



Belize's National Statement of Commitment for the Transforming Education Summit

Honorable Francis Fonseca
Minister of Education, Culture, Science and Technology

The preparatory documents for the Summit outline the growing crisis in education – the issues of equity and inclusion, quality and relevance – are precise for a country like Belize, strategically positioned between Central America and the Caribbean, where 100% of children between school going ages have missed out on over 5000 hours of face-to-face learning during the pandemic. In this context, and based on consultations and dialogue with stakeholders at all levels, the Government of Belize reaffirms its commitment to the following priorities:

1. Recovery from COVID-19 disruption:

Fully costed implementation of the Belize Education Sector Plan 2021-2025 which serves as a compass through the uncharted waters of Covid-19 learning recovery. The national consultations highlighted the effects of the pandemic on mental health and wellness, therefore, within the school system, there will be a focus on psychosocial health and well-being of students and teachers, on access to nutrition and on the protection of all children. Belize commits to the National Healthy Start Feeding Program launched to provide breakfast to the most vulnerable primary school students in all the 6 districts of Belize.

Reimagining Education, ensuring a human rights-based approach to inclusive, relevant early learning opportunities, through to primary and secondary education for lifelong learning skills. The education programme will make use of innovative approaches to reverse the effects of COVID-19 by strengthening distance and online learning, whilst supporting creative opportunities to fast-track learning opportunities for those children left behind, who are now at heightened risk to abuse, exploitation and violence.

Implementation of a new learning recovery programme called: “Let’s Catch Up” which focused on foundational literacy and numeracy for all students aged 5 to 9. This learning mitigation loss programme will also impact on the social well-being of the most vulnerable children, including rural, migrant and learners at the lower levels and in transitional grades.

Implementation of the Education Upliftment Project, supporting 100% of vulnerable students in the most violent communities in Belize City, where there is heightened risk of exposure to gang recruitment and drug crime.

Transforming Education: We commit to

Providing more varied and continuous professional development opportunities and relevant training for teachers and has therefore developed and launched the Teacher Learning Institute as a virtual hub in 2021.

Digital transformation in education with the national ConnectED programme launched this year, and with the partnership of UNICEF and other key stakeholders for GIGA to provide digital devices for

all students from primary through to secondary school, and to expand the internet infrastructure to ensure that all schools will have adequate access to internet across their campuses. By 2025, digital learning can be achieved by all children in Belize.

Curriculum reform with the launch of the new National Curriculum Framework 2022. Competency-based education will positively shift teaching methodologies and ensure authentic transferable skill applications for increased employability and entrepreneurship for all children and adolescents. In Belize, we have committed the Think Equal programme, embedded within the national early childhood curriculum framework which will provide children with the psychosocial support needed to be able to catch up on the procedural cognitive learning. This reform is intended to strengthen the core of the education system with a clear link to value based lessons, so Think Equal's structured curriculum of peace building, social and emotional intelligence for the early years will be an ideal complement.

2. Ensuring sustainable public financing: We commit to

Safeguarding social spending and increasing targeted capital investments in human capital. Our children must be made a priority and we emphasize the long-term benefits of investing in children on economic development and poverty alleviation: the positive impact of investment in human capital during the early stages of life has been globally agreed and evidenced. As an example, Belize has committed to the increased investment in Early Childhood Development with the technical assistance of key partners such as UNICEF, Mission 4.7, and Think Equal, Public financing for children is demonstrated through the Government's legislation of mandatory secondary school access for all children in Belize. In 2022, Belize extended the mandatory age of school attendance from 14 to 16. The Government of Belize has also committed to the development of an ECD policy and improvement of infrastructure for the expansion and access to ECD services for all children 0-8.

Strengthening the commitment of public finances and increased investment, in partnership with industries and the private sector to increase sustainable programs in education.

Moving forward, the Government of Belize remains focused on continuing to engage with its partners and stakeholders to ensure relevance and efficiency in the system of education, shaping students who will contribute positively to sustainable national growth and development.