to complete the program by the end of 2021.

The Education and Training Act 2010, mandates that the Ministry of Education ensures that the provision of education "caters to the special needs of challenged pupils". Education Rule 189 (1) also states that "programs will be designed to meet the needs of all challenged students" and that "the education system shall take into account the special educational needs of students and shall provide schools with learning environments to address those needs." Nonetheless, the educational experience of students with special education needs and their families is often far from this ideal. Some of the more prevalent challenges are outlined below.

Difficulties Gaining School Entry: Despite the education regulations mandating that schools accept and accommodate students regardless of their needs, schools often turn parents away when they try to enroll their children with disabilities. Parents who are not aware of their rights or the support that can be provided through the Ministry of Education often resort to accepting the school's decision.

Inadequate Referral and Diagnosis Processes: A number of factors contribute to students with SEN not being properly referred and diagnosed, including teachers and principals who fail to initiate the referral process; parents who are unwilling to give permission for their child to be referred and diagnosed because of denial or shame; failure of Special Education officers to follow-up with the process due to unavailability of transportation or assignments of tasks outside of their core responsibilities; and the lack of in-house

expertise and equipment needed to diagnose some conditions.

Limited Support at Higher Levels of Education: The support provided to high school students who are deaf/hard of hearing has allowed several of these students to graduate; however, they ultimately face a ceiling when trying to access tertiary education, since no such support is provided. Paraprofessional support is currently limited to interpreters, so students with other conditions often end up withdrawing from school.

Lack of Adequate Facilities and Resources: Most schools are either inaccessible or inadequate for wheelchairs. Some of the facilities serving special needs students are also in a state of disrepair. While NaRCIE provides or facilitates the donations of some resources like hearing aids and glasses, educational devices which could improve the learning experiences for students with SEN are often lacking. Finances to procure such devices or to hire paraprofessionals to assist children are beyond the reach of many families.

Stigma and Discrimination: As mentioned previously, students with SEN face discrimination from schools and sometimes within their own families. The lack of sensitization of the public leads to bullying of children from their peers as well as adults and makes it difficult for them to continue their education and to later find employment.

Providing and improving support services for children with SEN will require the development of structured programs for

students to access high-quality learning environments, individualized support, and resources in the least restrictive environment. The overall goals for this sector, as for the others, remain focused on access, equity and quality, which can only be achieved by ensuring that the most vulnerable students are given the attention that they need and deserve.

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

KRA 3.3 Special Education: Taking Everyone Along

Objective: Provide the legislation, policies, programs and resources needed to improve the inclusion and experience of students with diverse needs in the education system.

Expected Outcome: Belizean children will have access to quality education services regardless of their unique physical, social, emotional or academic needs.

Key Challenges: inadequate infrastructure, lack of training and human resources, inefficient support services

Strategic Actions:

3.3.1   Strengthen the legislative, regulatory and policy framework to ensure that children with diverse needs have equal access to quality and relevant education in the most enabling environment.

3.3.2   Ensure that special schools, classrooms and other facilities that serve students with special education needs, including NaRCIE, have appropriate accommodations and resources for students and staff.

3.3.3   Improve education and support services for students with special education needs, including referral and diagnostic services, learning support, development of life skills and, where applicable, transition into further education, skills training or employment.

3.3.4   Increase the availability of resources and services in key areas such as speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, diagnostics and paraprofessional support, especially in rural communities.

3.3.5   Implement a sustained public awareness campaign, school sensitization program and support groups to encourage greater acceptance and understanding of the rights of students with special education needs.

4. Maximizing Human Capital

Overview: While basic education (pre-primary, primary and secondary education) is designed to provide students with foundational knowledge and skills, training in the TVET, tertiary and adult education sectors is more focused on workforce development and real-life application. As a result, programs in these sectors need to be flexible and responsive to the changing needs of the economy and of the learners being served. The status, challenges and proposed strategic actions for each of these sectors are described below.

[22]TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Development of the TVET Sector

Although the recognition of the importance of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been slow to take root in Belize, the [23]need was acknowledged from the inception of education in the colony at the turn of the 19th century. Early reports include considerations for including practical subjects into the primary school curriculum and also on the establishment of an industrial school. This latter idea finally materialized in 1927 in the form of a reformatory agricultural school for young offenders. The Belize Technical High School, a more formal education institution, was established in 1952, providing an alternative to the academic curriculum being offered in other established high schools.

Focused coordination of the TVET sector started with the establishment of a Vocational Technical Training Unit (VTTU) in the 1980's and the first Centre for Employment Training in 1992. Between 2006 and 2009, six [24]Institutes for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ITVET) were established, one in each district. Some facilities were entirely new and others involved renovation of existing structures. The initiative was part of the Enhancement of TVET (ETVET) project funded by the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). Another component of the ETVET project was the development of a Belize Technical and Vocational Training Act. The TVET Act was passed in 2005, but was repealed shortly thereafter with the change in political administration and the introduction of the Belize Education and Training Act (BETA) 2010.

At the regional level, Belize joined the Caribbean Association of National Training Agencies (CANTA) which was established by CARICOM in 2003 to coordinate and rationalize TVET among member countries. The effort is intended to support the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) and its precept of free movement and certification of skilled labour. Belize is represented on CANTA by the Employment Training and Education Services (ETES) which is the successor of the VTTU. ETES, however,

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[22] D. Margarita Gomez, Director of the Employment Training and Education Services and Mr. Ricardo Gideon from the PPRE Unit made significant contributions to this section of the analysis.

[23] For more information, see Education in Belize: A historical Perspective, Bennett, 2008.

[24] The government-aided institute in Cayo retained its name as a Centre for Employment and Training (CET).

does not meet the criteria of a National Training Agency (NTA). The result is that there is no in-country authorizing body for Caribbean Vocational Qualifications (CVQ) certification of trainees.

Recent Initiatives

Section 11 of the Belize Education and Training Act 2010 retained the National Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NCTVET) as an advisory body for the sector; however, as mentioned previously, several provisions of BETA and the related regulations are not suited for the nature of the TVET sector. Additionally, although ETES is responsible for monitoring and supporting TVET institutions, the power to determine and enforce policies and practices within institutions lies with Boards of Managements.

In 2016, ETES and the NCTVET collaborated on the development of the NCTVET Strategic Plan 2017-2020. The plan was meant to address identified weaknesses such as the following:

- lack of consultation with employers and the private sector in developing training programs;
- undefined roles and responsibilities of Boards and administrators of ITVETs;
- weak coordination between ITVETs, ETES, NCTVET and the broader Ministry;
- weak maintenance practices, outdated equipment and lack of or inconsistent implementation of standards;
- low enrolment in programs and gender disparity in enrolment;

- negative public perception of TVET and low employer confidence in graduates;
- inadequate location of some sites (e.g. remote, flood prone);
- low level of qualifications of instructors and low capacity of graduates;
- few programs offered beyond Level 1;
- lack of a quality assurance system that would ensure regional competitiveness (e.g. CVQ);
- uncompetitive remuneration packages for instructors and one-year contract limits;
- limited opportunities for instructor development in pedagogy and technical expertise; and
- failure to capitalize on in-house expertise for maintenance and revenue generation.

The strategic plan focused on four key result areas (KRA) as shown below:

- KRA1-Governance, Management & Communication
- KRA2-Quality Assurance - Standards, Certification & Accreditation of Training Programs
- KRA3-Programming Relevance - Curriculum/Training Development and Infrastructure & Equipment
- KRA4-Instructor/Trainer Development

The strategic plan became the main focus of ETES for the period 2017-2020 and many of the embedded strategies were pursued. Terms of reference were drafted for the composition and functions for ITVET Boards and for Managers and Assistant Managers of ITVETs. An institutional evaluation and

improvement planning manual and instruments were developed and used in the external evaluation of ITVETs. Much effort was also placed on laying the groundwork to transition from the [25] Belize National Vocational Qualifications (BzNVQ) assessment structure to the more practical, competency-based, industry-involved CVQ certification system. In preparation for this transition, a TVET Administrative Handbook for CVQ was developed and used to sensitize Board members and train administrators and instructors in the requirements for transitioning to CVQ. ETES-led external quality audits following the CANTA standards and model were conducted on selected programs at each ITVET. This was followed by an official audit by the Caribbean Examinations Council's CVQ Division. Audit reports were shared with institutions for development of institutional enhancement plans.

Instructors and managers have also received specialized technical training under several initiatives facilitated by the Ministry of Education through ETES. In 2018/2019, two training programs were offered by the University of the West Indies through a project funded by the European Union: 1) a Diploma in Competency Based Education and Training (CBET) for instructors, and 2) a Certificate in Leadership and Management for TVET administrators. The project also included capacity building of two local tertiary institutions to be able to carry on such trainings locally. Instructors who had the requisite academic qualifications and completed the CBET diploma were awarded full teaching licences. A number of TVET instructors also participated in short-term skills training programs offered by the Republic of China (Taiwan) and Colombia.

Current Status and Challenges

Recent efforts have failed to produce the expanded enrolment and improved quality desired for the sector. Meaningful partnerships with the private sector remains elusive, the sector continues to be reactive rather than proactive, recognized external verification of the quality of programs is still non-existent, and the perceptions of TVET as a second-class education continues to persist. Some of the key challenges that remain are described below.

Low Qualifications of ITVET Instructors: Most ITVET instructors hold an Associate degree or lower in the trade area in which they teach. Furthermore, although, 37% hold a Bachelor's degree, these are normally in non-technical areas such as Math, Business or English Education. No Bachelor degree programs in technical areas (other than Information Technology) are offered by local institutions. Additionally, only 27% of the current ITVET instructors have completed the Diploma in Competency Based Education and Training (CBET), which is required for obtaining a full teaching licence for TVET.

Persistent Low Enrolment: The ITVET system was designed to accommodate 1,200 full-time students at any one time. As can be seen from Figure 22, even this low target has not been achieved. Furthermore, although ITVETs were envisioned to be primarily post-

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[25] BzNVQs have not been offered since 2019 because of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, there has been low participation from trainees since it is not a requirement by the ITVETs for students to sit the exam. There is also no BzNVQ examination beyond

Level I although there are several Level II programs being offered by institutions.

secondary, in some institutes, the majority of student are enrolled in prevocational programs. These are students who are below the age of 15, the minimum requirement for enrolment in a trade program. As discussed previously, female enrolment in TVET programs is extremely low.

FIGURE 22 ITVET ENROLMENT BY GENDER, 2014/15-2019/20
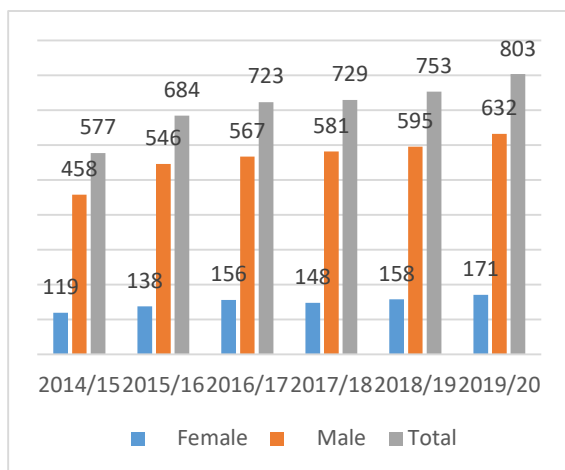
Source: PPRE Unit, MoECST

Low Completion and Achievement Rates
Results of a recent diagnosis of the TVET sector revealed wide variations in completion rates among institutions, with some institutions having rates as low as 8% and 26% of trainees completing programs in which they had enrolled between 2013 and 2017. Many of those who complete programs and sit the BzNVQ are unsuccessful in their first attempt and must retake the exam. Table 20 show the results of the 2019 BzNVQ examinations.

Although efforts have been made to address these long-standing problems, the necessary resources, systems and regulatory frameworks to support, build on, and sustain these initiatives have not been put in place. Partnership and coordination with the business community, professional associations, industry partners, labour unions and relevant ministries which are also crucial to the development of the sector are yet to be developed.

