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CAPRI

EDUCATION SCORECARD 2025

Assessing the Present, Guiding the Future

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CARIBBEAN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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EDUCATION REPORT CARD 2025:

Assessing the Present, Guiding the Future

SEPTEMBER 2025

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ACRONYMS

BOOST Initiative Building Out Our Science Teachers Initiative

CAPE Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination

CAPRI Caribbean Policy Research Institute

CARICOM Caribbean Community

CIT Curriculum Implementation Team

COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease 2019

CSEC Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate

CXC Caribbean Examinations Council

CWD Children with Disabilities

DUP Differential Unit Plan

EEIS Education Expenditure Information System

EMIS Education Management Information Systems

ESP Education Sector Plan

ETOC Education Transformation Oversight Committee

ETP External Training Providers

EWSSS Early Warning Student Support System

GDP Gross Domestic Product

GOILP Grade One Individual Learning Profile

GSAT Grade Six Achievement Test

HEART/NSTA Trust Human Employment and Resource Training/ National Service Training Agency Trust

IAD Inter-American Development Bank

IGDS Institute of Gender and Development Studies

JSLC Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions

JSRA Jamaica School Readiness Assessment

JTA Jamaica Teacher's Association

JTC Jamaica Teaching Council

JTEC Jamaica Tertiary Education Commission

LAYS Learning Adjusted Years of Schooling

MDGs Millennium Development Goals

MOE Ministry of Education, Youth, Skills and Information

NCE National Council on Education

NCEL National College for Educational Leadership

NEI National Education Inspectorate

NESP National Education Sector Plan

NPTAJ National Parent Teacher Association of Jamaica

NQF-J National Qualifications Framework of Jamaica

NSC National Standards Curriculum

NSCC National Secondary Students Council

NSLIP National School Learning and Intervention Plan

NUYP National Unattached Youth Programme

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PATH Programme of Advancement Through Health and Education

PEP Primary Exit Profile

PIOJ Planning Institute of Jamaica

PISA Programme for International Student Assessment

PCRI Postgraduate Centre for Research & Intelligence

PTA Parent Teacher Association

SEU Special Education Unit

SFPP Sixth Form Pathways Programme

SNED Sistema Nacional de Evaluación del Desempeño (National System to Evaluate School Performance)

STATIN Statistical Institute of Jamaica

TTI Talent Transfer Initiative

UCC University of the Commonwealth Caribbean

UIS UNESCO Institute for Statistics

UCJ University Council of Jamaica

UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Utech University of Technology

UWI, Mona University of the West Indies, Mona

MISSION

In 2000, the six Education for All goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expressed international agreement regarding the role of education in improving the lives of all people. In 2015, this consensus was further endorsed within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

However, despite the principles of sustainable development, and the existing consensus regarding the importance of education in supporting economic growth and participatory democracies, education in the Caribbean and Latin American region has not always been a top priority for many of the region's political and economic agendas.

The Education Report Cards present a common framework that defines and monitors key elements of the education system, with the aim of influencing and promoting informed debate on the state of education, public education policies, and their proper implementation.

Recognizing the diversity of the region, its people and its countries, the reports seek to foster an inclusive discussion among national and international stakeholders on how to strengthen education and make recommendations for next steps.

Specifically, the reports aim to:

Establish education policy as a priority on the public agenda, broadening its coverage to include issues beyond the traditional emphasis on teacher salaries and training.

Promote informed debate and seek consensus among stakeholders on ways to improve teaching and learning through better education policies.

Strengthen and support civil society efforts to improve the design and implementation of education policy and, in this way, contribute to improving the quality of education.

The 2025 Jamaica Education Report Card joins the previous report card published in 2012 and made possible thanks to the PREAL/CAPRI partnership, and in this instance through the technical assistance of the Inter-American Dialogue, the research team of the PCRI, and financial support from the honourable Earl Jarrett OJ, CD, JP, Hon. LL.D.

These reports are created with the aim of enriching national educational analysis and promoting the most effective decision-making for the education of every country.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This 2025 Jamaica Education Report Card was produced by the Caribbean Policy Research Institute (CAPRI) with technical assistance from the Inter-American Dialogue in Washington, D.C., the Postgraduate Centre for Research & Intelligence (PCRI), and financial support from the honourable Earl Jarrett OJ, CD, JP, Hon. LL.D and CAPRI.

The 2025 Jamaica Education Report Card includes pre-primary, primary, secondary and higher education levels in the analysis. It is the result of an extensive review of national and international studies, reports, and statistical data, as well as interviews with officials and consultants from the MOE, as well as from experts in the field of educational development. It should also be noted that data from the MOE, Statistical Institute of Jamaica (STATIN), Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ), the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the World Bank Group was a critical source of information for the report authors.

For its preparation, the research team comprises of Aaron Hoilett (PCRI Director), Peter Granston (CAPRI Research Associate), Fitz-Ali Nelson (PCRI Public Policy Research Officer), Aimee Olaiya (PCRI Economics and Statistics Research Officer), and Everica Walker (PCRI Senior Economics and Statistics Research Officer), with the technical assistance of Sarah Stanton from the Inter-American Dialogue, and the invaluable contribution of an Advisory Council composed of representatives from the education sector. To all of them, and to those who contributed to enriching this report, we express our deepest gratitude. We hope that the 2025 Jamaica Education Report Card will serve as a reference for decision-makers at the highest levels and guide them in coordinating actions among all sectors and actors in society that will result in a decent, quality education for all children as a means of providing them with opportunities for a better future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: A REPORT CARD ON EDUCATION IN JAMAICA, 2025

The 2025 Jamaica Education Report Card evaluates the performance of the education system across eight dimensions: learning outcomes, coverage, staying in school, equity, standards and evaluation, school authority and accountability, the teaching profession, and financing. The grades awarded in this report reveal a mixed picture.

