



## Transforming Education in Belize National Consultations Report

### Section 1: TES NATIONAL CONSULTATION PROCESS

Convenor's Name: Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology

Number of consultations (if more than one consultation takes place): 7

Basic information on all the consultation(s) convened:

Date of Consultation	Title of Consultation	Types (eg. National /Subnational)	Geographic Focus	Language used	Number of Participants for consultation
September 30 - December 31, 2021  January 2 - April 8, 2022	Green Light Status for Return to Onsite Learning in Belize	National, Virtual	National	English	580
February 11, 18, 25, 2022  March 11, 2022  April 1, 8, 2022  May 6, 2022	Belize National Consultations for Curriculum Reform	National	National	English	466 (persons were also involved in above consultation)
4 August 2022	TES National Stakeholder Consultations on Special Education: Taking Everyone Along	National	National	English	36
4 August 2022	TES National Stakeholder Consultations on Prioritizing Student	National	National	English	23

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	Welfare: Building Community Connections				
5 August 2022	TES National Stakeholder Consultations on Teacher Development: Elevating the Profession	National	National	English	50
5 August 2022	TES National Stakeholder Consultations on Maximizing Human Capital: Private Sector Involvement in Education	National	National	English	16
6 August 2022	The Children's Town Hall	National	National	English	98

Total number of participants: 803

Age Range of Participants	
78	0 - 17
75	18 - 24
207	25 - 34

197	35 - 44
209	45 - 54
35	55 - 64
2	65+

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<b>Gender Participants:</b>				
257	Male			
546	Female			
	Prefer not to say			
<b>Number of Participants from each Sector: (insert number)</b>				
730	Education		3	Nutrition
25	Child Protection		4	Communication
6	Health		2	Information Technology
9	Labour		6	Social Protection
3	Environment		10	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
5	Finance		Other (please explain)_____	
<b>Number of participants from each Stakeholder Group: (insert number)</b>				
586	Teacher, educators, facilitators, and professors			
89	Youth and students (including children and adolescents)			
1	School leaders (eg. From UNESCO)			
3	City and local government representatives			
24	Parents and caregivers			
12	Small/medium enterprises/unions			
	Large national businesses			
3	Members of Parliament			
2	Multi-national corporations			
	Local authorities			
14	Government and national institutions			
32	Public Servants			
11	Development Partners			
5	Managing authorities / proprietors of schools			
	International and/or Regional financial institutions			

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11	Relevant Non-Government Organizations
2	Indigenous people and community leaders
5	Scientific community, academic, universities and research institutes
3	Media
	Other (Please explain)

**Section 2: PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT**

1. Green Light Status for Return to Onsite Learning in Belize:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology (MoECST), using a virtual platform, conducted a school survey called ‘Green Light Status for Return to Onsite Learning.’ The main objective of the Green Light Status for Return to Onsite Learning survey was to gather current information on the readiness of administrators, teachers and students to return to face-to-face instruction. Information regarding the effects of the COVID-19 disruption on the teaching – learning process, effective practices of remote learning and vaccination information was collected. Data was gathered from 221 pre-primary schools, 276 primary schools, 61 secondary schools, 10 tertiary institutions, 6 TVETs and 6 ACE programmes.

2. Belize National Consultations for Curriculum Reform:

The MoECST in collaboration with the Belize National Teachers Union (BNTU), and with the support of United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), conducted national consultations on curriculum reform for primary schools in Belize. Data which spoke to the status of the current curriculum and its overload, processes, priorities and resources for reform and the outcomes of a relevant, reduced, realigned, realistic curriculum were collected. The consultation also sensitized and discussed competency-based education as the primary principle driving curriculum reform. Each consultation promoted inclusion and equity in that participants were from urban and rural areas, was not gender biased and regardless of type or management, the data gathered carried the same significant weight.

3. TES National Stakeholder Consultations:

The MoECST, in collaboration with UNICEF, hosted the National Stakeholder Consultations on August 4 and 5, 2022 and the Children’s Townhall on August 6, 2022 at the San Ignacio Hotel Conference Room. Priority stakeholders from across Belize were invited and engaged in the consultations. Stakeholders were grouped according to their sector and relevant roles as follows:

- Special Education: Taking Everyone Along

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- Prioritizing Student Welfare: Building Community Connections
- Teacher Development: Elevating the Profession
- Maximizing Human Capital: Private Sector Involvement in Education
- The Children's Town Hall

Table discussions within each stakeholder consultation were used to collect targeted data on:

1. How stakeholders can ensure full recovery from the educational disruptions caused by Covid-19
2. The main strategic transformations and levers for reimagining education and accelerating progress toward shared goals
3. The extent to which key priority areas from the Belize Education Sector Plan 2021-2025 have been achieved in connection to global SDG-4 on Quality Education
4. Stronger, more sustainable means of public financing of education in Belize.

