

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION SUMMIT 2022
BARBADOS CONSULTATION REPORT

Barbados is currently implementing an education reform agenda which is located in the context of numerous issues existing in the sector. These issues include but are not limited to persistent underperformance; student disengagement and indiscipline; programming out of sync with the needs of the economy; weak leadership and instructional quality; the absence of standards and accountability; and an archaic regulatory framework. Predominant among these issues is the fact that the focus given to the Barbados Secondary Schools' Entrance Examination as a mechanism for transition from the primary to the secondary level, often means that the needs of all students are not equitably addressed, with the result that each year many children fall further and further behind. These children transition to the secondary level without mastering the primary curriculum and eventually, many of them leave school without obtaining any certification. This is the genesis of much of the indiscipline developing in the country, making it imperative for the Ministry of Education, Technological and Vocational Training (METVT) to address the systemic and deep-rooted issues before they have a more debilitating effect on the country.

In addition to the afore-mentioned issues, as a result of the developments across the world since our last major reform initiative in the 1990s, it has also become necessary to focus attention on preparing our students for jobs which do not currently exist. According to the 2016 Future of Jobs Report of the World Economic Forum, 65% of the students who entered school in that year, will work in jobs which do not currently exist. These jobs will be based on, and enhanced by, the use of technology. Therefore, if our students are to be competent to operate in these jobs and to assist Barbados in achieving sustainable economic and social development, it is imperative that the education system prepare them appropriately. It is against this background that transformation of the education system in Barbados was first conceived by the present administration.

As preparations were ongoing for the implementation of the reform agenda, the world was struck by the Covid 19 pandemic. This had and is still having a significant impact on education in Barbados. Schools were closed to face-to-face instruction for the better part of two years, bringing about significant change in the delivery of instruction. Covid 19 has also, by itself, created a new set of challenges for education in Barbados. These include the engagement of parents and communities in the education of our children; expansion of the 'digital divide' with children from poor and vulnerable households lacking access to devices at the beginning of the pandemic; uneven internet coverage across the country leading to equity concerns; the inability, for various reasons, to reach students in the most disadvantaged households;

increased workloads and stress for teachers; significant learning loss across the board, but especially by the most vulnerable students; teacher discomfort with the new mode of instructional delivery; and monitoring of the new modality for the delivery of instruction. All of these issues were already being addressed as part of the ongoing transformation of the system, when the United Nations (UN) Transforming Education agenda was announced.

In this context, METVT determined that the agenda already commenced could be enhanced by delving deeper into the thematic tracks established by the UN. It therefore established five action committees to engage in consultations with relevant stakeholders to gather feedback on how stakeholders perceived the system and what they recommended as effective actions which could advance it in keeping with the thematic tracks of the UN.

Prior to engaging stakeholders, the action committees were asked to give consideration to themes by considering the following perspectives:

- Identification of discussion points based on expertise and experiences;
- Identification of some key issues which might impact the particular tracks and indication of how they might be addressed/mitigated;
- Identification of some key priority actions which might be taken to mitigate the impact of Covid 19 on the particular area under examination;
- Suggestions as to how we might plan for these tracks across all instructional modalities, where appropriate; and
- Suggestions as to what might be needed to align our actions with the targets for SDG 4 “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

Some of the major points identified for further discussion across the thematic tracks were as follows:

1. Inclusive, Equitable, Safe and Healthy Schools

- Colonial legacies in education which privilege academic achievement above all other gifts and talents;
- The lack of political will over decades to address the issues of education of students with disabilities;
- The global presentation of what inclusion should look like versus the realities of resource scarcity;
- Social attitudes to the concept of inclusion based on the model presented internationally;
- Societal and personal misconceptions about persons with disabilities, fueled by lack of knowledge or misinformation;

- Teaching methodologies (pedagogical approaches) practiced in our system which exclude students with varying disabilities up to the tertiary level; and
- Misalignment of educational goals with societal goals, especially where citizens with disabilities are concerned;

2. Learning and Skills for Life and Sustainable Development

- Absence of a clearly articulated national development plan to guide sustainable development;
- The challenge of a declining population and its impact on and implications for economic growth;
- Absence of an efficient framework for diagnosis, assessment, evaluation and measurement of national educational needs;
- Absence of incentives to retain the talent of highly skilled and qualified citizens in the country; and
- Lack of access to devices, internet and electricity and the impact on vulnerable students, exacerbated by the pandemic.