Standards and evaluation systems have improved, resulting in an A grade, but can be further strengthened by better monitoring and quality assurance processes. The National Standards Curriculum (NSC) provides a framework across four core areas, but implementation is constrained by limited resources and capacity. Standardised assessments exist for grades 1–6, with PEP exposing learning gaps that were obscured under GSAT. At the upper secondary level, curricula align with regional standards, and sixth form provides more diverse learning pathways. Standardised frameworks for students with disabilities are absent, and while Jamaica's participation in international assessments is limited, it is beginning to expand.

School authority and accountability for results received an A grade, since processes for stakeholder engagement are clearly established, and schools have autonomy; but accountability mechanisms for school boards need improvement. School boards often lack the capacity to provide effective oversight, limiting operational autonomy. While formal associations and mandatory membership encourage stakeholder participation, engagement is limited. The Ministry and its agencies provide technical oversight, but sometimes with limited impact.

Equity gaps are narrowing; Jamaican learners from low-income quintiles, rural areas and with disabilities have experienced a decline, resulting in a B grade. Educational attendance is nearly universal across socioeconomic groups, and the urban–rural gap has narrowed, though disparities remain in learning outcomes. Gender parity in attainment has been sustained, but poorer Jamaicans are falling further behind in years of schooling. Household income continues to shape digital access, while children with disabilities encounter barriers in both access and achievement.

Financing presents inefficiencies that still exist in how public monies are allocated and expended within the education sector, resulting in a B grade. Education financing in Jamaica meets international benchmarks, but resource allocation limits impact. Pre-primary education remains underfunded despite its foundational importance, while public subsidies at the tertiary level largely benefit higher-income households. Most spending goes to staff compensation, leaving limited room for infrastructure investment, even as urban schools face overcrowding. The current funding model is inefficient, tends to reinforce disparities between schools, and needs reformation.

Coverage receives a C grade, reflecting declines in the post-pandemic years, especially as secondary schools fail to reach all students. The chapter reveals enrolment patterns with mixed progress across levels of education. Pre-primary enrolment declined during COVID-19 but has since recovered. Primary education is approaching universal access, though discrepancies in data sources remain. At the secondary level, enrolment drops sharply at the upper level, leaving roughly one in five children out of school. At the tertiary level, access remains limited, with eight in ten Jamaicans aged 19–24 not enrolled. Overall, while aggregated enrolment figures appear strong, gaps are present, calling for targeted policies to close these coverage shortfalls.

The teaching profession received a grade of C, due to the critical challenges pertaining to compensation and recruitment training. While standards align with the NSC, weak oversight of teacher preparation and accreditation gaps in training institutions undermine instructional quality. Evaluation systems exist but lack enforcement, and recruitment strategies do not include a merit-based framework. Low compensation continues to drive attrition, weakening education quality and fuelling discontent in the sector.

Staying in school shows that completion rates remain weak across the system, resulting in a D grade. At the primary level, only eight in ten students receive a completion certificate. Lower secondary completion is

declining, while upper secondary completion showed relatively high levels in 2022, though certification rates remain low and data is limited. Among adults of prime working age, half have no formal certification. Absenteeism continues to drive dropout, particularly among boys and poorer students.

Learning outcomes show performance in most subject areas is stable or increasing, but results in Mathematics and Science subjects have been consistently low, earning a grade of D. There are modest gains but continued weakness in Jamaican learners' core numeracy and literacy: the Primary Exit Profile assessments reveal a slight shift toward "Proficient" in Mathematics and Science, yet most students still finish primary school without foundational skills. CSEC results mirror this pattern, with pass rates below 50 percent in Mathematics and Science, while Business and Technical subjects exceed 70-80 percent, and only about 18 percent of candidates meet the five-subject benchmark for tertiary entry. Internationally, Jamaica lags behind other countries in international assessments, with a pronounced urban-rural divide. The report links these outcomes to low early-stage readiness (one-third of pre-primary children below standards), uneven rollout of the National Standards Curriculum, and insufficient remediation resources.

To begin addressing these issues, the report identifies five urgent reforms. First, Jamaica should adopt a weighted school financing formula that allocates resources based on student needs rather than headcount. Second, an early warning student support system should be established to track absenteeism and dropouts in real time, linking vulnerable students with social services. Third, early childhood education must be expanded and fully upgraded, securing the foundation for all educational outcomes. Fourth, a programme should be established to attract and retain skilled teachers in underperforming schools, incentivising service where learning gaps are greatest. Fifth, an Educational Achievement and Equity Dashboard should be developed as a tool to bring together student performance data and equity indicators into a single, accessible platform for policymakers, educators, and the public.

With these recommendations, Jamaica can move towards a system that provides equitable, high-quality education at all levels and a future in which all Jamaican children can thrive.

EDUCATION REPORT CARD SCORES: JAMAICA, 2025			
SUBJECT	**GRADE**	**TREND**	**COMMENTS**
Standards and Evaluation System	A	↑	Jamaica's learning standards have improved, but can be further strengthened by better monitoring and quality assurance ensuring compliance.
School authority and accountability for results	A	↔	Mechanisms for stakeholder engagement are clearly established, and schools have autonomy, but accountability mechanisms for school boards need improvement.
Equity	B	↓	Although some gaps in equity have been narrowing, Jamaicans from low-income quintiles, rural areas and with disabilities have experienced declines in equity.
Financing	B	↔	Inefficiencies still exist in how public monies are allocated and expended within the education sector.
Coverage	C	↑	Enrolment at most education levels has been high but fluctuant, except for a persistent decline at the tertiary level.
Teaching Profession	C	↔	The teaching profession still faces critical challenges pertaining to compensation, recruitment and training.
Staying in School	D	↓	Completion rates have been declining, especially at the lower secondary level.
Learning Outcomes	D	↑	Performance in most subject areas is stable or increasing, but results in Mathematics and Science subjects have been consistently low.