TABLE 20 PERFORMANCE ON BZNVQ EXAMINATIONS BY OCCUPATIONAL TRADES, 2019

Occupational Trades	# of Sitters	# Passed	% Passed
Air Conditioning & Refrigeration	65	21	32%
Auto mechanic	193	79	41%
Commercial Food Preparation	66	10	15%
Cosmetology	49	23	47%
Building & Ground Maintenance	17	7	41%
Carpentry	6	0	0%
Computer Service Repair	16	14	88%
Electrical Installation	172	31	18%
Ornamental Horticulture	2	2	100%
Tourism Front Office	9	9	100%
Welding	14	6	43%
Total	**609**	**202**	**33%**

Source: ETES-MoECST

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

KRA 4.1 TVET: Meeting the Needs

Objective: Strengthen partnerships with industries and the private sector to improve the quality, relevance and responsiveness of the TVET sector.

Expected Outcome: A sense of ownership for TVET by industries and private sector will be evident from their extensive involvement in the development and quality assurance of TVET programs and institutions.

Key Challenges: skills gap, disconnect between TVET institutions and business and industry, outdated equipment and expertise, stigma

Strategic Actions:

4.1.1 Establish a National Training Agency, with oversight from the NCTVET, to be responsible for quality assurance and coordination of the TVET sector and award of national and regional vocational qualifications.

4.1.2 Upgrade the infrastructure, equipment and technical expertise in all ITVETs to comply with regional standards for delivery of quality TVET programs.

4.1.3 Establish standards, employment policies and remuneration schemes to attract trainers with high quality, relevant and up-to-date expertise and experience in the TVET sector.

4.1.4 Establish a TVET Scholarship Fund to train a cadre of skilled workers each year in high priority areas and new growth industries.

4.1.5 Collaborate with industries and the private sector to design and implement trade and apprenticeship programs that will attract more students into ITVETs, with particular emphasis on increasing the number of females and high school graduates.

[26]STATUS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN BELIZE

History and Governance

The higher education sector in Belize is relatively young. Delivery of post-secondary programs began in 1952 at St. John's College in Belize City. Since then, higher education has expanded across the country. As seen in Table 21, there are now eleven Associate-degree offering junior colleges, at least one in every district, with the exception of Toledo. There are also two local universities offering Bachelor's and a few Master's Degree programs; these are the national University of Belize (UB), established in 2000 after the amalgamation of five existing colleges, and a private institution, Galen University, founded in 2003. There are also four offshore medical colleges, catering primarily to foreign students, and a site of the University of the University of the West

Indies Open Campus, which facilitates access to online programs delivered by the Open Campus and offers a number of local short-term professional development courses.

The Education and Training Act (2010) gives the Ministry of Education the legal mandate to approve and grant licenses to operate tertiary institutions in the country, but the legislation is silent on the management, financing and operation of these institutions. The University of Belize has its own Act under Chapter 37 of the Laws of Belize (Revised Edition 2000), the University of Belize Act. This law outlines the appointment and composition of the Board of Trustees, the appointment of the President of the University and its faculty and staff, procedures for obtaining public funds and other financial matters.

TABLE 21 LIST OF LOCAL TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Institution	Year Est.	Degrees Offered	District
St. John's College Junior College	1952	AD	BZ
Stann Creek Ecumenical Junior College	1986	AD	SC
Corozal Junior College	1986	AD	CZ
Muffles Junior College	1992	AD	OW
Sacred Heart Junior College	1999	AD	CY
Belize Adventist Junior College	1999	AD	CZ
University of Belize	2000	AD, BD, MD	CY, BZ, TL
San Pedro Junior College	2000	AD	BZ
Galen University	2003	BD, MD	CY
Wesley Junior College	2003	AD	BZ
Centro Escolar México Junior College	2007	AD	CZ
Independence Junior College	2007	AD	SC
John Paul II Junior College	2013	AD	CY

Source: Tertiary Sector Diagnosis, 2020, PPRE-MoECST

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[26] Mr. Bernadino Pech from the PPRE Unit made significant contributions to this section of the analysis.

Junior colleges in Belize mostly arose as sixth form institutions using the campuses and resources of high schools. Over the years, and in the absence of clear guidance in the Education Rules, different management structures have emerged. These institutions are typically headed by deans with one or more assistant deans; however, in three such institutions there is also a president who oversees the affairs of both the junior college and high school divisions. In two of those three cases, the president is also the principal of the high school division. Eight of the eleven junior colleges have joint Boards of Management, serving both junior college and high school divisions. These bodies are composed primarily in accordance with the terms of reference provided for high schools. Junior college administrators and faculty members generally perceive this arrangement as providing them with inadequate representation (Pech, 2020).

Quality and Quality Assurance

Another Act which should have far reaching implications for higher education institutions in Belize is the Belize National Accreditation Council Act. This law was passed in 2005, but was never implemented. A more recent initiative to establish a Qualifications and Quality Assurance Authority has also stalled. There is therefore a void in the external quality assurance and accreditation of tertiary institutions in Belize. As a result, quality control mechanisms have been implemented in an ad hoc manner. Although some internal quality assurance practices are documented in institution handbooks, others are carried out only through institutional tradition and culture. In a recent diagnosis of the sector, leaders across the country acknowledged the need for a more rigorous process that can be held up to scrutiny. This involves the

documentation of the different procedures that are currently followed so that all stakeholders are aware of these institutional processes.

At the junior college level, a few institutions have started a self-assessment and external peer-review process through a collaboration between the Association of Tertiary Level Institutions in Belize (ATLIB) and the Consortium for Belize Educational Cooperation (COBEC), a group of U.S.-based universities. As the Ministry of Education does further work on the development of an external quality assurance mechanism, these institutions may have a head start; however, some institutions have not yet indicated their willingness to engage in this process. At the university level, both Galen University and the University of Belize have some structures in place to apply and implement internal quality assurance principles. The University of Belize has a Quality Assurance Unit which oversees the development and discontinuation of programs in their faculties. This office is seen as one of strategic importance for the university as its goals, outlined in the Vision 2022, include seeking accreditation.

Despite efforts by ATLIB over the years to establish a national articulation framework, there are no national agreements for the transfer of credits. As a result, transfers are dealt with on the basis of non-binding agreements between the individual institutions and, in some cases, inconsistent assessments by personnel performing admission functions. The lack of oversight and coordination within the sector has led to large disparities in the content of programs and courses, even when they are similarly named. The result is that courses taken at the Associate degree level may have to be

repeated when students transfer into another Associate or a Bachelor's degree program, leading to [27]extra time and cost for program completion. These transfer and accreditation issues become even more pronounced when students seek access to institutions outside of the country, as those institutions attempt to vet the credits gotten at local institutions.

There are no required national examinations for tertiary level students. The only required professional examination is for nurses, but this is a regional examination. Annually, a few junior college students also take the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) to qualify for entry into programs at the University of the West Indies or to compete for the Belize Scholarship. The Belize Scholarship is a monetary award to support studies at a university, local or international, of the winner's choice. In 2019, 73 students sat CAPE.

Enrolment and Programs

Table 22 shows that enrolment in local higher education institutions increased to above 10,000 students for the first time in 2019/20. Approximately 55% of students that year were enrolled in universities and the remainder in junior colleges. The primary focus of local tertiary institutions is the delivery of academic programs. As discussed previously, there is no national external mechanism in place to assess program or institutional quality. The result is that institutions may offer programs for which they do not have appropriate facilities or technical expertise and continue to do so for as long as there are students willing to enroll in those programs.

The University of Belize, recently established a process for the development and rollout of new programs. It involves stakeholder surveys and an examination of employment opportunities for prospective graduates. Most institutions, however, have no established program review process in place for determining the impact or relevance of program offerings to national development.

TABLE 22 ENROLMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION BY SUBSECTOR, 2014/15-2019/20

Level and Sex	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Junior College	**3,905**	**4,120**	**4,296**	**4,267**	**4,447**	**4,596**
Male	1,635	1,744	1,837	1,798	1,800	1,850
Female	2,270	2,376	2,459	2,469	2,647	2,746
University	**4,657**	**4,913**	**5,129**	**5,260**	**5,383**	**5,516**
Male	1,647	1,693	1,756	1,806	1,868	1,888
Female	3,010	3,220	3,373	3,454	3,515	3,628
Total	**8,562**	**9,033**	**9,425**	**9,527**	**9,830**	**10,112**
Male	3,282	3,437	3,593	3,604	3,668	3,738
Female	5,280	5,596	5,832	5,923	6,162	6,374

Source: PPRE-MoECST

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[27] The Tertiary Sector Diagnosis found completion rates as low as 45% among a selected set of institutions. Although most students (68%) eventually finish their programs only about half (51%) complete within the time-frame indicated on the official program schedule.

As shown in Figure 23, a large portion, 45% of students in local tertiary institutions, tend to enroll in Business programs. Natural Science and Education programs each attract about 14% of enrolled students and enrolment in all other fields is less than 10%. Females make up the larger portion of enrolments in education (86%), social sciences (85%), health sciences (78%), humanities (77%), business (63%) and natural sciences (56%), but are significantly underrepresented in the areas of engineering (44%), agriculture (33%) and ICT (15%).

Research

As mentioned previously, there are limited provisions set out for higher education in the current Belize Education and Training Act. This includes the important area of research. Research figures prominently however in the University of Belize Act. Section 5 states that: "The objectives of the University shall be to provide teaching, conduct research and offer services consistent with the development needs of Belize." Section 3 also stipulates that "striving to attain academic, research and service, teaching and professional excellence at the national, regional and international levels" and "ensuring that its students and graduates have strong academic, ethical, independent and analytical literacy, numeracy and research capabilities" as guiding principles under which the university is to operate.

Nonetheless, the culture of scientific research is not well established. This is compounded by the fact that only 40% of faculty at the junior college level and 60% at the university level have a graduate degree. Only 8% overall have a doctorate degree. As expected, more faculty members at the university level are engaged in research and publications than at the junior college level, where it is neither an expectation nor requirement. Faculty at Galen University are required to engage in service and research for promotion and tenure. The requirement is not as stringent at the University of Belize, but the institution indicated that its faculty do publish occasionally in peer-reviewed journals and the university's five-year plan also includes the goal of increasing its focus on research studies that address the social, economic, and environmental challenges that face Belize.

FIGURE 23 ENROLMENT IN LOCAL TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS BY PROGRAM, 2018/19

Program	Enrolment
Agriculture	126
Business	4225
Education	1273
Engineering	241
General Studies	299
Health Science	636
Humanities	452
Info. Technology	572
Natural Science	1286
Social Science	133
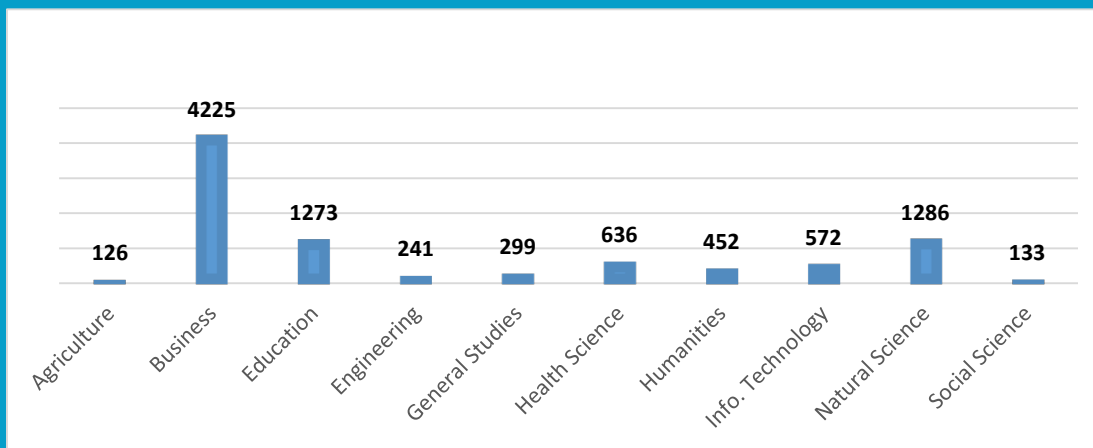
Source: Tertiary Sector Diagnosis, MoECST

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

KRA 4.2 Higher Education: Raising the Bar

Objective: Implement legislation, policies and mechanisms to build the higher education sector's capacity to deliver quality programs and research services aligned to national development needs.