Table discussions were guided by tailored questions sourced from the United Nation's Transforming Education Summit 2022 Guidelines for National Consultations. Table leaders/notetakers recorded stakeholder responses using an electronic jotform. Table reporters used the collected data in the electronic jotform to present and share pertinent information from their table's discussion during the session.

Using separate sessions to facilitate consultations allowed for a whole-of-government approach, ensured inclusion and equity, and allowed for focusing on youth as 'agents of change.'

### **A Whole-of-government Approach:**

The national stakeholder consultations involved multi-sectoral representation from line ministries including the Ministry of Health and Wellness, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Human Development, Families, and Indigenous People's Affairs, Ministry of Sustainable Development, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management, and Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology. Stakeholders from the Education, Child Protection, Health, Environment, Finance, Labor, Nutrition, Communication, Information Technology, Social Protection and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene sectors of Belize were represented. Additionally, local government representatives participated with members from national universities and academia.

### **Inclusion and Equality:**

Collectively, 803 stakeholders participated in all national and virtual consultations. Persons consulted included children, adolescents, teens and adults with ages ranging from eight (8) to sixty five (65). These stakeholders included adult and youth parliamentarians, representatives from school managing authorities, school proprietors and board of governors, school administrators, school counselors, teachers, students and parents. Students from primary, secondary, tertiary and vocational institutions were represented. Students and parents were

invited from vulnerable groups, migrant communities and indigenous communities from urban and rural areas across Belize. Students with special needs and parents of students with special needs were proportionately represented in the consultations. Autism Belize, Belize Assembly for Persons with Diverse Abilities (BAPDA), the National Commission of Families and Children, UNICEF, UNESCO, Pathlight International, Health, Counseling and Psychological Services Limited (HC&P Services LTD) and the Love Foundation were among the non-government organizations involved in the consultations. Galen University and development partners including the Millennium Challenge Corporation were engaged in the consultation. The Belize National Teachers Union and public servants from invited line ministries were well represented. Members of the private sector which included entrepreneurs and local, small and medium businesses were involved in the consultations along with persons from national media. Males were represented by 32%.

### **Focusing on youth as ‘agents of change’**

The Children’s Town Hall involved a total of eighty-nine (89) youth participants. Their ages ranged from (8) to seventeen (17) for children, adolescents, and teenagers and from eighteen (18) to twenty-three (23) for young adults. These stakeholders were selected from urban and rural areas nationwide with inclusion of indigenous people, vulnerable groups, and youth with special needs. 51% of these stakeholders were girls. Moreover, youth stakeholders represented two main groups: children, adolescents and teenagers enrolled in school (91%) and teenagers and young adults who dropped out of school (9%). Enrolled youths represented a cross section of Belize’s current school population by level with representation from primary (40%), secondary (36%) and vocational (15%) institutions. The 9% out-of-school youth included both employed and unemployed persons. The Children’s Town Hall utilized a mixture of current COVID-19 data presentations facilitated by the Department of Youth Services, MoECST, National Children’s Parliament, and Adolescent and Youth Alliance. Through youth-led table discussions, stakeholders shared their experiences throughout COVID-19 and provided key information on how the education system in Belize could be transformed.

### **3. CONSULTATION FOCUS AND OUTCOMES**

What was/were the *main area(s) of focus* of the national consultation(s), *based on the TES five thematic action tracks\** and the issues outlined in the Discussion Papers and the Futures of Education Briefing Notes?

#### ***1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools:***

A primary area of the virtual and national consultations focused on the impact of the COVID-19 educational disruption on special education within Belize. Participants were asked to identify steps to recover pandemic-related learning losses in special education as well as evaluate any progress to date. Additionally, stakeholders were asked to assess Belize’s current standings with

regards to Key Priority Area (KPA) 3.3 on Special Education as targeted in the Belize Education Sector Plan (BES Plan) 2021-2025. Possibilities for system change that are now apparent were discussed with mechanisms to strengthen policy. Stakeholders highlighted features of special education most important to continue, strengthen and/or safeguard post COVID-19 while also providing directions for innovations that would allow the transformation of special education in Belize. Digital learning was highlighted as a useful tool for this transformation process.