3. Teachers, Teaching and the Teaching Profession

- development of the teaching profession;
- the status, working conditions and remuneration of teachers;
- teacher education: pre-service and in-service training;
- mentorship;
- teacher motivation and wellbeing;
- teacher attrition and implications for quality; and
- opportunities for professional advancement.

4. Digital Learning and Transformation

- Our future relationship with knowledge in the context of the internet;
- The new focus of education given our changing relationship with knowledge;
- The post-Covid technologically driven world in which we now live and its relevance to the delivery of education;
- How technology is shaping a range of sectors: economic, fintech, science and innovation, education, health, governance, arts and entertainment, etc.
- The need to equip our students to carry out 21st century jobs as well as those not yet created;

- Digitization of social and economic services requiring citizens to be capable of functioning in such a society and being able to fuel the transformation of such a society;
- Enhancing the competitiveness of the country on a global stage;
- Fulfilling our sustainable development goals.

5. Financing of Education

- The sufficiency of public financing given the wide scale needs and enhancements required in the system;
- Different types of private sector/corporate support that can be encouraged;
- Leveraging the innovation of the non-state sector;
- Building and scaling paternships; and
- Cash transfers to the vulnerable.

On the basis of the above points, the action committees engaged in consultation with groups of knowledgeable stakeholders as well as members of the general public and were able to identify some priority actions which could be taken to address the issues highlighted. Following are summaries of the priority actions recommended:

Thematic Track 1: Inclusive, Equitable, Safe and Healthy Schools

Several opportunities for equitable provision of education to students with special educational needs, inclusive of mainstreaming across the primary, secondary and tertiary education system, were recommended. There were also suggestions for enhancing the health of the students and the safety and security of the environments. Some of the recommendations were as follows:

Inclusivity and Equity:

- Providing a framework for access to students at the nursery level who present with developmental delays;
- Providing in-class supports at the nursery, primary and secondary levels for students who need to be supported in mainstream classrooms;
- Providing a more diverse curriculum at the primary and secondary levels, commensurate with the interests and talents of students, as well as in touch with global and local demands for employability skills;
- Providing lifelong learning opportunities for tertiary level and further education for persons with disabilities who wish to study or qualify in a particular area;

- Undertaking a more equitable approach to the awarding of National Scholarships, to include students with varying gifts, talents and skills in non-traditional areas;
- Providing technological and financial assistance to the vulnerable, particularly those with disabilities in our society who need to navigate a technology-driven world;
- Setting out a policy framework which would govern not only the education of students with disabilities, but legislating the employment of persons with disabilities, to a specific percentage of the workforce in every company and ministry;
- Frame-working a strategic plan for these actions, with specific timelines of achievement, which would be legislated outside of political will;
- Increasing access to appropriate education and provision of appropriate educational programmes for students with special educational needs; and
- Providing teachers with skills to use information technology to reach students with special educational needs.

Health

- Implementation of the newly approved School Nutrition Policy to assist with the reduction of childhood obesity;
- Creation of a healthier school environment which models, teaches and caters to the physical and mental health and wellness of students;
- The sustained promotion of an effective shift in behaviour as it relates to healthy choices and lifestyles among the most vulnerable population;
- Improvement of the food services environment including both the School Meals programme and the canteen and vending operations in and around schools;
- Incorporation of health-related education into the school curriculum;
- Health promotion among the school community with a particular focus on parents and children;
- A focus in physical education that not only represents competitive sport but also aims at providing physical activity for students who are not interested in high performance sports; and
- Recalibration of the approach to physical activity in schools.