Expected Outcome: Belizeans will have access to high quality and relevant tertiary education programs and research provided by institutions that meet national, regional and international standards.

Key Challenges: lack of quality assurance and accreditation, skills gap, misalignment of programs with priority needs, limited production of research

Strategic Actions:

4.2.1   Establish a Higher Education Council with government, academia and private sector partners to set standards and provide quality assurance and accreditation for higher education institutions in Belize.

4.2.2   Develop regulations and policies to guide the management, staffing and administration of government and grant-aided junior colleges.

4.2.3   Establish a Higher Education Fund and other financial assistance programs to encourage students to pursue studies in high priority areas such as STEM and provide special incentives for currently underrepresented groups such as males.

4.2.4   Facilitate university and junior college faculty in pursuing advanced qualifications in areas of national priority.

4.2.5   Support the University of Belize and other higher education institutions to build their capacity to conduct research in areas of national priority.

[28]OVERVIEW OF THE ADULT AND CONTINUING EDUCATION SECTOR

Access and Participation

The Education and Training Act of Belize 2010, describes "*continuing education*" as

"a short-term programme of study in a specific area for professional or employment or job related skills and knowledge enhancement; it can be award-bearing or non-award bearing and vocational or non-vocational".

St. John's College, with its establishment of an Extension School in 1947, was the pioneer of adult education in Belize. The school originally offered leadership training for high school graduates but transitioned in 1965 to offer a high school equivalency program for students who never attended or did not complete high school. By the time of the

closure of the Extension School in 2012, several other ACE institutions had been established. The first of these was the Corozal Junior College ACE Division, which opened in 1993 to offer an Associate Degree in Business Administration. Since then, a growing demand for formal education for out-of-school youth and lifelong learning opportunities for adults has led to the emergence of ten high school equivalency programs across the country, at least one in every district (see Table 23). Additionally, one institution offers a one-year Opportunity Certificate program which prepares students to transition to junior college. In 2017, Escuela Secundaria Technica Mexico ACE became the latest registered ACE institution in Belize.

TABLE 23 LIST OF ACE INSTITUTIONS

District	Institution Name	Year Est.	Type
CZ	Corozal Junior/ Community College ACE	1993	Specially Assisted
BZ	San Pedro ACE	1996	Specially Assisted
OW	San Juan Bautista ACE	1999	Private
TL	St. Peter Claver College ACE	1999	Government Aided
SC	Stann Creek Ecumenical ACE	2001	Government Aided
BZ	Wesley ACE	2003	Government Aided
CY	Baptist School of ACE	2006	Specially Assisted
BZ	Gwen Lizarraga ACE	2009	Government
CY	St. Ignatius High School of ACE	2009	Specially Assisted
SC	Independence ACE	2016	Government
CZ	Escuela Secundaria Tecnica Mexico ACE	2017	Government

Source: ACE Sector Diagnosis, MoECST

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[28] Mr. Ricardo Gideon from the PPRE Unit made significant contributions to this section of the analysis.

Despite the increase in the number of institutions, enrolment in ACE programs declined by 11% between 2015/16 and 2019/20. Gwen Lizaraga ACE in Belize City is the largest ACE institution, accounting for 30.6% of the total ACE enrolment in 2019/20 (see Table 24). Between the 2015/16 and 2019/20 academic years, female enrolment accounted for 58% of the total enrolment (note Figure 24). Similarly, the average female graduation rate is higher when compared to males for the same time period; for every male that graduates, two females graduate. Over the past five years the average dropout rate has been 13%. One

of the main reasons cited for the high dropout rate is financial constraints.

Financing for the ACE sector comes from two main sources, namely, public funds and student fees. ACE receives less than 1% of the annual education budget. Public funding is distributed disproportionally among institutions, as some are highly subsidized while others receive little or no funding. There is no funding formula or strategy used to determine funding for respective institutions. The Ministry does not control fees charged for ACE programs and so fees vary considerably by institution, from

TABLE 24 ENROLMENT IN ACE INSTITUTIONS BY DISTRICT, 2015/16-2019/20

District	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	% Change
Belize	570	633	566	452	409	-28%
Cayo	177	173	143	143	113	-36%
Corozal	179	178	201	213	238	33%
Orange Walk	28	25	18	23	27	-4%
Stann Creek	119	124	154	160	152	27%
Toledo	73	78	85	81	77	5%
Total	1,146	1,211	1,167	1,072	1,016	-11%

Source: PPRE Unit, MoECST

FIGURE 24 ENROLMENT IN ACE INSTITUTIONS BY GENDER, 2015/16-2019/20
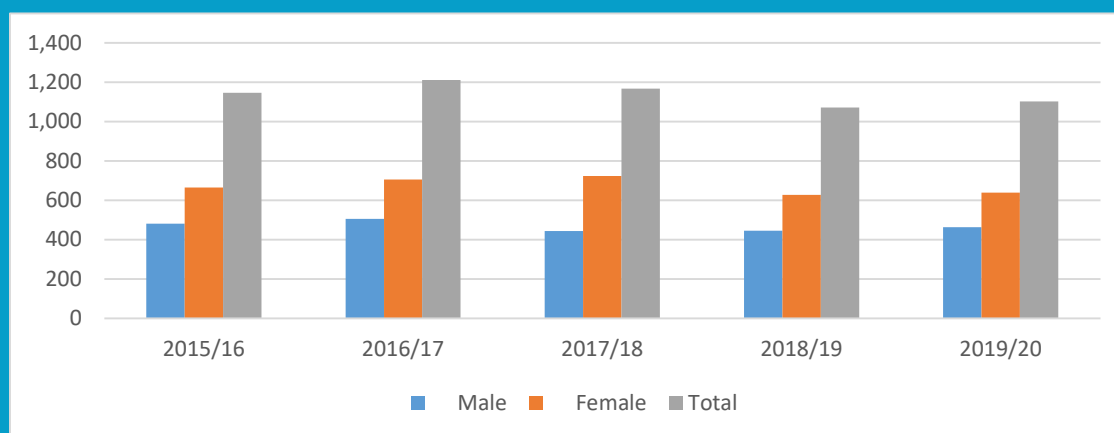
Source: PPRE Unit, MoECST

$119.00 to $3,000.00 per academic year. The level of fees charged depends on the public funding received by respective institutions. An ACE high school equivalency program is generally more expensive to complete than a secondary level diploma in a traditional high school.

Program Content and Delivery

As Table 25 shows, of the eleven registered ACE institutions, nine offer high school equivalency programs, one offers both a high school equivalency diploma and associate degree program and one offers a one-year opportunity program. Currently, all high school equivalency programs follow the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) curriculum. For the most part, this

prepares students to sit several CSEC examinations. However, there is no specific formal structure in place to guide the curriculum of ACE programs and few ACE students actually sit CSEC examinations at the completion of their program.

Since there is no prescribed timeframe for the length of the high school equivalency programs, program duration varies among institutions. For example, some institutions are offering a three-year program while others are offering a four-year program for the same certification. ACE programs basically mirror regular secondary school programs with core subject areas such as Mathematics, Science, English, Spanish and Information Technology being offered. In fact, nine of the ACE programs are attached

TABLE 25 PROGRAMS OFFERED BY ACE INSTITUTIONS

District	Institution Name	Programs Offered	Length
BZ	San Pedro ACE	High School Equivalency Diploma	4 years
BZ	Wesley ACE	Opportunity Program	1 year
BZ	Gwen Lizarraga ACE	General Education Diploma	3 years
CY	Baptist School of ACE	High School Equivalency Diploma	4 years
CY	St. Ignatius High School of ACE	High School Equivalency Diploma with a Certificate in a CET Program	4 years
CZ	Corozal Junior College ACE	Associate in Paralegal Studies, Associate in Management of Business	2 years
CZ	Corozal Community ACE	High School Equivalency Diploma College ACE	3 years
CZ	Escuela Secundaria Tecnica Mexico ACE	High School Equivalency Diploma	3 years
OW	San Juan Bautista ACE	High School Equivalency Diploma	4 years
SC	Stann Creek Ecumenical ACE	High School Equivalency Diploma	4 years
SC	Independence ACE	High School Equivalency Diploma	4 years
TL	St. Peter Claver College ACE	High School Equivalency Diploma	3 years

Source: ACE Sector Diagnosis, MoECST

to traditional secondary schools and the teachers at both levels are generally the same. However, not all teachers teaching at the various ACE programs are licensed educators at the secondary level.

Although ACE institutions were intended for persons over the age of 18, the programs attract a large number of students under 18 years of age who have dropped out of regular high schools or who, for financial reasons, need to work during the day. This presents institutions with challenges in planning appropriate programs and approaches.

Since a vast majority of the ACE programs are attached to a regular high school with which they share facilities, instruction time usually runs from 5:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Lesson delivery is traditionally imparted through a face-to-face modality; however, COVID-19 restrictions forced a transition to a distance learning modality. Over 95% of students have engaged in online delivery and the remainder through printed-packages.

Recent Initiatives

In 2017, the Ministry of Education signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and Notesmaster for a project to develop Open Education Resources (OERs) for the secondary school level. The objective of the project was two-fold: 1) to train teachers and course writers in the development of e-learning content and in the use of a Learning Management Systems (LMS); and 2) to

develop high quality OERs for a number of high school subjects for use in mainstream schools and secondary level programs for out-of-school youth and adults.

The resources developed cover ten secondary school subjects: English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Integrated Science, Spanish, Principles of Accounting, Information Technology, Entrepreneurship, Electrical Wiring and Life Skills. To date, resources have been completed for six of the ten subjects (English, Mathematics, Social Studies, Integrated Science, Spanish and Life Skills) and writers are working on completing the resources for the other four subjects. Once all resources have been reviewed and accepted by the Ministry, Notesmaster will upload them to an aptus device. The aptus device works through an intranet platform which allows users to connect using either a cell phone, a laptop, a tablet or a desktop. Once connected, the user is able to access the resources on the device.

The Ministry plans to pilot the resources in 15 schools across the country and will conduct an evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the resources and technology. Both students and teachers will be able to benefit from the materials developed by the writers as resource materials to support teaching and learning. This program will be particularly beneficial to out-of-school youth and adults who face challenges that prevent them from attending a traditional school.

Another recent initiative supported the expansion of options for adult learners through a Technology Program. The Technology Program is a collaboration between ACE Institutions and ITVETs and allows adult learners in their second and/or third year in evening division programs to take a skills development program offered at

ITVETs. One such collaboration is that between St. Ignatius High School Evening Division and the Cayo Center for Employment Training. The managements of the two institutions signed memorandums of understanding (MOU) for three cycles of training. The collaboration resulted in ACE students completing programs and getting employment opportunities that are directly linked to industry needs within the Cayo District.

An Association of Adult and Continuing Education providers has recently been formed. The goal of the association is to increase collaboration and promote standardization within the ACE sector. Current problems associated with the sector which the association and the MoECST hope to address include:

- limited scope of current program offerings;
- lack of information regarding the needs of employers and employees;
- insufficient access to institutions;
- high cost of programs; and
- no system in place to assess and recognize knowledge and skills gained through experience.