GRADE	
A	EXCELLENT
B	GOOD
C	AVERAGE
D	UNSATISFACTORY
F	VERY POOR

TREND	
↑	IMPROVING
↔	NO OBSERVABLE CHANGE
↓	DECLINING

INTRODUCTION

The Jamaica Education Report Card examines the performance of Jamaica's education system across eight key dimensions: learning outcomes, coverage, staying in school, equity, school authority and accountability for results, financing, teaching profession, and standards and evaluation systems. These domains reflect the core principles of access, quality, and equity—each essential to ensuring that all Jamaican learners can participate in, progress through, and benefit from education.

While notable progress has been made in areas such as pre-primary enrolment and gender parity in attainment, the Report Card highlights persistent disparities by income, geography, and disability status. Reforms under the National Standards Curriculum (NSC) signal a shift toward learner-centred instruction, yet gaps in teacher preparation, resource provision, and quality assurance hinder effective implementation. Meanwhile, expenditure in the education sector, while robust, is inefficient, neglecting the developmental needs at the pre-primary level.

Ultimately, the Report Card serves as a diagnostic tool to inform policy reform and guide action. By identifying systemic gaps and opportunities across these eight dimensions, it provides a roadmap for strengthening education delivery and ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has access to meaningful learning opportunities.

LEARNING OUTCOMES D↑

PERFORMANCE IN A MAJORITY OF SUBJECT AREAS ARE STABLE OR INCREASING, BUT RESULTS IN MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE SUBJECTS HAVE BEEN CONSISTENTLY LOW.

This report considers learning outcomes to be the knowledge, skills, values and competencies students acquire from education. This assessment of learning outcomes asks whether children are acquiring the knowledge and skills needed for adulthood, and whether schools are effectively providing that foundation. These outcomes are determined by performance in standardised tests and examinations. Evidence from national, regional, and international assessments that measure students' attainment of minimum proficiency in key learning areas will be used to answer these questions.

Under this chapter, assessment results show that Jamaican students are inconsistently mastering the knowledge and skills required at each stage of schooling. At the early levels, literacy rates have improved, but numeracy remains weak. By the end of primary education, Mathematics and Science outcomes fall short of national targets and international benchmarks.

At the secondary level, pass rates in Mathematics and Science remain low, while Business and Technical/ Vocational subjects record higher results. Only a small proportion of students meet the grades required for tertiary entry, and performance has declined since 2023. International comparisons confirm these patterns. In the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Jamaican students scored below global averages in Mathematics, Science, and Reading.[1]

These results show that many students advance through the system without achieving minimum proficiency in core subjects.

Low School Readiness persists among Jamaican Pre-Primary Students

At the pre-primary level, the MOE utilizes the diagnostic tool, the Jamaica School Readiness Assessment (JSRA) to evaluate the preparedness of pre-primary students for entry into primary education.[2] It assesses core developmental and learning competencies and identifies students who require additional support to make a successful transition.

In 2022, the JSRA found that nearly one-third, 10,018 out of 27,179, pre-primary students assessed did not meet the minimum standard and required either increased monitoring in class or a referral to second-level screening.[3] This could mean that, for a substantial proportion of children entering primary school, foundational language, cognition, and socio-emotional skills have not been attained resulting in entry to the primary level without fully developed foundational competencies.

These early deficits matter because they may persist and compound into children who start behind in key areas like vocabulary, problem-solving, or self-regulation. This can result in a struggle to catch up without targeted intervention. An intervention does exist, in the form of the National School Learning and Intervention Plan (NSLIP), which aims to shape quality early-childhood environments and provide timely support services.[4] But early childhood outcomes are yet to be seen.

PEP performance has improved since 2022, but students are still leaving this stage without the foundational skills needed for success in secondary school and adulthood

The Primary Exit Profile (PEP) is Jamaica's national assessment used to gauge students' mastery of the knowledge and skills expected by the end of primary school, and it also determines high school placement. Administered from Grade 4 to Grade 6, PEP reports performance in four bands—Beginning, Developing, Proficient, and Highly Proficient—intended to capture levels of competence in core subjects.[5] Students achieving Proficient or Highly Proficient are considered to have reached the minimum satisfactory standard for progression. Between 2022 and 2024, there is notable improvement in Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, but a decrease in Language Arts. [6]

Results show that while more students are reaching Proficient in Mathematics, most remain at the Beginning or Developing levels, meaning many still struggle to acquire foundational numeracy skills. This indicates that students may manage simple recall or basic applications but often have difficulty with problem-solving, reasoning, or applying mathematics to real-life tasks. Given that maths underpins science, technology, and daily life, weak performance at this stage is likely to make secondary school and later learning more difficult.

Science outcomes improved more markedly: by 2023 and 2024, a majority of students (53 percent) were rated Proficient, reflecting stronger grasp of scientific concepts compared to earlier cohorts. Social Studies also showed steady improvement, with most students now demonstrating competence at the Proficient level. In contrast, Language Arts declined over the same period, indicating that many students are leaving primary school without the expected literacy competencies.