Safety

- Conduct of an assessment of the current school safety policy to determine whether it is fit for purpose, and whether it takes into consideration the needs of all students, including those with special educational needs;
- Establishment of safe and open spaces in all schools, especially in the context of Covid 19;
- Development of a general safety policy and school specific policies that are tested periodically in the event of fire, bad weather, or other safety challenges;
- Development of a school specific building code to be conceptualized in partnership with key stakeholders from the Barbados Council for the Disabled.

Thematic Track 2: Learning and Skills for Life and Sustainable Development

Stakeholders participating in the consultation on this thematic track were of the view that we must develop individuals to be agents of change, so the system we are striving to build can be human-centred, based on student competencies and be coupled with an environment that sustains the concept of human-centredness. Such a system, it was agreed, needed to encourage the following priority actions:

- Building and implementation of robust lifelong learning policies and systems:
 - A digital skills framework
 - A numeracy and literacy policy
- Promotion of a whole-of institution approach to learning:
 - Adoption of the Education for Sustainable Development plan as outlined by UNESCO in all schools;
 - Creation of strategic plans aligned to national goals in all schools. Persons monitoring the implementation of these plans should be trained in Effective Process Management and Lean Six Sigma.
- Creation of a well-oiled education system that seamlessly adapts to evolving skill demands in changing economies, for example, the current transition to green and digital economies:
 - Reform of curricula to include greater emphasis on citizenship, green skills and a design thinking approach;
 - Ratification of the National Competency Based framework;

- Ensuring that there is inclusion and equity, making provision for students with Special Educational Needs; and
- Creation of multiple pathways for certification and access to post-secondary education.
- Strengthening of governance, finance and reporting protocols in educational institutions.
- Emphasizing foundational learning:
 - Place greater focus on design thinking skills, commencing at the early childhood level;
 - Encourage activities that foster innovative discovery skills;
 - Incorporate resilience building into the curriculum; and
 - Adjust the mandatory requirement for children to enter school to include parental responsibility.
- Development of the perception of education for sustainable development:
 - Establish a repository for national educational attainment targets accessible to learners, teachers, educators and the general public;
 - Develop a new core curriculum to include design thinking and communications;
 - Consider a private-sector approach to building teacher morale and engagement; and
 - Create, populate and maintain a central system for the data management of education to be shared with relevant government agencies and other stakeholders.
- Place emphasis on skills for employment and entrepreneurship:
 - Strengthen and promote opportunities for apprenticeships;
 - Place special focus on social entrepreneurship; and
 - Give support to the strengthening of frameworks for patents.
- Adoption of a whole-of-society approach to education:
 - Offer incentives to business, individuals, and civil society which encourage them to create programmes which foster design thinking, build resilience and promote Barbadian norms and values; and
 - Involve innovative discovery learning and resilience building at every level of the education system as well as in the society.

- Place emphasis on development of skills for the future:
 - Provide our students with access to futuristic tools;
 - Establish public/private partnerships to support the development of futuristic skills; and
 - Shift from teaching-to-test towards a focus on competency-based assessment.

Thematic Track 3: Teachers, Teaching and the Teaching Profession

Persons contributing to the request for inputs relating to this thematic track strongly believed that the response of teachers during remote learning underscores the essential role played by teachers in the education of the nation's children. It was felt that this is therefore an opportune time to further develop the skills of teachers and integrate Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) into education, through the provision of regular professional development programmes.