As discussed previously, education level has an impact on prospects for employment and earnings. Therefore, high school equivalency programs do have a place given the high numbers of workers without that level of education. However, more attention needs to be paid to ensuring that ACE institutions cater to the needs of the adult population beyond high school equivalency, that institutions are able to offer programs that are relevant to the needs of employers and employees, and that programs are delivered in a format that is appropriate and accessible to adult learners.

STRATEGIC RESPONSE

KRA 4.3 Adult Education: Educating for Life

Objective: Expand access to relevant adult education programs to build Belize's human capital and upgrade the quality of the workforce.

Expected Outcome: Belizeans will be able to access relevant educational opportunities for self-improvement and employment throughout their life span.

Key Challenges: low levels of education in the workforce, limited scope of programs, high cost of programs, lack of connection to employment needs

Strategic Actions:

4.3.1   Develop a national policy for Adult Education, including standards for programs and providers.

4.3.2   Establish programmes across the country to teach literacy, civics, parenting education and financial literacy to adult learners.

4.3.3   Work with employers to develop customized programs that can build the capacity of their employees and boost productivity.

4.3.4   Support the development of online adult education programmes to increase the number of persons in the workforce with secondary level qualifications.

4.3.5   Develop and implement a system for prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) to facilitate certification of skills gained through work experience.

III.   IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING ARRANGEMENTS

Arrangements for the implementation and monitoring of the BESPlan are illustrated in Figure 25. Each of the twelve Key Result Areas (KRA) will be assigned to one or more implementing units (IU) or teams within the MoECST. The heads of the implementing units will be responsible for: 1) incorporating the activities for the particular KRA into their annual work plan and budget, as necessary, 2) coordinating the activities outlined under the KRA, and 3) reporting on progress. There are also four Technical Working Groups (TWG), each corresponding to one of the four domains of the plan. The TWGs are comprised of the heads of units to which relevant KRAs are assigned and function as technical advisory bodies. TWGs meet on a monthly basis and produce quarterly reports. The chairpersons of the four TWGs, along with the Ministry's Senior Management Team and the Director(s) for Policy, Planning and Projects serve on a Steering Committee (SC). The SC is chaired by the Chief Executive Officer of the Ministry of Education and meets on a quarterly basis to review reports from the TWGs and to provide guidance on further implementation of the plan. The SC reports to the Minister and Minister of State. SC members also participate on various national committees in support of the country's Medium Term Development Plan. This facilitates inter-ministerial sharing and collaboration and ensures that the plans of the MoECST are consistent with national development goals.

FIGURE 25 GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS
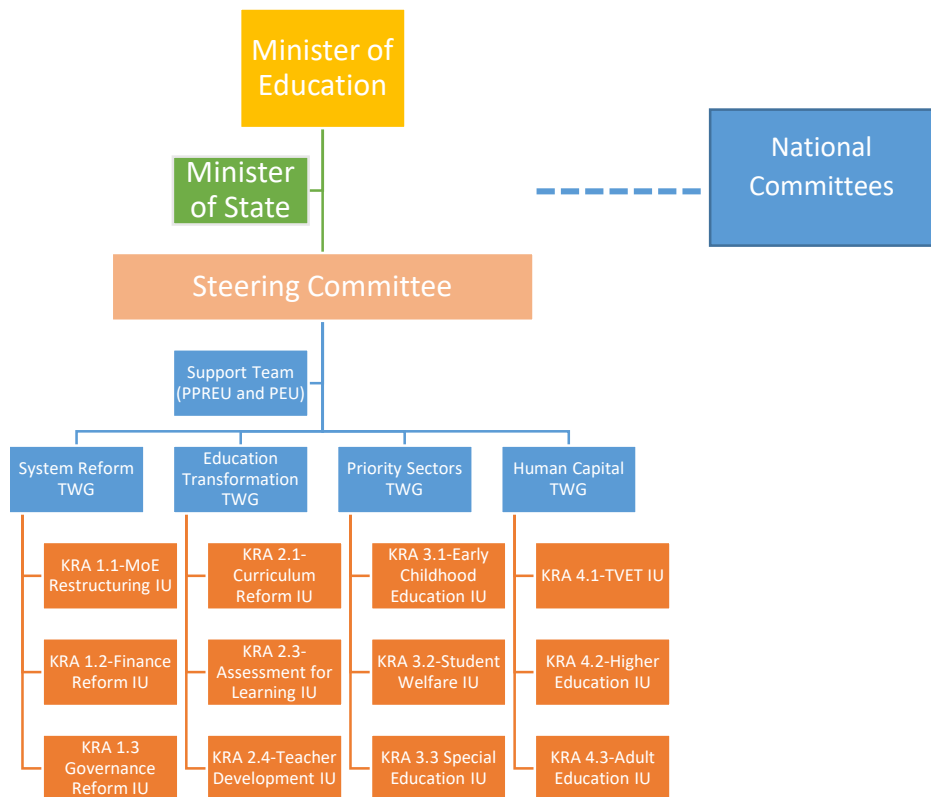
IV.   TIMELINES AND OUTPUTS

Table 26 lists the strategic actions and targets, as well as the expected timelines for completion of related outputs. This is intended to be a living document that is subject to change based on the results of monitoring and evaluation exercises. The plan incorporates an agile approach to plan implementation with identified product owners, coaches and implementation teams.

TABLE 26 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

KRA 1.1 Ministry of Education Reform: Becoming Fit for Purpose

Objective: Restructure the Ministry of Education in order to increase its efficiency and capacity to effectively respond to the needs of the education system.

Expected Outcome: The Ministry of Education will be suitably organized and staffed by personnel who have the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to deliver quality and responsive education services within an organizational culture that promotes innovation and accountability.

Strategic Actions	Timeline				Output Indicators	Baseline	Target	Output Owner	Coach	Implementation Team
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
1.1.1 Update the mission and organizational structure of the Ministry of Education to enable better communication and collaboration within the Ministry and greater efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery.	▨				MoECST organizational Chart	outdated	updated organizational chart published	Chief Executive Officer (CEO)	Administrative Officer (AO)	Senior Management Team (SMT) in collaboration with Records Management Unit, PPRE Unit and Ministry of Public Service (MPS)

KRA 1.1 Ministry of Education Reform: Becoming Fit for Purpose										
Objective: Restructure the Ministry of Education in order to increase its efficiency and capacity to effectively respond to the needs of the education system.										
Expected Outcome: The Ministry of Education will be suitably organized and staffed by personnel who have the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to deliver quality and responsive education services within an organizational culture that promotes innovation and accountability.										
Strategic Actions	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
1.1.2 Develop terms of reference for each position, office and area of service to provide clarity in roles and responsibilities.					Revised Terms of Reference	not in place	TORs published	CEO	AO	SMT in collaboration with Records Management Unit, PPRE Unit and MPS
1.1.3 Develop a performance-based appraisal and recognition system for Ministry staff and service teams and address identified professional development needs.					Appraisal and Recognition Manual	not in place	manual published	CEO	AO	SMT in collaboration with Records Management Unit, PPRE Unit and MPS

KRA 1.1 Ministry of Education Reform: Becoming Fit for Purpose										
Objective: Restructure the Ministry of Education in order to increase its efficiency and capacity to effectively respond to the needs of the education system.										
Expected Outcome: The Ministry of Education will be suitably organized and staffed by personnel who have the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to deliver quality and responsive education services within an organizational culture that promotes innovation and accountability.										
Strategic Actions	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
1.1.4 Implement a comprehensive rebranding and communication strategy to build the Ministry's public image and capacity to inform and engage internal and external stakeholders.					MoECST Communication Plan	not in place	plan implemented	CEO	Assigned Deputy Chief Education Officer (DCEdO)	SMT in collaboration with Communications Team and all MoECST Units and District Education Centers (DECs)
1.1.5 Maximize the use of BEMIS and other technologies to digitize the Ministry's processes and services.					New BEMIS features and digital service applications	core features	minimum of 2 new features and applications per year	CEO	Assigned DCEdO Manager, ICT Unit	BEMIS Manager and PPRE Unit ICT Unit

KRA 1.2 Education Finance Reform: Getting Value for Money				
Objective: Align the Ministry's financial resources and mechanisms with targets for improved performance, expanded access and increased equity and accountability.				
Expected Outcome: The Ministry of Education will have measurable impact on the social and economic development of the nation through a financing system and programs that are based on equity, performance and merit.				

Strategic Actions:	Timeline				Output Indicators	Baseline	Target	Output Owner	Coach	Implementation Team
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
1.2.1　Review and rationalize school financing policies and mechanisms at all levels of the education system to increase equity and incentivize performance, achievement and continuous improvement.					Comprehensive School Financing Policy and Business Rules	not in place	policy and business rules published	CEO	Chief Education Officer (CEdO)	Finance Office in collaboration with SMT and PPRE Unit
1.2.2　Provide free access to education from preschool to junior college.					Free Education Grants	not in place	grants issued	CEO	Finance Officer (FO)	Finance Office
1.2.3　Establish a Rural Education Grant Fund to increase access to education for					Rural Education Grant Fund Policy	$1M in grant funds	$3M in grant funds	CEO	FO	Finance Office

KRA 1.2 Education Finance Reform: Getting Value for Money										
Objective: Align the Ministry's financial resources and mechanisms with targets for improved performance, expanded access and increased equity and accountability.										
Expected Outcome: The Ministry of Education will have measurable impact on the social and economic development of the nation through a financing system and programs that are based on equity, performance and merit.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
students from rural areas.										
1.2.4 Ensure that all students and teachers from Standard 4 to Form 4 have access to high speed internet or an alternative wireless service and to an appropriate digital device.					Digital devices and internet or wireless service	66% access to devices 70% access to internet/wireless service	100% access to devices 100% access to internet/wireless service	CEO	Science and Technology Coordinator (STC)	Science and Technology Unit with support from Project Execution Unit (PEU)
1.2.5 Establish an Audit Unit within the Ministry of Education to ensure accountability for public funds.					Audit Unit	not in place	established	CEO	FO	Finance Office in collaboration with Auditor General's Office and MPS

KRA 1.3 Governance Reform: Strengthening the Foundations									
Objective: Strengthen the legislative, regulatory and policy framework for better outcomes and improved governance and leadership of the education system.									
Expected Outcome: The Belize education system will be guided by a comprehensive and effective policy and regulatory framework that facilitates access, inclusion, quality and accountability.									
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
1.3.1 Conduct a comprehensive review and revision of education legislation, regulations and policies, including those related to education councils, commissions and boards, to increase effectiveness in the governance of the education system.					Revised legislation and regulations	not in place	legislation and regulations enacted	CEO	CEdO	Crown Counsel in collaboration with PPRE Unit and Attorney General (AG) Ministry
1.3.2 Expand the compulsory school age to include students at the preschool and secondary levels of education.					Revised legislation and regulations	not in place	legislation and regulations enacted	CEO	CEdO	Crown Counsel in collaboration with AG Ministry
1.3.3 Introduce a mechanism for the empowerment and meaningful participation of parents in school-level and					Regional and National Parent Associations	not in place	associations established	CEdO	Assigned DCEdO	SMT in collaboration with DECs

KRA 1.3 Governance Reform: Strengthening the Foundations									
Objective: Strengthen the legislative, regulatory and policy framework for better outcomes and improved governance and leadership of the education system.									
Expected Outcome: The Belize education system will be guided by a comprehensive and effective policy and regulatory framework that facilitates access, inclusion, quality and accountability.									
Strategic Actions:	Timeline				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
national-level decision-making on education issues.										
1.3.4 Establish standards and school monitoring and support systems for pre-primary, primary and secondary institutions to ensure delivery of quality services and continuous school improvement.					Standards of Quality and School Monitoring and Support Manual	not in place	manual published	CEdO	Assigned DCEdO	SMT in collaboration with all MoECST Units and DECs
1.3.5 Ensure that all managing authorities and principals receive relevant leadership training in areas such as education regulations, clinical supervision, financial management, school self-assessment and improvement planning.					Managing Authorities and School Leaders Training	sporadically	biannually	CEdO	Assigned DCEdO	Teacher Learning Institute (TLI) in collaboration with relevant MoECST Units and DECs