***2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development:***

As it pertains to learning and skills for life, both virtual and national consultations examined the impact of the COVID-19 educational disruption on learning loss, student disengagement, dropout, and non-re enrollment among vulnerable groups. Moreover, participants recognized the impact of the pandemic on the well-being of both learners and teachers. Connected to this, steps for recovery and proposed additional, short term, support measures were discussed. Stakeholders also assessed learning during the pandemic and identified the connected innovations needed to support student progress. Digital learning and its associated skills were highlighted as transformational and necessary for innovatively rethinking the education system of Belize. KPA 3.2 from the BES Plan 2021-2025 that speaks to student welfare and the provision of resources and programs to support students with social, economic and psychosocial challenges were assessed by stakeholders to determine if Belize was on track with these targets and policy directions. This filters into the Belize's attainment of SDG-4 Quality Education.

In terms of work and employment, the consultation targeted public and private sector entities to identify remaining and emerging issues within the education system of Belize and how these issues can be addressed by existing policies, processes, initiatives, and practices. Public and private sector stakeholders provided useful directions as to what can be included at the different educational levels so that institutions can better prepare their students for meaningful employment across sectors. These discussions enabled the determination of key areas of action to which the government can commit as well as allowed for the identification of who needs to be mobilized to achieve the vision of transforming education in Belize.

A major discussion point of the national consultation was sustainable development. Stakeholders examined how the financing of education (special education, the current system, student welfare, teacher development and training, and support services) can be made more affordable and or sustainable. The private sector reflected on their involvement in financing the education system of Belize and identified additional mechanisms to strengthen partnerships. Steps for greater equity in resource allocation were also considered.

***3. Teachers, teaching, and the teaching profession:***

Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession was a major focus area of the virtual and national consultations. Stakeholders were asked to examine the impact of the COVID-19 educational disruption on teachers, teaching methodologies and teacher development. Stakeholders were

asked to list steps that have been taken to recover pandemic-related losses and evaluate progress made to date. Additional measures to support further recovery were also proposed. Having assessed KPA 2.3 of the BES Plan 2021 – 2025 on transforming teacher education and development programs and incentivizing quality teaching practices and performance results for improved student learning, stakeholders determined the current standing of Belize and identified main obstacles that have made progress difficult. Stakeholders then identified main strategic transformations and levers for reimagining education and accelerating progress toward the achievement of shared goals.

#### ***4. Digital learning and transformation:***

Digital education, engaging with online resources and fully utilizing virtual platforms to deliver instruction were underutilized pre-COVID-19. Hence, the inclusion of digital learning and the innovative transformation of teaching and learning during and after the pandemic was a key aspect of the virtual and national consultations. Stakeholders were asked about their experiences and were able to identify how digital learning could be used to transform the current education system of Belize to better serve all sectors and especially vulnerable groups. Stakeholders posited that in order to keep students engaged, teaching methods saw a direct shift to remote, paper based or online learning and/or hybrid learning during the pandemic. Recognizing the adjustments made and the innovative rethinking for teaching and learning during the COVID-19 educational disruption, the continuous use of technology within onsite, face-to-face return is a crucial lever of change. Teacher, parent, and student training in digital learning, connected teaching methods and methods of assessment, and equitable resource allocation were directly tied to this lever of change.

#### ***5. Financing of Education:***

Each national consultation examined how to strengthen and achieve sustainable means of public financing of education so that the cost of education can be made free where possible or more affordable in Belize. Private and public sector stakeholders also evaluated the extent to which partnerships have been functional as well as how partnerships can be strengthened. Industry attachment, improved transparency and increased accountability were identified as factors to consider for continuous, strengthened partnerships. Stakeholders were also asked to make considerations on how greater equity in resource allocation can be ensured.

### **What are the main outcomes regarding the four key components of the national consultation(s)?**

1. Recovery from COVID-19 disruption [short term]



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To mitigate pandemic related challenges and recover from the COVID-19 disruption, stakeholders identified the need for a policy and a connected framework that maps pandemic related procedures and recovery processes. This can be directly related to KRA 1.3 of the BESPlan 2021-2025. A whole-of-government approach can be employed to draft such policies.