Teachers consulted also indicated that they felt the pressure of not being able to complete their syllabuses. It was therefore going to be necessary to address **learning loss**, where such loss existed. Solutions must be student-specific and student-centred. Consequently, learning loss should be addressed on a case-by-case basis and the teacher must be at the forefront of charting the path to learning recovery. It was felt that this may require some or all of the following:

- Extra classes by the class/subject teacher in afterschool programmes;
- Having students repeat the year;
- Summer School Recovery Programme with paid trained teachers, which may include recent graduates from Erdiston Teachers' Training College;
- In the Nursery and Primary schools, where learning loss might be caused by the inability to teach the skill or topic, strategic adjustments might have to be made to the curriculum to ensure learning recovery;
- Learning support in the classrooms to help individual students during class time where necessary;
- From the reports made, the tripartite union of school, student and home was strengthened during the remote learning experience. Parental support would have helped with mitigating learning loss, as their appreciation of the work done by teachers grew. However, in some cases, too much parental assistance was given to students when online assessments were being done, thereby invalidating those assessments. It is clear that parents should be given guidance as to

how they can actively and appropriately support their children in school.

In relation to assistance which should be provided to teachers, it was felt that teachers must be involved, from the inception, in any attempt to transform education. They should be made aware of and be party to any proposed changes before the general public is officially engaged. The following points were noted:

- Teachers require appropriate resources across all instructional modalities;
- Teachers across the system should be encouraged to establish and participate in professional subject communities; for example, a group of Technical and Vocational Studies teachers would be able to lobby for partnerships that support having students experience cutting-edge technology and internships;
- The formation of strategic partnerships with educational institutions, at both the regional and international levels, must be facilitated, to support the different instructional modalities.
- There must be examination of successful systems in other countries with analysis to determine how they may be adapted to our needs;
- The teaching profession needs to be properly marketed. A greater presence at career showcases may encourage school leavers to consider the teaching profession as a viable career path;
- Greater teacher autonomy must be encouraged. This will lead to improvement in teachers' sense of professional confidence and capability thereby resulting in more effective teaching;
- Wherever practical, teachers should have their own homeroom/personal teaching space, especially where the use of technology is a requirement; and
- Attention must be paid to the quality of leadership in schools.

Finally, it was felt by persons participating in this discussion that our actions will be properly aligned with SDG4 if we focus attention on the following:

- Development of a strategic policy for the future of education in Barbados;
- Recruitment of quality personnel to be trained to serve as teachers;
- Pre-service and in-service training must be encouraged as part of the professionalization of teachers;
- Setting and maintaining high standards and competencies for the teaching profession;

- Recognizing the work of teachers and encouraging them to share best practices. Teachers, as professionals, should be encouraged to be reflective, to constantly evaluate their practice and hence identify their training needs;
- Encouragement of collaboration and the establishment of professional learning communities;
- Recruitment and training of a cadre of educational leaders as leaders of change, who will actively spearhead the transformation of education in Barbados;
- Facilitation of a further national discussion at the appropriate time.

Thematic Track 4: Digital Learning and Transformation

The question arose as to why it was necessary to transform education with technology. Robust discussion led to the conclusion that there first needed to be an examination of the philosophy of digital transformation. The consultations therefore focused on the thinking behind digital transformation and what we stand to gain from it. This led to the conclusion that there were not only educational gains, but also economic and socio-cultural gains to be derived from the pursuit of this goal. These perceived gains were as follows:

- transforming education to ensure its sustainability and continued relevance so that as technology evolves it remains a malleable vehicle capable of empowering both teachers and students with the requisite skills to meet the changing needs of the 21st Century;
- positioning our citizens to benefit from the global digital revolution in terms of their ability to live, work and contribute to a growing, digital economy
- Empowering our citizens as co-creators and/or new knowledge generators who can communicate effectively and collaborate in digital spaces to leverage themselves and a national/regional agenda on a global stage.