KRA 2.1 Curriculum Reform: Learning What Matters									
Objective: Reform the national curriculum so that students are able to gain the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed for personal and national development.									
Expected Outcome: Belizean students will spend their time in school acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are needed for their personal development and the development of the nation.									
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
2.1.1　Develop a National Curriculum Reform Framework, based on International Bureau of Education and UNESCO standards, to guide the development of national curriculum at the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels of education with a focus on student competency.	▨				National Curriculum Reform Framework	not in place	framework published	CEdO	Assigned Officer, Curriculum & Assessment Unit	Curriculum Reform Task Force with support from Curriculum & Assessment Unit
2.1.2　Use the National Curriculum Reform Framework to streamline the curriculum at the primary and secondary levels and to allow for in-depth acquisition of the literacy, numeracy, technological and critical		▨	▨		New Streamlined National Curriculum	not in place	curriculum published	CEdO	Director, Curriculum & Assessment Unit	Curriculum & Assessment Unit with guidance from Curriculum Reform Task Force

KRA 2.1 Curriculum Reform: Learning What Matters										
Objective: Reform the national curriculum so that students are able to gain the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed for personal and national development.										
Expected Outcome: Belizean students will spend their time in school acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are needed for their personal development and the development of the nation.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
thinking skills needed in the 21st Century.										
2.1.3 Ensure that subjects which promote physical and mental wellness and sustainable human development, including the expressive arts, physical education, civics, Belizean, African and Mayan History, gardening, agriculture, environmental education and entrepreneurship, are integrated into the national curriculum at all levels.					Curriculum guides for lessons on mental and physical wellness and sustainable human development	not in place	guides published	CEdO	Director, Curriculum & Assessment Unit	Curriculum & Assessment Unit
2.1.4 Develop a National School Portal and learning platform with quality resources for teachers and students to facilitate remote learning and appropriate					National School Portal	Not in place	National School Portal operational	CEO	STC	Coordinator, National School Portal with assistance from Science and Technology Unit

KRA 2.1 Curriculum Reform: Learning What Matters									
Objective: Reform the national curriculum so that students are able to gain the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed for personal and national development.									
Expected Outcome: Belizean students will spend their time in school acquiring the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are needed for their personal development and the development of the nation.									
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
implementation of the national curriculum.										
2.1.5 Implement a revised and expanded national textbook program at the primary and secondary levels of education with free learning resources that are aligned to the national curriculum.					Electronic and paper-based textbooks	paper-based and primary level only	electronic and paper-based textbooks for primary and secondary levels distributed	CEdO	Director, Curriculum & Assessment Unit	Curriculum & Assessment Unit

KRA 2.2 Assessment for Learning: Measuring What Counts										
Objective: Create a quality and relevant assessment and examination system that is aligned to the national curriculum and that provides meaningful information for improvements in teaching and learning.										
Expected Outcome: Belizean students will participate in a fair, valid system of assessments that allows for improvement, certification and verification of their competencies and level of achievement.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
2.2.1 Develop a national student assessment policy and scheme for the Belize education system, including a mechanism for the effective use of assessment results to impact education policies and practices at both the school and system levels.					National Assessment Policy	not in place	policy published	CEdO	Director, Curriculum & Assessment Unit	Curriculum & Assessment Unit in collaboration with PPRE Unit
2.2.2 Strengthen the expertise within the Curriculum and Assessment Unit to develop quality diagnostic and standardized assessments.					Number of Examinations Officers with formal training in Measurement and Evaluation	0	5	CEdO	Director, Curriculum & Assessment Unit	Curriculum & Assessment Unit

KRA 2.2 Assessment for Learning: Measuring What Counts										
Objective: Create a quality and relevant assessment and examination system that is aligned to the national curriculum and that provides meaningful information for improvements in teaching and learning.										
Expected Outcome: Belizean students will participate in a fair, valid system of assessments that allows for improvement, certification and verification of their competencies and level of achievement.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
2.2.3 Upgrade the technology and infrastructure used in the administration and analysis of examinations to improve timeliness and usefulness of results.					New assessment equipment and software	not available	equipment and software procured	CEdO	Director, Curriculum & Assessment Unit	Curriculum & Assessment Unit with Coordinator, NSP
2.2.4 Develop a suite of appropriate screening tools, diagnostic tests and standardized examinations that are aligned to national curriculum benchmarks at all levels and in accordance with the new assessment policy and scheme.					item banks for new tests and examinations	not in place	item banks in place for all new tests and examinations	CEdO	Director, Curriculum & Assessment Unit	Curriculum & Assessment Unit

KRA 2.2 Assessment for Learning: Measuring What Counts										
Objective: Create a quality and relevant assessment and examination system that is aligned to the national curriculum and that provides meaningful information for improvements in teaching and learning.										
Expected Outcome: Belizean students will participate in a fair, valid system of assessments that allows for improvement, certification and verification of their competencies and level of achievement.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
2.2.5 Develop teacher resources and provide training to teachers in administering screening tools and diagnostic tests and in the use of appropriate assessment strategies to promote learning.					Number of teachers trained to administer new tools and tests	0	5,000	CEdO	Director, Curriculum & Assessment Unit	Curriculum & Assessment Unit in collaboration with TLI

KRA 2.3 Teacher Development: Elevating the Profession									
Objective: Transform teacher education and development programs and incentivizing quality teaching practices and performance results for improved student learning.									
Expected Outcome: Belizean teachers will have the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to support students in acquiring high levels of literacy, numeracy, critical thinking and personal and interpersonal skills.									
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
2.3.1 Upgrade the teacher education programs at all levels to ensure that teachers have the specialized content knowledge and pedagogical skills needed to deliver the national curriculum effectively to all students.					Program Specifications	outdated	New Program Specifications published	CEdO	Director, Teacher Education Unit	Teacher Education Unit in collaboration with relevant MoECST Units and Teacher Education Institutions
2.3.2 Ensure that teachers at the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels of education and all teacher educators and professional development facilitators are appropriately trained.					Teacher Educators Certificate Program	not in place	implemented	CEdO	Director, Teacher Education Unit	Teacher Education Unit in collaboration with TLI
2.3.3 Establish a Teacher Learning Institute to provide structured, comprehensive, year-round professional development programs based					Percentage of teachers earning a minimum of 20 hours of CPD annually	40% (est.)	80%	CEdO	Assigned DCEdO	TLI in collaboration with relevant MoECST Units and Teacher

KRA 2.3 Teacher Development: Elevating the Profession										
Objective: Transform teacher education and development programs and incentivizing quality teaching practices and performance results for improved student learning.										
Expected Outcome: Belizean teachers will have the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to support students in acquiring high levels of literacy, numeracy, critical thinking and personal and interpersonal skills.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
on identified needs of teachers and school leaders.										Education Institutions
2.3.4 Establish a STEAM Laboratory School to promote effective and innovative teaching in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics.					Number of secondary school teachers trained through the STEAM Laboratory School	0	100	CEO	Assigned DCEdO	PEU in collaboration with Science and Technology Unit and relevant MoECTS Units
2.3.5 Revise the appraisal system for teachers and school leaders and introduce a performance-based incentive system to promote school improvement and student achievement.					Appraisal and Incentive Manual	not in place	manual published	CEdO	Director, Teacher Education Unit	Teacher Education Unit in collaboration with SMT

KRA 3.1 Early Childhood Education: Starting Strong										
Objective: Implement early childhood policy and curricular reform and expand services in underserved areas in order to increase access to quality early childhood education.										
Expected Outcome: All Belizean preschool-aged children will have access to quality preschool programs and services.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				Output Indicators	Baseline	Target	Output Owner	Coach	Implementation Team
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
3.1.1 Collaborate with relevant line Ministries to develop an updated national policy and strategy for Early Childhood Education and Development in Belize.					National ECED Policy and Strategy	outdated	New policy and strategy published	CEO	Director, ECE Unit	ECE Unit in collaboration with Ministries of Health and Human Development
3.1.2 Establish a comprehensive, play-oriented preschool and lower primary education curriculum which includes reading, visual arts, dancing, planting, music, civics and an introduction to technology.					National ECE Curriculum	outdated	New ECE curriculum published	CEdO	Director, Curriculum and Assessment	Curriculum and Assessment Unit in collaboration with ECE Unit
3.1.3 Expand access to preschool education for 3 and 4 year olds by building new preschools and attaching preschools to existing primary schools where possible.					Number of Preschools	229	250	CEO	Assigned DCEdO	PEU in collaboration with ECE Unit and Government School Management

KRA 3.1 Early Childhood Education: Starting Strong									
Objective: Implement early childhood policy and curricular reform and expand services in underserved areas in order to increase access to quality early childhood education.									
Expected Outcome: All Belizean preschool-aged children will have access to quality preschool programs and services.									
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				Output Indicators	Baseline	Target	Output Owner	Coach	Implementation Team
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
3.1.4 Develop alternative preschool programs in areas where traditional preschools are not feasible.					Number of 3 and 4-year old children reached through alternative preschool program	0	4,000	CEO	Director, ECE Unit	ECE Unit in collaboration with Curriculum and Assessment Unit and PEU
3.1.5 Develop an ECE public awareness campaign with key messages including the importance of early childhood stimulation, education and development.					ECE Public Awareness campaign	Not in place	ECE Public Awareness Campaign implemented	CEO	Director, ECE Unit	Communications Team in collaboration with ECE Unit and PEU

KRA 3.2 Student Welfare: Reducing Vulnerability										
Objective: Provide resources and programs to support students with social, economic and psychosocial challenges.										
Expected Outcome: All Belizean children with socio-economic and psychosocial needs will be identified and appropriately supported.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
3.2.1 Establish a National Healthy Start Feeding Program with a school gardening component to provide nutritional support for students from low income families.					Number of children in National Healthy Start Feeding Program	1,000	10,000	CEdO	Director, Student Welfare Unit	Student Welfare Unit in collaboration with Ministry of Agriculture
3.2.2 Increase the availability of trained school counsellors at the primary level to address the psychosocial needs of students.					Number of primary school counsellors	6	100	CEO	Director, Student Welfare Unit	Student Welfare Unit in collaboration with Finance Office and Teacher Administrative Services Unit
3.2.3 Design and implement school-wide programs that promote social and emotional learning and encourage positive discipline and restorative practices at school and in the home.					Number of schools in socio-emotional learning program	39	120	CEO	Director, Student Welfare Unit	Student Welfare Unit in collaboration with Ministry of Health and Wellness

Strategic Actions:	Timeline				Output Indicators	Baseline	Target	Output Owner	Coach	Implementation Team
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
KRA 3.2 Student Welfare: Reducing Vulnerability										
Objective: Provide resources and programs to support students with social, economic and psychosocial challenges.										
Expected Outcome: All Belizean children with socio-economic and psychosocial needs will be identified and appropriately supported.										
3.2.4 Work with social service organizations to strengthen the system for identifying and supporting children with social barriers to inclusion and learning, including refugees, students living in poverty and those from remote rural areas.					Annual inclusion intervention report	not in place	report published annually	CEO	Director, Student Welfare Unit	Student Welfare Unit in collaboration with Ministry of Human Development
3.2.5 Design and implement support programs that target increased retention and achievement of students in primary and secondary schools, with particular attention to boys.					Number of boys supported through new targeted intervention programs	0	10,000	CEO	Director, Student Welfare Unit	Student Welfare Unit in collaboration with Ministry of Human Development