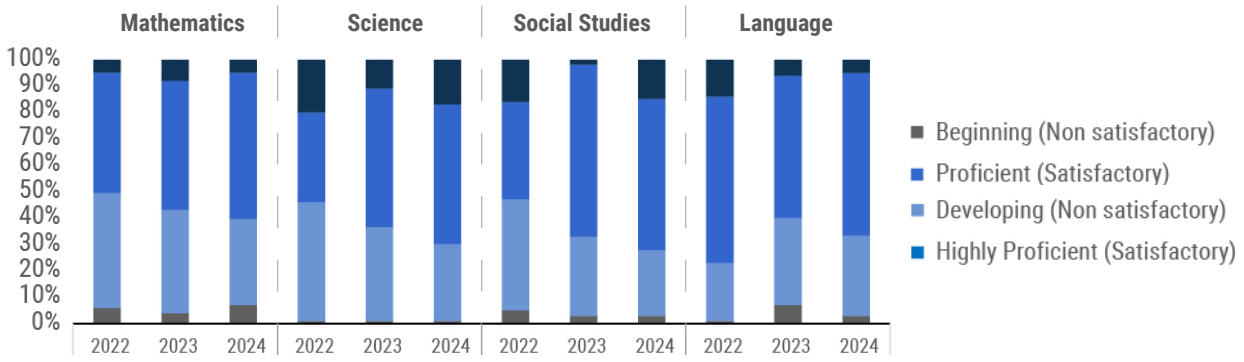
These outcomes highlight uneven progress across subject areas. Students are gaining ground in Science and Social Studies but continue to face challenges in Mathematics and Language Arts—skills that underpin future learning and employment opportunities.

To address these gaps, the MOE has introduced NSLIP at the primary level, which applies targeted remediation to strengthen student learning outcomes. Measures include extended teaching time through summer schools and homework programmes, psychosocial and parental engagement, strict attendance monitoring, digital learning resources, and customised instruction based on assessment data. [7]

DIFFERING PERFORMANCE IS SEEN ACROSS SUBJECT AREAS

FIGURE 1: PEP RESULTS 2022-2024

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (2024)



Science and Mathematics are weak, while Business and Technical Subjects are strong

At the end of secondary school, all students sit the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC), which is the main indicator of whether they have acquired the knowledge and skills needed for tertiary entry and the labour market. Results from 2019 to 2025 reveal clear patterns in student learning outcomes.

Students demonstrate stronger attainment in Business and Technical/Vocational subjects, where pass rates frequently exceed 70–80 percent.[8] These results suggest that many students are leaving secondary school with competencies in applied and work-related areas. By contrast, performance in Mathematics and Science remains consistently weak (with the exception of Biology and Agricultural Science), (with pass rates below 50 percent in most years and no science subject surpassing 80 percent across the period. This indicates that large numbers of students are not acquiring the quantitative reasoning and scientific literacy skills that are fundamental to participation in higher education and many areas of employment.

English Language outcomes are better than Mathematics but still uneven. Pass rates hovered below 80 percent until 2025, when they rose to 85 percent. While this suggests progress in literacy, the fact that English Language has not consistently met high proficiency thresholds points to gaps in communication skills, which are central to both academic progression and workplace readiness.[9]

Overall, only 19.2 percent of students in 2025 passed at least five CSEC subjects including English and Mathematics—the baseline requirement for tertiary entry.[10] This proportion has been stagnant or declining since 2023, meaning that the majority of students complete secondary school without the minimum certification needed to access further education or skilled employment.

These outcomes indicate that while some students are developing technical and vocational competencies, many are not mastering core skills in numeracy, literacy, and scientific reasoning. This limits their ability to progress into tertiary education and constrains the broader workforce's preparedness for modern labour market demands. Existing interventions—such as the Information Communication Technology in Education Policy and the NSLIP—have yet to shift these trends, highlighting the need for a renewed focus on foundational competencies at the secondary level. [11]

Jamaica's PISA results fall below global averages but compare favourably with peer middle-income countries

In 2022, Jamaica participated for the first time in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which measures whether 15-year-olds can apply what they have learned in mathematics, reading, and science to real-world problems.[12] A total of 3,873 students from 147 secondary schools took part.

The results show that Jamaican students are not consistently acquiring the higher-order skills in reasoning, problem-solving, and critical thinking that are essential for adulthood. Most students scored below Level Two proficiency, which means they were generally limited to answering straightforward questions with all information provided, rather than demonstrating the ability to analyse, infer, or apply knowledge to new contexts. Few students reached the highest performance bands, underscoring gaps in advanced competencies.[13]

Although scores were below global averages in all three subject areas, Jamaica performed above the average for many other middle-income countries.[14] This suggests that while students are not yet achieving globally competitive outcomes, the system is performing relatively well compared to peers at a similar level of national income.

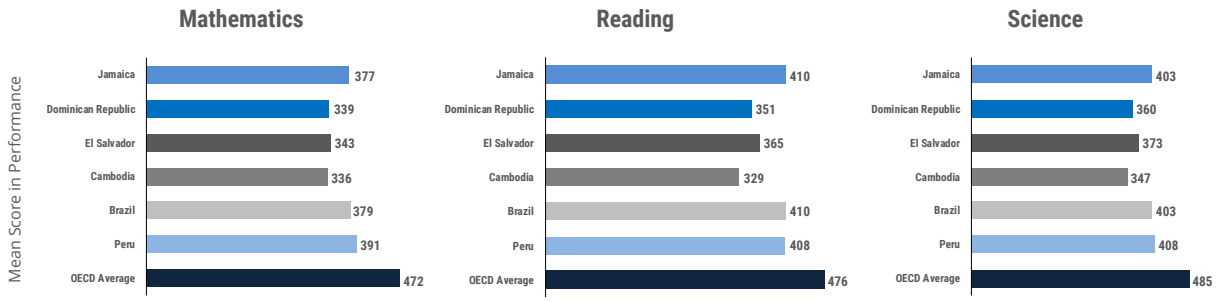
Another noteworthy finding is that socioeconomic background plays a smaller role in shaping achievement in Jamaica than in most OECD countries. The performance gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students was 45 score points, compared to an OECD average of 93.[15] This points to greater equity in access to basic learning, though it also signals that many students, regardless of background, are struggling to progress beyond foundational skills.

Overall, Jamaica's PISA results suggest that while access to schooling is relatively equitable, too many students are leaving secondary education without the reasoning and applied skills needed to thrive in higher education, employment, and civic life. Strengthening instruction in mathematics, science, and literacy, alongside deeper emphasis on problem-solving, can close this gap.