Priority Actions

- Adoption and implementation of a guiding framework;
- A Digital Development Policy which articulates and prioritizes specific digital competencies required for life in the 21st century;
- A Digital Development Policy which charts how digital literacies and the development of advanced competencies will flow from nursery to primary to secondary to tertiary and the wider society;
- Assessment of infrastructural needs including devices and other related equipment, connectivity, on-site support and other physical infrastructural needs, civil works and fence-to-fence connectivity;

- A digital curriculum with the requisite content;
- Development of teacher capacity in collaboration with all educational training institutions in Barbados;
- Multi-sectoral collaboration between Education and other Ministries, as required;
- Stakeholder engagement, including corporate Barbados, Non-Governmental organisations and other institutions;
- Digital leadership training for school and system leaders;
- Syllabus development;
- Integration of digital skills across the curriculum;
- Development of digital communities of practice at the level of the school;
- Teacher and student training and development; and
- Parent sensitization.

Thematic Track 5: Financing Education

According to data from the World Bank, government expenditure on education in Barbados at 2020, totalled 4.3% of GDP, placing Barbados at 92 out of 200 countries.

The action committee first examined the goals of the Ministry to see how they aligned with the financing available. The goals of the Ministry were:

- To enhance overall student learning and achievement outcomes across national system;
- To strengthen overall standards and practices for improving teacher quality and school leadership;
- To enhance overall physical infrastructure and the technological, digital and innovative profile of the system;
- To strengthen the institutional profile and operational functioning of the Ministry; and
- To strengthen and enhance the regulatory framework and environment governing the wider educational sector.

Given these needs, it was determined that current financing was insufficient to execute the vision developed by the Ministry. The conclusion therefore was that if these goals were to be achieved, other resources must be obtained.

Barbados' spending on education was then examined to determine how it compared with the spending of other countries in the region as well as internationally. Samples of those comparisons are as follows:

Barbados Spending on Education in Comparison to the Region

<u>Country</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>% of GDP</u>
Barbados	2020	4.3
Jamaica	2020	5.4
Belize	2020	7.9
St Vincent & Grenadines	2018	5.7
Puerto Rico	2014	6.1
Cuba	2010	12.8

Barbados Spending on Education in Comparison Globally

<u>Country</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>% of GDP</u>
Barbados	2018	5.43
Greenland	2018	10.6
Norway	2018	7.6
Sweden	2018	7.6
Iceland	2018	7.6
Denmark	2017	7.8

Having evaluated the annual expenditure on education, there was a consensus that a number of actions needed to be taken to enhance the spending generally, but specifically in the case of spending on special educational needs. Further, it was felt that since Government undertakes the funding of the entire system, most of the new financing initiatives should be undertaken by corporate Barbados, both in cash and in-kind.

The actions recommended are as follows:

Public Funding:

- Commit to allocating a percentage of annual budget to special education commensurate with the size and needs of the special needs population. Funds should be allocated to classroom needs as well as improvements to the plant through the use of universal design principles;
- Provision of additional funding for teacher training and training of other critical human resource personnel such as Guidance Counsellors and Social Workers;
- Review of teaching service roles to include Teacher Aides and other staff members to realistically execute inclusivity goals.

Corporate Funding:

- Development of corporate partnerships to supplement funding from the national budget;
- Establishment of a sovereign wealth fund to support/finance education;
- Establish programmes in collaboration with corporate Barbados e.g. mentoring and coaching, for both students and teachers;
- Adoption of schools/programmes by private entities;
- Provision of scholarships to vulnerable students by corporate companies;
- Donation of equipment and resources which support programmes which benefit private entities;
- Setting up of internship programmes to provide students and teachers with authentic workforce experience;
- Provision of technical assistance by corporate Barbados especially in relation to offering expertise; and
- Organising fund-raising activities to benefit the system or to benefit specific schools.

Next Step

It is clear that from the feedback gathered from the work of the action committees, there are still a number of discussion points which need to be ventilated to garner the full position of the Barbadian people on transformation of the system. Working class Barbadians have for some time been expressing the opinion that the system, as currently configured, does not serve the needs of their children. Social developments in the country may appear to support these opinions. The consultation process needs to dig deeper to validate or refute these claims. It is therefore envisaged that wider consultation will ensue in the coming weeks and months to inform how the process unfolds.