KRA 3.3 Special Education: Taking Everyone Along										
Objective: Provide the legislation, policies, programs and resources needed to improve the inclusion and experience of students with diverse needs in the education system.										
Expected Outcome: Belizean children will have access to quality education services regardless of their unique physical, social, emotional or academic needs.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
3.3.1 Strengthen the legislative, regulatory and policy framework to ensure that children with diverse needs have equal access to quality and relevant education in the most enabling environment.					Legislation and regulations	limited legal provisions	New legislation and regulations enacted with adequate provisions for children with diverse needs	CEO	CEdO	Crown Counsel in collaboration with Special Education Unit, PPRE Unit and AG Ministry
3.3.2 Ensure that special schools, classrooms and other facilities that serve students with special education needs, including NaRCIE, have appropriate accommodations and resources for students and staff.					Number of Special Education facilities renovated and equipped	0	10	CEO	Director, Special Education Unit	Special Education Unit in collaboration with PEU

KRA 3.3 Special Education: Taking Everyone Along										
Objective: Provide the legislation, policies, programs and resources needed to improve the inclusion and experience of students with diverse needs in the education system.										
Expected Outcome: Belizean children will have access to quality education services regardless of their unique physical, social, emotional or academic needs.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
3.3.3 Improve education and support services for students with special education needs, including referral and diagnostic services, learning support, development of life skills and, where applicable, transition into further education, skills training or employment.					Standard operation procedures manual for Special Education services	drafted	SOP manual published	CEO	Director, Special Education Unit	Special Education Unit in collaboration with relevant MoECST Units and DECs
3.3.4 Increase the availability of resources and services in key areas such as speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, diagnostics and paraprofessional support, especially in rural communities.					Special therapy clinics	2 per year	6 per year	CEO	Director, Special Education Unit	Special Education Unit in collaboration with DECs

KRA 3.3 Special Education: Taking Everyone Along									
Objective: Provide the legislation, policies, programs and resources needed to improve the inclusion and experience of students with diverse needs in the education system.									
Expected Outcome: Belizean children will have access to quality education services regardless of their unique physical, social, emotional or academic needs.									
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
3.3.5 Implement a sustained public awareness campaign, school sensitization program and support groups to encourage greater acceptance and understanding of the rights of students with special education needs.					Public airing of Special Needs messages/programs	infrequently	weekly	CEO	Director, Special Education Unit	Communications Team in collaboration with Special Education Unit

KRA 4.1 TVET: Meeting the Needs										
Objective: Strengthen partnerships with industries and the private sector to improve the quality, relevance and responsiveness of the TVET sector.										
Expected Outcome: A sense of ownership for TVET by industries and the private sector will be evident from their extensive involvement in the development and quality assurance of TVET programs and institutions.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
4.1.1 Establish a National Training Agency, with oversight from the NCTVET, to be responsible for quality assurance and coordination of the TVET sector and award of national and regional vocational qualifications.					National Training Agency	not in place	National Training Agency established	CEdO	Director, TVET Unit	TVET Unit in collaboration with Crown Counsel, AG Ministry, Finance Office and PPRE Unit
4.1.2 Upgrade the infrastructure, equipment and technical expertise in all ITVETs to comply with regional standards for delivery of quality TVET programs.					Number of ITVETs with upgraded equipment and technical expertise to meet regional standards in at least two high priority areas	0	6	CEO	Director, TVET Unit	Finance Office in collaboration with TVET Unit, National Training Agency (NTA) and PEU

KRA 4.1 TVET: Meeting the Needs										
Objective: Strengthen partnerships with industries and the private sector to improve the quality, relevance and responsiveness of the TVET sector.										
Expected Outcome: A sense of ownership for TVET by industries and the private sector will be evident from their extensive involvement in the development and quality assurance of TVET programs and institutions.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
4.1.3 Establish standards, employment policies and remuneration schemes to attract trainers with high quality, relevant and up-to-date expertise and experience in the TVET sector.					Standards for Trainers	Not in place	standards published	CEdO	Director, TVET Unit	TVET Unit in collaboration with NTA
4.1.4 Establish a TVET Scholarship Fund to train a cadre of skilled workers each year in high priority areas and new growth industries.					Scholarship Fund	$0	$1,000,000	CEO	FO	Finance Office in collaboration with TVET Unit and NTA

KRA 4.1 TVET: Meeting the Needs										
Objective: Strengthen partnerships with industries and the private sector to improve the quality, relevance and responsiveness of the TVET sector.										
Expected Outcome: A sense of ownership for TVET by industries and the private sector will be evident from their extensive involvement in the development and quality assurance of TVET programs and institutions.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
4.1.5　Collaborate with industries and the private sector to design and implement trade and apprenticeship programs that will attract more students into ITVETs, with particular emphasis on increasing the number of females and high school graduates.					Number of Industry-sponsored Apprenticeship Programs	0	6	CEdO	Director, TVET Unit	TVET Unit in collaboration with NTA

KRA 4.2 Higher Education: Raising the Bar										
Objective: Implement legislation, policies and mechanisms to build the higher education sector's capacity to deliver quality programs and research services aligned to national development needs.										
Expected Outcome: Belizeans will have access to high quality and relevant tertiary education programs and research provided by institutions that meet national, regional and international standards.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
4.2.1 Establish a Higher Education Council with government, academia and private sector partners to set standards and provide quality assurance and accreditation for higher education institutions in Belize.					Higher Education Council legislation	Not in place	legislation enacted	CEdO	Director, Tertiary Education Unit	Crown Counsel in collaboration with Tertiary Education Unit, PPRE Unit and AG Ministry
4.2.2 Develop regulations and policies to guide the management, staffing and administration of government and grant-aided junior colleges.					Higher Education Regulations and Policies	Not in place	regulations and policies published	CEdO	Director, Tertiary Education Unit	Crown Counsel in collaboration with Tertiary Education Unit, PPRE Unit and AG Ministry
4.2.3 Establish a Higher Education Fund and other financial assistance programs to encourage students to pursue studies in high priority areas such as STEM and provide special incentives for					High Priority Education Fund	not in place	fund established	CEO	FO	Finance Office in collaboration with Tertiary Education Unit and SMT

KRA 4.2 Higher Education: Raising the Bar										
Objective: Implement legislation, policies and mechanisms to build the higher education sector's capacity to deliver quality programs and research services aligned to national development needs.										
Expected Outcome: Belizeans will have access to high quality and relevant tertiary education programs and research provided by institutions that meet national, regional and international standards.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
currently underrepresented groups such as males.										
4.2.4 Facilitate university and junior college faculty in pursuing advanced qualifications in areas of national priority.					High Priority Education Fund	not in place	fund established	CEO	FO	Finance Office in collaboration with Tertiary Education Unit and Higher Education Council
4.2.5 Support the University of Belize and other higher education institutions to build their capacity to conduct research in areas of national priority.					National Research Grant Fund	Not in place	fund established	CEO	FO	Finance Office in collaboration with Tertiary Education Unit and Higher Education Council

KRA 4.3 Adult Education: Educating for Life										
Objective: Expand access to relevant adult education programs to build Belize's human capital and upgrade the quality of the workforce.										
Expected Outcome: Belizeans will be able to access relevant educational opportunities for self-improvement and employment throughout their life span.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
4.3.1 Develop a national policy for Adult Education, including standards for programs and providers.					National Adult Education Policy	Not in place	policy published	CEdO	Director, Adult Education Unit	Adult Education Unit in collaboration with PPRE Unit
4.3.2 Establish programmes across the country to teach literacy, civics, parenting education and financial literacy to adult learners.					National Adult Literacy Program	Not in place	in place in each district	CEdO	Director, Adult Education Unit	Adult Education Unit in collaboration with Curriculum and Assessment Unit
4.3.3 Work with employers to develop customized programs that can build the capacity of their employees and boost productivity.					Employer-sponsored Adult Education Program	0	at least 2 per district	CEdO	Director, Adult Education Unit	Adult Education Unit in collaboration with NTA and TVET Unit
4.3.4 Support the development of online adult education programmes to increase the number of					National online Adult Education Program	Not in place	operational	CEdO	Director, Adult Education Unit	Adult Education Unit in collaboration with Curriculum and Assessment Unit

KRA 4.3 Adult Education: Educating for Life										
Objective: Expand access to relevant adult education programs to build Belize's human capital and upgrade the quality of the workforce.										
Expected Outcome: Belizeans will be able to access relevant educational opportunities for self-improvement and employment throughout their life span.										
Strategic Actions:	**Timeline**				**Output Indicators**	**Baseline**	**Target**	**Output Owner**	**Coach**	**Implementation Team**
	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25						
persons in the workforce with secondary level qualifications.										
4.3.5 Develop and implement a system for prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) to facilitate certification of skills gained through work experience.					PLAR manual	drafted	Manual published	CEdO	Director, Adult Education Unit	Adult Education Unit in collaboration with Curriculum and Assessment Unit

V. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Table 27 outlines the expected outcomes of the BESPlan. Performance of the plan will be tracked through the use of key performance indicators (KPIs). KPIs were selected to provide measures of progress in the areas of access, quality and equity, in each sector of education. Baseline figures reflect data for the 2020/21 academic year or the most recent available year. In some instances, figures for both 2020/21 and 2019/20 are included. This was done in cases where the COVID-19 pandemic may have had an unusual impact on the value of the indicator. Targets are based on a theory of change, which rationalizes the differences between baselines and targets as a result of the outputs expected to be generated from implementation of the various strategic actions.

TABLE 27 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND THEORY OF CHANGE

Sector	Key Performance Indicators	Definition	Baselines	Targets (2024/25)	Theory of Change (from outputs to outcomes)
Pre-primary	Pre-primary Gross Enrolment Ratio	The total number of students enrolled in preschools or preschool programs as a proportion of the total 3 and 4-year-old population.	34.2% (2020/21) *46.60% (2019/20)*	70%	Increase in the number of preschools, the introduction of an alternative preschool program, expansion of compulsory school age and increased awareness of the importance of early childhood education will result in more children attending preschool.
Pre-primary	% of Trained Preschool Teachers	Percentage of preschool teachers who have received at least the minimum organized pedagogical teacher training required for teaching at the preschool level.	67.6% (2020/21)	85%	Continued support for the training of teachers and teacher education institutions, the introduction of a performance-based incentive system and improvements in governance and quality assurance will ensure that more preschool teachers become trained.

Sector	Key Performance Indicators	Definition	Baselines	Targets (2024/25)	Theory of Change (from outputs to outcomes)
Pre-primary	[29]Early Childhood Development in Literacy/Numeracy	Percentage of children age 36-59 months who are developmentally on track in literacy-numeracy	52.50% (2015/16)	60.00%	The establishment of policies, standards and mechanisms for quality assurance for preschools, the training of preschool teachers and leaders, the implementation of improved play-based curriculum, and the development of screening tools will result in more preschool children reaching developmental milestones in literacy and numeracy.
Pre-primary	[30]Location Parity Index-Pre-primary GER	Ratio of the total number of rural students enrolled in preschools as a proportion of the total 3-4-year-old rural population to the value of the same indicator for the urban population.	0.59 (2019/20)	0.90	The new preschools and alternative education programs will benefit rural communities primarily and thus reduce the gap between urban and rural enrolment in pre-primary education.
Primary	Apparent Intake Rate	Number of new entrants in Grade 1 in primary schools as a percentage of the population aged 5 years.	84.1% (2020/21 _94.70% (2019/20)_	98%	The implementation of the Healthy Start Feeding Program, Rural Education Grant Fund, increase in access to early childhood education and increased support for children with special needs will result in more children starting primary school on time.

[29] The figure for Early Childhood Development-Literacy/Numeracy is derived from MICS 5 which was conducted in 2015/16. Baselines and targets may be adjusted based on the results of MICS 6 or the MOE Screening Tools which are to be developed.

[30] Location Parity Index is calculated for a particular indicator by dividing the value for the rural population by the value for the urban population. The closer the resulting figure is to 1, the greater the degree of equity between the rural and urban populations. A figure below 1 indicates that the rural population is at a disadvantage in that particular indicator.