DESPITE AN OVERALL BELOW AVERAGE PERFORMANCE IN PISA, JAMAICAN STUDENTS ARE IN A STRONGER ACADEMIC POSITION COMPARED TO OTHER DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

FIGURE 2: PISA MEAN SCORE IN MATHEMATICS, READING AND SCIENCE WITHIN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES, 2022

SOURCE: OECD (2022)



Rural–urban divides in PISA outcomes

Although enrolment rates between rural and urban students in Jamaica are nearly equal (as discussed in the Equity chapter), PISA results show sharp disparities in learning outcomes. Urban students were far more likely to demonstrate the higher-order competencies in reasoning, literacy, and problem-solving that are essential for adulthood.

In Reading, 8 percent of participating students from urban schools reached the high proficiency bands, demonstrating the ability to interpret complex texts and draw inferences. By contrast, none of the rural students tested achieved this level. A similar pattern was observed in Science and Mathematics: 7 percent and 2 percent of urban students, respectively, scored at the high proficiency levels, while no rural students did. [16]

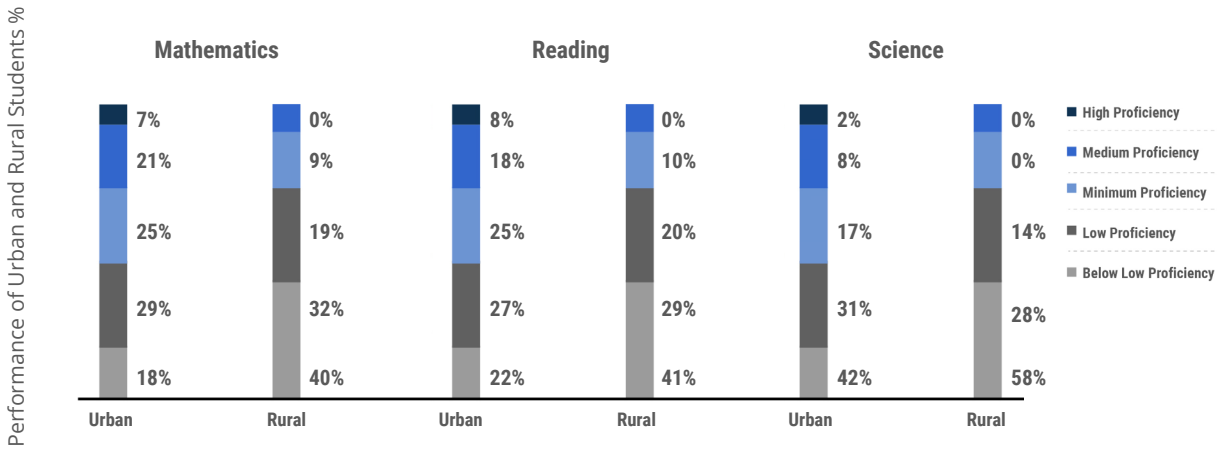
These results show that near-parity in school attendance does not translate into parity in the acquisition of skills. Rural students are not only less likely to reach advanced proficiency but are also disproportionately clustered at lower performance levels. This suggests that while access to education is broadly shared, the quality of learning—and the competencies needed to thrive in higher education and the labour market—remains unevenly distributed.

Results aside, participation itself signals a meaningful commitment to aligning Jamaica's education system with international assessment standards and improving accountability for learning outcomes.

RURAL STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN PISA IS SIGNIFICANTLY LOWER, COMPARE TO THEIR URBAN COUNTERPARTS

FIGURE 3: PERFORMANCE OF URBAN AND RURAL STUDENTS IN 2022 PISA EXAMINATIONS

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (2024)



COVERAGE C ↑

ENROLMENT AT MOST EDUCATION LEVELS HAVE BEEN HIGH BUT FLUCTUANT, EXCEPT FOR A PERSISTENT DECLINE AT THE TERTIARY LEVEL.

Coverage refers to the proportion of the eligible population that is actually enrolled in education at each level. It is a core measure of whether the system is reaching the children and young people it is designed to serve. High coverage indicates that students are at least present in school and have the opportunity to learn; low coverage highlights points in the system where children are excluded altogether, and therefore cannot acquire the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed for adulthood.

Tracking coverage across levels also helps identify where participation falters—whether at entry, during transitions, or before completion—and which groups are most affected. In Jamaica, coverage has generally been high at the primary and lower secondary levels, but gaps remain at both the pre-primary and tertiary levels. These disparities are especially relevant to rural and low-income households, where enrolment barriers are more pronounced.

This chapter reviews coverage trends over the past decade, identifies where participation is lowest, and examines factors that have influenced enrolment. It focuses in particular on pre-primary and tertiary education, where coverage remains below national and international benchmarks, and on disparities affecting vulnerable groups.[17]

Pre-primary enrolment fell since COVID-19 but has rebounded in tandem with policy efforts

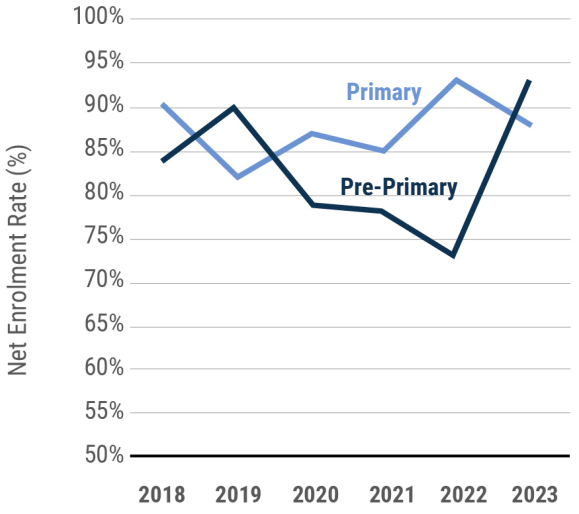
Between 2014 and 2024, Jamaica's net pre-primary enrolment rate generally ranged from 77 percent to 88 percent, peaking at 90 percent in 2019. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 caused a decline of 11 percent, to the lowest point in the past decade. [18] This drop mirrored a global pattern whereby pre-primary education was disrupted because of the pandemic, and many countries recorded falls in enrolment at this level.