Stakeholders highlighted that the COVID-19 disruption mainly affected mental health and wellness across sectors. Within the school system, it was noted that there were significant negative effects on the psychosocial health and well-being of students and teachers, on access to nutrition and on the protection of children, especially girls. Hence, the creation of safe spaces at all schools, increased access to school counseling services, creating community hubs for at-risk youths and the continuing of school feeding programs were among the recommendations made to address these areas. MoECST's commitment to KRA 3.2 of the BESPlan is directly related to the provision of resources and programs to support students with social, economic and psychosocial challenges.

With regards to the education disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, stakeholders shared that affected areas included participation in education, quality of service, learning and development, parenting and family-life. There were significant impacts on social well-being and learning of vulnerable groups, especially poor, rural children, migrants, English language learners, and those at the lower levels and transitional grades. These impacts were compounded by the constraints of access to technology and lack of parental support. The impacts on mode and quality of education delivered with similar access to technology constraints and lack of capacity of teachers, administrators, and parents to adjust to digital changes were also significant. Family literacy and targeted teacher, parent and student training in digital literacy was the common recommendation made to improve these areas. Youth stakeholders support technology training and identified such training as important to support learning.

Stakeholders reported that dropout rates at both primary and secondary levels increased (more so in rural areas) while re-enrolment at both levels was far reduced. Many school-age children were not enrolled or attending school. In response, stakeholders recommended improved truancy services and/or improved communication and partnerships between schools and parents and MoECST.

As shared by stakeholders, efforts to recover learning loss were prioritized at school and at national levels. Intensive remediation was used with the introduction of hybrid learning to help students to recover from learning loss. School level learning recovery plans were implemented. The Abridged Curriculum was then created by MoECST to assist with learning recovery. The Abridged Curriculum was designed for short term (1 year) use and targeted the concepts/skills most important for scaffolding instruction and recovery of learning. Thereafter, MoECST embarked on national primary school diagnostic testing and capacity building, through which school administrators and primary school teachers were trained on how to administer, mark, and

analyze the Belize Diagnostic Assessment Test. The data from the diagnostic tests was used to draft and implement teaching-learning intervention plans that were tailored to meet the needs of students. This initiative focussed on bridging widespread learning gaps. The shift to national diagnostic testing was recognized as a significant progress marker. However, it was recommended that MoECST also develop diagnostic assessments for secondary school students and in particular for special education students and/or make accommodations and modifications to teaching strategies so that inclusion can be further achieved.

Stakeholders supported MoECST in embracing curriculum reform as it relates to KRA 2.1 of the BESPlan 2021-2025. Curriculum overload has been a significant factor that has impeded student success and teacher efficacy within the education system of Belize. Competency-based education, which will positively shift teaching methodologies, improve student mastery of concepts, cater to differentiation, develop students' critical thinking and ensure skill applications is now the underlying principle of the Belize National Curriculum. Curriculum reform was also recognized as a major progress marker in recovering from the pandemic and for transforming education in Belize. Youth stakeholders suggest the addition of sports and agriculture skills development to this curriculum framework at all levels. Additionally, stakeholders also recommended that toolkits which include a plethora of resources be developed so that competency-based education can be delivered effectively.

Stakeholders encouraged the continuation of recovery programmes like the 'Let's Catch Up Summer Camp,' stating that such initiatives address ongoing learning recovery. As was recommended, MoECST can make considerations as to how recovery programmes can be offered after school and throughout the school year.

As it relates to Teacher Education Institutions, stakeholders suggested that these entities should evaluate and rethink internship requirements. It was suggested that the period of internship be extended, with manageable deliverables over the extended period. Additional support can be provided to newly qualified teachers in any area lacking (digital skills, pedagogy, assessment).

## **2. Transformation of education [medium-longer-term]**

Stakeholders shared that paper-based instruction used during the pandemic was not effective. As a result of paper-based instruction, students were disengaged and undersupported, and learning was limited. Stakeholders stated that while online instruction assisted with student engagement and offered a means for lesson delivery, many students still struggled because they did not have access to devices or internet, or their access to the internet was poor, and teachers were ill prepared to deliver online instruction. In response, the return to onsite learning became critically important to combat learning loss and increase student engagement. As such, the education system of Belize saw a progressive shift to hybrid learning during the pandemic. This shift was identified as a major step toward learning recovery and rethinking education in Belize. Hence, a major recommendation is to digitally transform education in Belize. It was recommended that

the country fully embrace technology to improve services across sectors. Stakeholders suggested that MoECST explore how resources and funding can be used to properly equip schools with internet and devices so that digital learning can be regularized within the face-to-face classroom. Mandated teacher, parent and student training in this area must complement this transformation and resourcing.