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Sector	Key Performance Indicators	Definition	Baselines	Targets (2024/25)	Theory of Change (from outputs to outcomes)
Primary	% of Trained Primary School Teachers	Percentage of primary school teachers who have received at least the minimum organized pedagogical teacher training required for teaching at the primary school level.	87.8% (2020/21)	98%	Continued support for the training of teachers and teacher education institutions, the introduction of a performance-based incentive system and improvements in governance and quality assurance will ensure that the vast majority of primary school teachers become trained.
Primary	% of Primary School Students Proficient in English	Percentage of students who earn a satisfactory grade on standardized English examinations taken at the end of primary.	46.00% (2019/20)	55.0%	The establishment of standards and mechanisms for quality assurance for primary schools, the training of primary school teachers and leaders, increased support for children with special needs, increase in access to early childhood education, the implementation of a streamlined and improved national curriculum, the integration of science and technology in teaching and learning and the proper use of assessment for learning will result in more primary school children being successful on English exams.
Primary	% of Primary School Students Proficient in Math	Percentage of students who earn a satisfactory grade on standardized Math examinations taken at the end of primary.	40.00% (2019/20)	45.0%	The establishment of standards and mechanisms for quality assurance for primary schools, the training of primary school teachers and leaders, increased support for children with special needs, increase in access to early childhood education, the implementation of a streamlined and improved national curriculum, the integration of science and technology in teaching and learning and the proper use of assessment for learning

Sector	Key Performance Indicators	Definition	Baselines	Targets (2024/25)	Theory of Change (from outputs to outcomes)
					will result in more primary school children being successful on Math exams.
Primary	Location Parity Index- Primary GER	Ratio of the total number of rural students enrolled in primary schools as a proportion of the total 5-12-year-old rural population to the value of the same indicator for the urban population.	0.93 (2019/20)	0.96	The National Healthy Start Feeding program and Rural Education Grant Fund will benefit rural communities primarily and thus reduce the gap between urban and rural enrolment in primary education.
Secondary	Secondary Net Enrolment Rate	The total number of students 13 to 16 years of age enrolled in secondary schools as a proportion of the total 13 to16-year-old population.	56.6% (2020/21)	75%	The expansion of the compulsory school age, secondary finance reform and free digital devices and resources will result in more students attending secondary school.
Secondary	% of Trained Secondary School Teachers	Percentage of secondary school teachers who have received at least the minimum organized pedagogical teacher training required for teaching at the secondary level.	70.6% (2020/21)	80%	Continued support for the training of teachers and teacher education institutions, the introduction of a performance-based incentive system and improvements in governance and quality assurance will result in more secondary school teachers becoming trained.
Secondary	% of secondary school students Proficient in English	The total number of final year secondary school students who earn a satisfactory grade on a standardized English examination as a proportion of all fourth form students.	58.8% (2019/20)	65%	The establishment of standards and mechanisms for quality assurance for secondary schools, the training and support of secondary school teachers and leaders, the implementation of a streamlined and improved national curriculum, the integration of science and technology in teaching and learning and

Sector	Key Performance Indicators	Definition	Baselines	Targets (2024/25)	Theory of Change (from outputs to outcomes)
					the proper use of assessment for learning will result in more secondary school students being successful on English exams.
Secondary	% of secondary school students proficient in Math	The total number of final year secondary school students who earn a satisfactory grade on a standardized Math examination as a proportion of all fourth form students.	22.8% (2019/20)	30%	The establishment of standards and mechanisms for quality assurance for secondary schools, the training and support of secondary school teachers and leaders, the implementation of a streamlined and improved national curriculum, the integration of science and technology in teaching and learning and the proper use of assessment for learning will result in more secondary school students being successful on Math exams.
Secondary	[31]Wealth Parity Index-Secondary Net Attendance	Ratio of the proportion of secondary school age children attending secondary school or higher who are from the poorest wealth index quintile to the value of the same indicator for those from the richest wealth index quintile.	0.39 (2015/16)	0.50	The expansion of the compulsory school age, more targeted financial assistance system, and distribution of electronic devices and resources will benefit students from lower socio-economic households primarily and thus reduce the gap in secondary attendance between the poorest and richest wealth index quintiles.

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[31] Wealth Parity is calculated for a particular indicator by dividing the value for the population falling in the lowest wealth index quintile by the value for the population falling in the highest wealth index quintile. The closer the resulting figure is to 1 the greater the degree of equity between the poorest and richest populations. A figure below one shows that the poorest quintile is at a disadvantage in that particular indicator. The Wealth Parity Index indicated here is derived from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 5 which was conducted in 2015. Baselines and targets may be adjusted based on the results of MICS 6.

Sector	Key Performance Indicators	Definition	Baselines	Targets (2024/25)	Theory of Change (from outputs to outcomes)
TVET	TVET Enrolment	The total number of full-time trainees enrolled in TVET Institutions.	824 (2020/21)	3000	The increased public and private sector investments and involvement in TVET and the introduction of the TVET scholarship programs new trade and apprenticeship programs and quality assurance mechanisms will result in more persons enrolling in ITVETs.
TVET	Number of CVQs Awarded	Number of CVQ certificates issued to persons who meet competency requirements in occupational trades	0 (2020/21)	120	The establishment of the National Training Agency, the introduction of new trade and apprenticeship programs, new standards for TVET instructors, and increased support for ITVETs will result in trainees meeting requirements for CVQs.
TVET	[32]Gender Parity Index- TVET Enrolment	Ratio of the number of female trainees to the number of male trainees enrolled in ITVETs.	0.29 (2020/21)	0.35	The TVET scholarship program and new trade programs will include targeted provisions for females and thus attract more females into ITVETs and reduce the gap between male and female enrolment.
Tertiary	Tertiary GER	The total number of students enrolled in tertiary institutions (local junior colleges and universities) as a proportion of the total 17 to 21-year-old population.	23.2% (2020/21) *24.1% (2019/20)*	28%	The introduction of the High Priority Education Fund and financial reform in the tertiary sector will result in more students opting to pursue tertiary education.

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[32] Gender Parity is calculated for a particular indicator by dividing the value for females by the value for males. The closer the resulting figure is to 1 the greater the degree of equity between males and females. A figure below 1 indicates that females are at a disadvantage while a figure above 1 shows that males are at a disadvantage.

Sector	Key Performance Indicators	Definition	Baselines	Targets (2024/25)	Theory of Change (from outputs to outcomes)
Tertiary	% of Tertiary Instructors with Graduate Degrees	Percentage of tertiary instructors who have a Master's or Doctorate degree	54% (2019/20)	60%	The introduction of the Higher Education Commission, strengthening of the regulations for tertiary institutions, and the financial support for pursuing high priority degrees will result in more tertiary instructors earning graduate degrees.
Tertiary	% of Tertiary Students Enrolled in STEM Programs	The percentage of students in tertiary institutions enrolled in Agriculture, Natural Sciences, Information Communication Technology, Engineering, Health and Welfare and Mathematics.	30.1% (2019/20)	35.0%	The increased involvement of the private sector and industry, financial support for STEM programs and students, and capacity building of instructors will result in more students enrolling in STEM programs.
Tertiary	Gender Parity Index-Tertiary Enrolment	Ratio of the number of female students compared to the number of male students enrolled in tertiary institutions.	1.70 (2020/21) *1.66 (2019/20)*	1.60	The High Priority Education Fund and focus on STEM will provide more opportunities for males to pursue tertiary education and thus reduce the gap between male and female enrolment in tertiary institutions.
ACE	ACE Enrolment	The total number of students enrolled in ACE institutions.	818 (2020/21)	3000	Increased involvement of employers, introduction of online programs, and formal recognition of prior learning will result in more adults pursuing further education.

Sector	Key Performance Indicators	Definition	Baselines	Targets (2024/25)	Theory of Change (from outputs to outcomes)
ACE	% of Workforce with Secondary or Tertiary Education	Number of persons as a proportion of the workforce reporting having a secondary or tertiary level education on the Labour Force Survey	46.5% (Sep. 2020) *40.9%* *(Sep. 2019)*	55%	Strengthening of the regulations for managing and administrating ACE institutions, the introduction of the national literacy and alternative online education programs, and increased employer support will result in increased education levels in the workforce.
ACE	Gender Parity Index- ACE Enrolment	Ratio of the number of female students compared to the number of male students enrolled in ACE institutions.	1.74 (2020/21) *1.41* *(2019/20)*	1.35	The increased support of employers, availability of programs and PLAR system will benefit males primarily and thus reduce the gap between male and female enrolment in ACE programs.

VI. RISK MITIGATION MEASURES

Table 28 describes the likelihood and impact of potential risks to successful implementation of the BESPlan and proposed mitigation measures.

TABLE 28 RISK MITIGATION PLAN

Potential Risks	Level of Likelihood	Potential Impact	Mitigating Measures
1. Economic Uncertainty • lowering of budget ceilings • insufficient funds for planned activities • misalignment of budget with strategic activities • reduced family income and investment in education • increased migration for economic reasons	High	High	• incorporate BESPlan activities in annual cost centre budgets • identify cost saving measures • monitor and evaluate efficiency in spending • explore external and additional sources of funding • pool resources where possible and maximize use • target support to lower socio-economic families
2. Policy and Politics • change in administration at Ministry level • change in strategic direction • lack of buy-in from key line Ministries	Low	High	• maintain sense of ownership for BESPlan among Ministry personnel and stakeholders • lobby support for BESPlan from relevant line Ministries (e.g. Office of the Prime Minister, Ministries of Finance, Economic Development)
3. Time Constraints • being pulled away on urgent matters ("firefighting") • difficulty finding time to meet due to conflicting schedules and competing priorities	Medium	High	• prioritize BESPlan activities • ensure that BESPlan activities are a part of each Unit's and officer's work plan • have a detailed and well-outlined action plan • dedicate time for BESPlan meetings
4. Human Resource Constraints • limited number of officers to implement plan • unfilled vacancies • low capacity and expertise in some areas	Medium	Medium	• fill vacancies where possible • identify and add staff for key activities as appropriate • identify and support training opportunities • outsource activities where necessary

Potential Risks	Level of Likelihood	Potential Impact	Mitigating Measures
5. Waning Commitment • possible resistance to some of the proposed changes • desire to hold on to individual fiefdoms /turfs • cynicism regarding political will for changes among Ministry personnel and stakeholders • planning fatigue	Medium	High	• utilize effective change management methodologies • clarify roles and responsibilities and monitor commitment to meeting responsibilities • demonstrate accountability for results, acknowledge contributions and celebrate small milestones • build partnerships and relationships within the Ministry and with stakeholders • ensure that targets are practical and achievable and that actions are sustained
6. Communication Gaps • working in silos • failure to share plans and updates • failure to consult with key stakeholders	Medium	Medium	• establish systems for reporting on BESPlan regularly and widely • communicate openly and consistently internally and with external stakeholders • identify champions within each group of stakeholders • respond to concerns thoroughly and in a timely manner
7. Natural Disasters • economic and social effects of COVID-19 pandemic • possible hurricanes, drought • inability to reach students • possibility of damage to infrastructure and loss of resources and investments	High	High	• build capacity for delivery of remote education • ensure new facilities are hurricane-proof • provide training on disaster-preparedness • implement risk mitigation plan alongside BESPlan

VII. FINANCING ARRANGEMENTS

Table 29 lists the primary resources required for each strategic action and the source of financing. In most cases, strategic actions can be implemented using existing expertise and financial resources through the MoECST Recurrent and Capital II Expenditure budgets. Some external expertise and resources will require Capital III funding from local, regional and international donor agencies, such as the Belize Social Investment Fund, UNICEF, the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Available grants and loan funds will be used to prioritize BESPlan strategic actions.