By 2023, Jamaica's pre-primary enrolment had rebounded by 10 percent. This recovery coincided with and may have been the outcome of government measures to mitigate pandemic-related disruption and its impacts.

PRE-PRIMARY ENROLMENT SHOWS SIGNS OF RECOVERY POST-PANDEMIC, WHILE PRIMARY ENROLMENT REMAINS HIGH AND STABLE

FIGURE 4: JAMAICA'S PRE-PRIMARY AND PRIMARY SCHOOL NET ENROLMENT RATE, 2018-2023

SOURCE: UNESCO INSTITUTE FOR STATISTICS (2025)



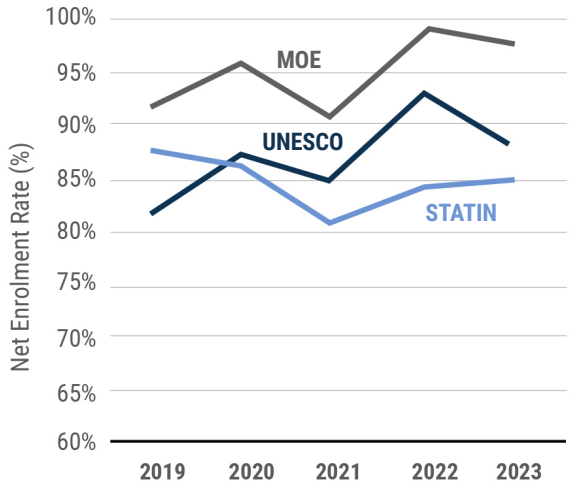
Net primary enrolment moves closer to near-universal access but with discrepancies across data sources

While net primary enrolment in Jamaica approaches near-universal coverage, there are notable discrepancies across data sources. The MOE reports figures closest to universal coverage, with net enrolment at 99 percent in 2022 and 98 percent in 2023.[19] By contrast, estimates from STATIN and UIS are notably lower.[20] This divergence reflects differences in the population estimates used to calculate enrolment rates, a gap only reinforced by the absence of updated census data since 2011. With the 2021 census results not yet fully incorporated into official reporting, agencies must rely on varying population models to calculate their rates.

DISCREPANCIES ACROSS DATA SOURCES RAISE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ACCURACY OF NET PRIMARY ENROLMENT REPORTING

FIGURE 5: PRIMARY SCHOOL NET ENROLMENT RATE ACROSS DIFFERENT SOURCES, 2019-2023

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SKILLS, YOUTH AND INFORMATION (2025)
STATISTICAL INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA (2024)
UNESCO INSTITUTE FOR STATISTICS (2025)



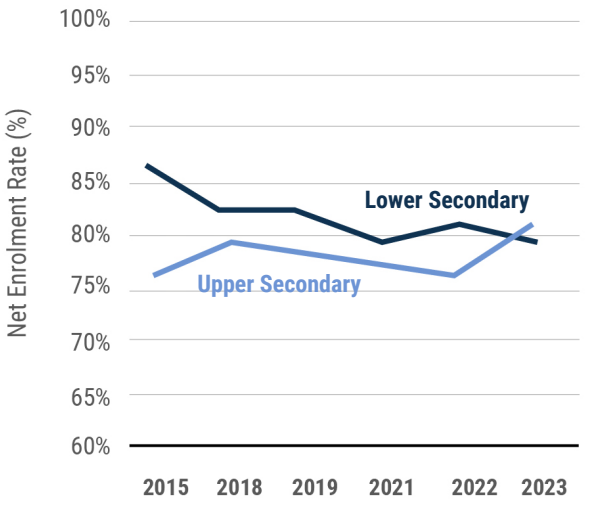
Net enrolment at the upper secondary level is consistently below that of lower secondary, leaving about one in five secondary-aged children out of school

In Jamaica, net enrolment declines as students move up the education system, with both lower and upper secondary rates below the primary level. Between 2015 and 2022, about one in five secondary-aged children were not enrolled in school, and upper secondary enrolment was consistently lower than lower secondary, suggesting that many students did not progress beyond the lower level.[21] In 2023, however, upper secondary enrolment exceeded lower secondary for the first time in years, a shift that may reflect the impact of the Government's Sixth Form Pathways Programme, introduced in 2022 to expand certification options and encourage students to remain in school. [22]

ENROLMENT RATES DECLINE DURING PROGRESSION OF EDUCATION LEVELS, WITH UPPER SECONDARY CONSISTENTLY LAGGING BEHIND LOWER SECONDARY UNTIL 2023

FIGURE 6: LOWER AND UPPER SECONDARY NET ENROLMENT, 2015-2023

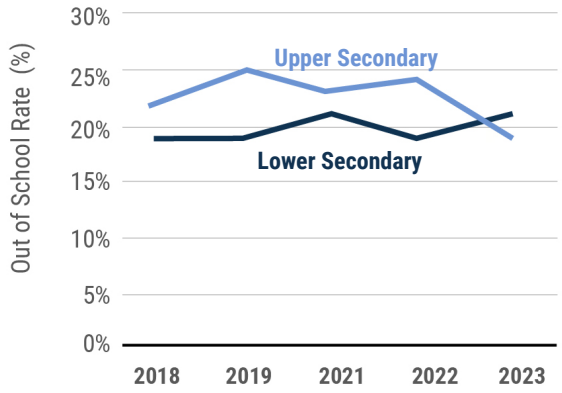
SOURCE: UNESCO INSTITUTE FOR STATISTICS (2025)