Stakeholders also considered and recommended that MoECST fully explore how online remote and/or hybrid learning can be made feasible. This would fully support school operations in the event of another pandemic related disruption.

Stakeholders recognized the progress MoECST has made with the Teacher Learning Institute (TLI), the national school portal and the MoECST website. It was recommended that similar platforms for student learning be developed. To complement the curricular movement toward competency-based education, stakeholders recommended that MoECST develop a website exclusively for learners from various levels, through which users can further engage with curricular content and complete practice activities. The development of apps to support learning was another transformative recommendation. It was also recommended that ebooks be introduced. The development of teacher toolkits to support digital learning was also recommended.

In consideration of ITVETs (KRA 4.1 of the BESPlan 2021-2025), stakeholders recommended that MoECST continue to think about how ITVETs can be rebranded and consider which trainings can be centralized by district to better/more equitably equip ITVETs. This may give these institutions an opportunity for self sustenance. Additionally, it was recommended that equivalence measurements for qualifications received from formal secondary schools, tertiary schools and TVETS be made available so that trainees are given equal opportunities within the employment market.

### **3. Review of national education targets and benchmarks**

Belize established national education targets and benchmarks for the period 2021-2025 with the goal of moving closer to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Targets focus on increased access to all levels of education, from preschool to university; reduced gender, rural/urban and socioeconomic inequities; improved quality of education at all levels of the system; and alignment of the system of education to national development needs. Stakeholders were asked to review the country's current targets and strategies. They were also asked to comment on progress to date, to identify existing obstacles and challenges, and to make recommendations for strengthening policy directions.

Participants at the national consultations noted that progress was being made in several areas. These include increasing access to teacher professional development, efforts to develop a

competency-based national curriculum framework and learning outcomes, expansion of socio-emotional learning at the secondary education level, increased support for students with special needs, and improved collaboration with social service agencies. They also highlighted areas where much more progress is needed, such as the need to establish policies to ensure accommodation of children with special needs, the need to improve school infrastructure, increasing the quality and relevance of skills training, reforming the teacher appraisal system, and ensuring better psychosocial support for students.

The major obstacles identified were financial limitations, lack of capacity, particularly in key areas such as counselling and teacher training, unsupportive cultural practices, fragmentation of the education system, poor quality of school leadership and administration, and limited networking and collaboration with the private sector. Stakeholders recommended that greater focus be placed on catering to students' needs and interests, especially that of boys, the implementation of free education, better engagement of teachers, parents and the public in decision making, the establishment of required standards and regulations, and greater accountability from teachers and school leaders.

Children, adolescents and young adults were asked to highlight their own priority areas for improvement. Their responses focused on the need for improved facilities, resources and services for students with special needs, a better learning environment with greater psychosocial support for students and improved student-teacher relationships, and changes to the content and delivery of the curriculum, including the integration of technology, areas such as arts and agriculture, and more hands-on learning. Young people are also looking forward to a system where there is increased equity in access to resources and more opportunities to interact with their peers and to voice their concern to the country's leaders.

#### **4. Ensuring sustainable public financing**

Children, adolescents and young adults who participated in the stakeholder sessions were particularly vocal on the urgent need to remove low socio-economic status as a barrier to participation in education. They called for free education to be implemented, for increased support in the areas of transportation, uniforms, books, school supplies and feeding programs and for scholarships and subsidy programs to be designed and distributed in ways that allow for equitable access. A major precursor for achieving this transformation is sustainable public financing.

One of the key policy objectives of Belize's Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology for the 2021-2025 period is to align the Ministry's financial resources and mechanisms with targets for improved performance, expanded access, and increased equity and accountability. Stakeholders were asked to provide recommendations on how education can be made more affordable and sustainable and how to ensure a more equitable distribution of public

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resources. Their responses supported the Ministry's policy objective. The call was for more targeted and needs-based financing for students, as well as for schools, and for greater incentives to be provided in areas of national priority. Stakeholders believe that such a change will require increased collection and use of data, monitoring and evaluation and accountability. They also highlighted the need for other sources of financing to supplement and complement public financing. Suggestions focused on strengthening private sector partnerships to encourage engagement and investments in education and introducing low-interest student loan facilities.