TABLE 29 FINANCING ARRANGEMENTS

CODE	STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIMARY RESOURCES	SOURCE OF FINANCING
1.1.1	Update the mission and organizational structure of the Ministry of Education to enable better communication and collaboration and greater efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery.	In-house Expertise with assistance from the Ministry of Public Service	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments
1.1.2	Develop terms of reference for each position, office and area of service to provide clarity in roles and responsibilities.	In-house Expertise with assistance from the Ministry of Public Service	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments
1.1.3	Develop a performance-based appraisal and recognition system for Ministry of Education staff and address identified professional development needs.	In-house Expertise with assistance from the Ministry of Public Service	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments
1.1.4	Implement a comprehensive rebranding and communication strategy to build the Ministry's public image and capacity to inform and engage internal and external stakeholders.	In-house Expertise with external support from media firms	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Advertisement, Contracts and Consultancies

CODE	STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIMARY RESOURCES	SOURCE OF FINANCING
1.1.5	Maximize the use of BEMIS and other technologies to digitize the Ministry's processes and services.	In-house Expertise	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
1.2.1	Review and rationalize school financing policies and mechanisms at all levels of the education system to increase equity and incentivize performance, achievement and continuous improvement.	In-house Expertise with assistance from External Expertise-Education Finance	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies, Contracts and Consultancies
1.2.2	Provide free access to education from preschool to junior college.	Financial Resources	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Scholarships and Grants
1.2.3	Establish a Rural Education Grant Fund to increase access to education for students from rural areas.	Financial Resources	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Scholarships and Grants
1.2.4	Ensure that all students and teachers from Standard 4 to Form 4 have access to high speed internet or an alternative wireless service and to an appropriate digital device.	Material and Financial Resources-equipment, service charge	Capital III Expenditure (equipment); MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Contracts and Consultancies (service charge)
1.2.5	Establish an audit unit within the Ministry of Education to ensure accountability for public funds.	Human resources, travel and subsistence	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
1.3.1	Conduct a comprehensive review and revision of education legislation, regulations and policies, including those related to education councils, commissions and boards, to increase effectiveness in the governance of the education system.	In-house Expertise with support from External Expertise-Legal Drafting	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Contracts and Consultancies

CODE	STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIMARY RESOURCES	SOURCE OF FINANCING
1.3.2	Expand compulsory education to include students at the preschool and secondary levels of education.	In-house Expertise with support from External Expertise-Legal Drafting	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Contracts and Consultancies
1.3.3	Introduce a mechanism for the empowerment and meaningful participation of parents in school-level and national-level decision-making on education issues.	In-house Expertise	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
1.3.4	Establish standards and school monitoring and support systems for pre-primary, primary and secondary institutions to ensure delivery of quality services and continuous school improvement.	In-house Expertise	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
1.3.5	Ensure that all managing authorities and principals receive relevant leadership training in areas such as education regulations, clinical supervision, financial management, school self-assessment and improvement planning.	In-house Expertise	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
2.1.1	Develop a National Curriculum Reform Framework, based on International Bureau of Education and UNESCO standards, to guide the development of national curriculum at the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels of education with a focus on student competency.	In-house Expertise with support from stakeholders	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
2.1.2	Use the National Curriculum Reform Framework to streamline the curriculum at the primary and secondary levels and to allow for in-depth acquisition of the literacy, numeracy, technological and critical thinking skills needed in the 21st Century.	In-house Expertise	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies

CODE	STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIMARY RESOURCES	SOURCE OF FINANCING
2.1.3	Ensure that subjects which promote physical and mental wellness and sustainable human development, including the expressive arts, physical education, civics, Belizean, African and Mayan History, gardening, agriculture, environmental education and entrepreneurship, are integrated into the national curriculum at all levels.	In-house Expertise	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
2.1.4	Develop a National School Portal and learning platform with quality resources for teachers and students to facilitate remote learning and appropriate implementation of the national curriculum.	In-house Expertise	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
2.1.5	Implement a revised and expanded national textbook program at the primary and secondary levels of education with free learning resources that are aligned to the national curriculum	Material resources: books, software	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Contracts and Consultancies
2.2.1	Develop a national student assessment policy and scheme for the Belize education system, including a mechanism for the effective use of assessment results to impact education policies and practices at both the school and system levels.	External Expertise-Measurement and Evaluation	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Contracts and Consultancies
2.2.2	Strengthen the expertise within the Examinations Unit to develop quality diagnostic and standardized assessments.	External Expertise-Measurement and Evaluation	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Contracts and Consultancies
2.2.3	Upgrade the technology and infrastructure used in the administration and analysis of examinations to improve timeliness and usefulness of results.	Material Resources: equipment and software	Capital II Expenditure

CODE	STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIMARY RESOURCES	SOURCE OF FINANCING
2.2.4	Develop a suite of appropriate screening tools, diagnostic tests and standardized examinations that are aligned to national curriculum benchmarks at all levels and in accordance with the new assessment policy and scheme.	In-house Expertise with support from External Expertise-Measurement and Evaluation	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Contracts and Consultancies
2.2.5	Develop teacher resources and provide training to teachers in administering screening tools and diagnostic tests and in the use of appropriate assessment strategies to promote learning.	In-house Expertise	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
2.3.1	Upgrade the teacher education programs at all levels to ensure that teachers have the specialized content knowledge and pedagogical skills needed to deliver the national curriculum effectively to all students.	In-house Expertise with support from External Expertise-Teacher Education	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Contracts and Consultancies
2.3.2	Ensure that teachers at the pre-primary, primary and secondary levels of education and all teacher educators and professional development facilitators are appropriately trained.	In-house Expertise with support from External Expertise-Teacher Education	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies, Contracts and Consultancies
2.3.3	Establish a Teacher Learning Institute to provide structured, comprehensive, year-round professional development programs based on identified needs of teachers and school leaders.	In-house expertise	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
2.3.4	Establish a STEAM Laboratory School to promote effective and innovative teaching in the areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics.	In-house Expertise with support from External Expertise-Construction, Curriculum Design	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments (human resources); Capital III Expenditure (building supplies and equipment, External Expertise-(Construction, Curriculum Design)

CODE	STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIMARY RESOURCES	SOURCE OF FINANCING
2.3.5	Revise the appraisal system for teachers and school leaders and introduce performance-based incentive mechanisms to promote school improvement and student achievement.	In-house expertise	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments
3.1.1	Collaborate with relevant line Ministries to develop an updated national policy and strategy for Early Childhood Education and Development in Belize.	In-house expertise with support from Ministries of Health and Human Development	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
3.1.2	Establish a comprehensive, play-oriented preschool and lower primary education curriculum which includes reading, visual arts, dancing, planting, music, civics and an introduction to technology.	In-house expertise	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
3.1.3	Expand access to preschool education for 3 and 4 year olds by building new preschools and attaching preschools to existing primary schools where possible.	External Expertise-Design and Construction	Capital II and Capital III Expenditure
3.1.4	Develop alternative preschool programs in areas where traditional preschools are not feasible.	In-house expertise with external funding for material resources	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments; Capital III Expenditure-material and financial resources
3.1.5	Develop an ECE public awareness campaign with key messages including the importance of early childhood stimulation, education and development.	In-house Expertise with external support from media firms	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Advertisement, Contracts and Consultancies
3.2.1	Establish a National Healthy Start Feeding Program with a school gardening component to provide nutritional support for students from low income families.	Material and Financial Resources	MoECST Capital II Expenditure; Capital III Expenditure

CODE	STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIMARY RESOURCES	SOURCE OF FINANCING
3.2.2	Increase the availability of trained school counsellors at the primary level to address the psychosocial needs of students.	Financial Resources	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Scholarships and Grants
3.2.3	Design and implement school-wide programs that promote social and emotional learning and encourage positive discipline and restorative practices at school and in the home.	In-house expertise with support from various line Ministries and social service organizations	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
3.2.4	Work with social service organizations to strengthen the system for identifying and supporting children with social barriers to inclusion and learning, including refugees, students living in poverty and those from remote rural areas.	In-house expertise with support from various line Ministries and social service organizations	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
3.2.5	Design and implement support programs that target increased retention and achievement of students in primary and secondary schools, with particular attention to boys.	In-house expertise with support from various line Ministries and social service organizations	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
3.3.1	Strengthen the legislative, regulatory and policy framework to ensure that children with special needs have access to quality and relevant education in the most enabling environment.	In-house Expertise with support from External Expertise-Legal Drafting	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Contracts and Consultancies
3.3.2	Ensure that special schools, classrooms and other facilities that serve students with special education needs, including NaRCIE, have appropriate accommodations and resources for students and staff.	External Expertise-Design and Construction	Capital II and Capital III Expenditure

CODE	STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIMARY RESOURCES	SOURCE OF FINANCING
3.3.3	Improve education and support services for students with special education needs, including referral and diagnosis processes, learning support, development of life skills and, where applicable, successful transition into further education, TVET or the world of work.	In-house expertise with support from various line Ministries and social service organizations	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
3.3.4	Increase the availability of resources and services in key areas such as speech therapy, physical therapy, occupational therapy, diagnostics, and paraprofessional support, especially in rural communities.	In-house expertise with support from various line Ministries and social service organizations	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
3.3.5	Implement a sustained public awareness campaign, school sensitization program and support groups to encourage greater acceptance and understanding of the rights of students with special education needs.	In-house Expertise with external support from media firms	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Advertisement, Contracts and Consultancies
4.1.1	Establish a National Training Agency, with oversight from the NCTVET, to be responsible for quality assurance and coordination of the TVET sector and award of national and regional vocational qualifications.	In-house Expertise with support from External Expertise-Legal Drafting	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Contracts and Consultancies
4.1.2	Upgrade the infrastructure, equipment and technical expertise in all ITVETs to comply with regional standards for delivery of quality TVET programs.	Material Resources	Capital II and Capital III Expenditure
4.1.3	Establish standards, employment policies and remuneration schemes to attract trainers with high quality, relevant and up-to-date expertise and experience in the TVET sector.	In-house Expertise with support from NCTVET	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
4.1.4	Establish a TVET Scholarship Fund to train a cadre of skilled workers each year in high priority areas and new growth industries.	Financial Resources	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Scholarships and Grants

CODE	STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIMARY RESOURCES	SOURCE OF FINANCING
4.1.5	Collaborate with industries and the private sector to design and implement trade and apprenticeship programs that will attract more students into ITVETs, with particular emphasis on increasing the number of females and high school graduates.	In-house Expertise with support from NCTVET, National Training Agency and business and industry	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
4.2.1	Establish a Higher Education Council with government, academia and private sector partners to set standards and provide quality assurance and accreditation for higher education institutions in Belize.	In-house Expertise with support from External Expertise-Legal Drafting	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Contracts and Consultancies
4.2.2	Develop regulations and policies to guide the management and staffing of government and grant-aided junior colleges.	In-house Expertise with support from External Expertise-Legal Drafting	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Contracts and Consultancies
4.2.3	Establish a Higher Education Fund and other financial assistance programs to encourage students to pursue studies in high priority areas such as STEM and provide special incentives for currently underrepresented groups such as males.	Financial Resources	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Scholarships and Grants
4.2.4	Facilitate university and junior college faculty in pursuing advanced qualifications in areas of national priority.	Financial Resources	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Scholarships and Grants
4.2.5	Support the University of Belize and other higher education institutions to build their capacity to conduct research in areas of national priority.	Financial Resources	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Scholarships and Grants
4.3.1	Develop a national policy for Adult Education, including standards for programs and providers.	In-house Expertise	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies

CODE	STRATEGIC ACTION	PRIMARY RESOURCES	SOURCE OF FINANCING
4.3.2	Establish programmes across the country to teach literacy, civics, parenting education and financial literacy to adult learners.	In-house Expertise	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
4.3.3	Work with employers to develop customized programs that can build the capacity of their employees and boost productivity.	In-house Expertise with support from NCTVET, National Training Agency and business and industry	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies
4.3.4	Support the development of online adult education programmes to increase the number of persons in the workforce with secondary level qualifications.	In-house Expertise	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emolument, Materials and Supplies s
4.3.5	Develop and implement a system for prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) to facilitate certification of skills gained through work experience.	In-house Expertise	MoECST Recurrent Expenditure-Emoluments, Materials and Supplies

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