APPROXIMATELY ONE IN FIVE SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN ARE NOT ENROLLED IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

FIGURE 7: UPPER AND LOWER SECONDARY OUT OF SCHOOL RATE, 2018-2023

SOURCE: UNESCO INSTITUTE FOR STATISTICS (2025)



Education policies have reduced financial barriers to primary and secondary education but have not adequately addressed non-financial factors affecting enrolment

Policies aimed at reducing financial barriers to attendance and enrolment, such as the Programme of Advancement Through Health and Education (PATH), and the non-mandatory payment of school fees policy, have contributed to higher enrolment by eliminating direct costs for primary and secondary education.[23] However, PATH is being accessed by fewer Jamaicans from the lowest income quintile, and this may be due to a lack of access or awareness of PATH, which can result in financial constraints still being an impediment to enrolment.[24] Further, these financial aid policies and programmes do not address non-financial barriers that continue to keep some children out of school.

One of the main barriers to enrolment at the primary and secondary level not directly related to financial impediments is a lack of safe transportation, especially in rural communities.[25] In response, the Jamaican government has moved to implement a rural bus system to be launched at the beginning of the new academic year in September 2025. Another barrier is the frequency of children living in inadequate social conditions wherein they are not with a responsible parent or guardian; this is also associated with a prevalence of child labour.[26] This inhibits children from benefiting from PATH benefits because a parent or guardian is required to initiate the application process for PATH. Although child labour is partially related to financial impediments, the major causes are also related to dysfunctional social backgrounds.

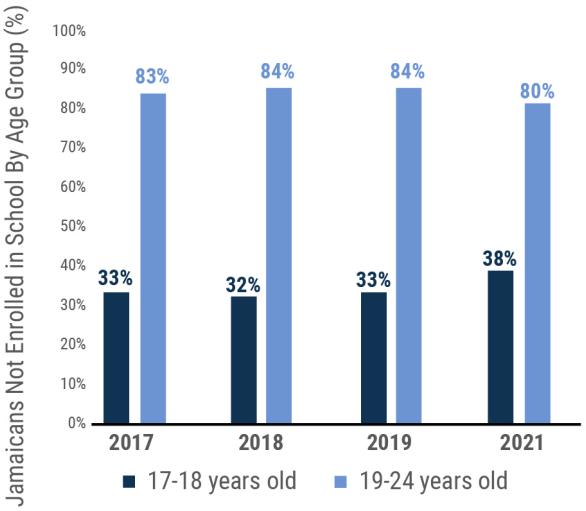
Eight out of every ten Jamaicans aged 19–24 is not enrolled in tertiary education

Most Jamaicans do not progress to tertiary study after secondary school. In 2021, only 20 percent of 19 to 24-year-olds (the typical university-entry age after sixth form) were enrolled in education; meaning 80 percent were not, down from 84 percent in 2017 and 2019.[27] Among 17 to 18-year-olds (typical sixth-form age), non-enrolment rose from 32 percent in 2017 to 38 percent in 2021. Whether this reflects pandemic effects, delayed progression, financial or social barriers, or alternative life choices is unclear.

A LARGE SHARE OF YOUTH, ESPECIALLY THOSE AGED 19 TO 24, ARE NOT ENGAGED IN FORMAL EDUCATION

FIGURE 8: PERCENTAGE OF JAMAICANS NOT ENROLLED IN SCHOOL BY AGE GROUP, 2017-2021

SOURCE: PLANNING INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA (2021)



SFPP has improved access to tertiary education, but limited data hinders tracking its impact on enrolment

In 2021, Jamaica's gross tertiary enrolment rate was 29 percent, four points lower than in 2015, and well below the international average of 40 percent. [28] Since then, the government has introduced measures to expand access to tertiary education, most notably the Sixth Form Pathways Programme (SFPP) launched in 2022.

SFPP targets students unable to matriculate into tertiary institutions because they lacked post-secondary qualifications, particularly Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) certifications.[29] It provides these students with the opportunity to join CAPE programmes and sit the examinations while also allowing alternative pathways outside of CAPE. Alongside this programme, an update to the National Qualifications Framework of Jamaica (NQF-J) now recognises additional post-secondary pathways as valid qualifications for tertiary entry. Together, these changes have significantly widened formal access to tertiary education.

However, increased access does not necessarily equate to increased enrolment. Measuring the SFPP's impact is difficult because gross tertiary enrolment data are scarce, inconsistently calculated, and last recently compiled before the policy took effect. Without updated figures, it is not yet possible to determine whether the programme has led to more students entering tertiary institutions.

The MOE also offers various forms of financial aid, such as scholarships, grants, and loans, but uptake is limited due to barriers such as scholarship and grant bonding requirements, the obligation to begin loan repayment six months after graduation, and low awareness of available programmes. [30]

Enrolment patterns also reflect a gender disparity: in 2019, twice as many women as men were enrolled in tertiary institutions. [31] Male students are often more drawn to practical, vocational subjects that may not require tertiary study, and before SFPP, most sixth form programmes did not accommodate vocational tracks. The SFPP now offers such options, which may help reduce gender imbalances over time. Without new and reliable post-2022 data, however, any assessment of SFPP's effect on tertiary enrolment remains speculative.

BOX 1: COVERAGE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Coverage is usually measured through enrolment rates, but during the COVID-19 pandemic, whether students were enrolled said little about whether they could actually participate in learning. Two additional indicators—access to devices and connectivity and school days lost—are therefore useful to understand how coverage was affected.

Access to devices and connectivity
In 2021, only about half of Jamaica's primary and secondary schools had internet access, limiting the reach of online learning. 29 At the household level, access to suitable devices varied sharply by income and location. Among the poorest households, just 36 percent had a laptop, but 89 percent had a tablet; in rural areas, 53 percent had a laptop, and 80 percent had a tablet. 30 While tablets were more widely available, they were often less effective for schoolwork because they could not run certain applications or software. This reliance on less capable devices meant that many low-income and rural students were at a disadvantage in keeping up with lessons.

School days lost
From March 2020 to March 2022, Jamaica's schools were closed for in-person learning, resulting in the loss of roughly one-third of instructional time over two academic years. This disruption was within the global average, but its effects were not evenly felt. 31 Students from low-income households—those least likely to have access to devices and reliable internet—were disproportionately affected, widening existing inequalities in participation.

Taken together, these indicators show that during the pandemic, enrolment alone overstated actual educational coverage. Many students were formally enrolled but effectively excluded from meaningful learning opportunities.

STAYING IN SCHOOL

COMPLETION RATES HAVE BEEN DECLINING, ESPECIALLY AT THE LOWER SECONDARY LEVEL.

When assessing whether Jamaican children stay in school, two questions arise: do they complete schooling at least through the end of high school, and do they finish with the qualifications needed for further study or work? Completion and graduation rates provide the first measure, while certification pass rates offer the second.[32]

The fact that pass rates are consistently lower than completion rates suggests that many students leave school without acquiring credentials. Primary school completion rates have been declining since 2020, and lower secondary completion rates have declined since 2016. By contrast, upper secondary completion has remained relatively high.

Poverty is thought to contribute to early school leaving. PATH has helped reduce this trend by supporting attendance, though a recent drop in applications among qualifying students may indicate new barriers to access.

The SFPP aims to encourage more students to progress to sixth form by, expanding their range of academic and vocational routes leading to recognised qualifications with the goal of improving students' chances of securing the certifications needed for tertiary education or skilled employment. Even so, across the system, certification pass rates remain lower than completion rates.

In both PEP and CSEC, relatively few students achieve the minimum pass standard. As a result, even with students completing primary or secondary school, many leave without the qualifications needed for higher education, vocational training, or well-paid work, thereby limiting the skill level and future opportunities of those entering the labour force at prime working age.

Only eight in ten primary school students receive their completion certificate

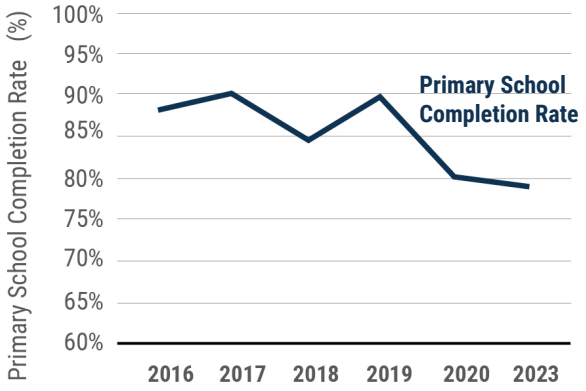
In 2023, Jamaica's primary school completion rate was 79 percent—11 percent lower than in 2017 and below international standards.[33] This means that while nearly all Jamaican children begin primary school, fewer than eight in ten complete it. The pandemic contributed to this decline: in 2020, the completion rate fell to 80 percent, a drop of 10 percentage points compared to 2019.

Completion, however, does not always translate into certification. In 2023, only 60 percent of students passed the PEP examinations. In practice, this means that just six in ten primary school leavers graduated with the credential signalling mastery of the curriculum.[34]

COMPLETION RATES HAVE DROPPED SIGNIFICANTLY, POINTING TO BARRIERS IN STUDENTS' ABILITY TO FINISH PRIMARY EDUCATION

FIGURE 9: PRIMARY SCHOOL COMPLETION RATE, 2016-2023

SOURCE: THE WORLD BANK GROUP (2023)

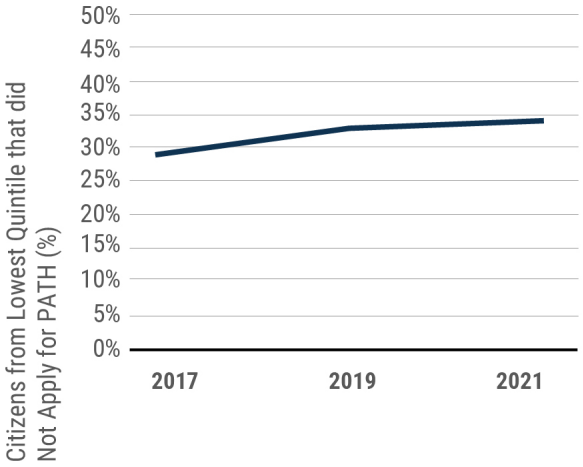


Multiple factors likely contribute to Jamaica's primary school completion rate, one of which is the reach of PATH.[35] This programme provides financial support to low-income students, conditional on maintaining at least 85 percent attendance.[36] Despite PATH's significant benefits, around a third of the poorest households do not participate in the programme. In 2019, 29 percent of Jamaicans in the lowest income quintile had not applied for PATH, and by 2021 even fewer applied (34 percent).[37] This can be a possible reason for not only declining completion rates but also declining enrolment rates.

A GROWING NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS ARE NOT ACCESSING PATH, LIMITING ITS INTENDED IMPACT

FIGURE 10: PERCENTAGE OF CITIZENS FROM LOWEST QUINTILE THAT DID NOT APPLY FOR PATH

SOURCE: PLANNING INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA (2021)
PLANNING INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA (2019)
PLANNING INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA (2017)



Lower secondary completion is declining, while upper secondary completion was relatively high in 2022, though data is limited and certification rates remain low

In 2022, Jamaica's upper secondary school completion rate was relatively high at 87 percent, with female and male rates at 89 percent and 83 percent, respectively. [38] Due to limited historical data, it is difficult to identify a trend for upper secondary completion.

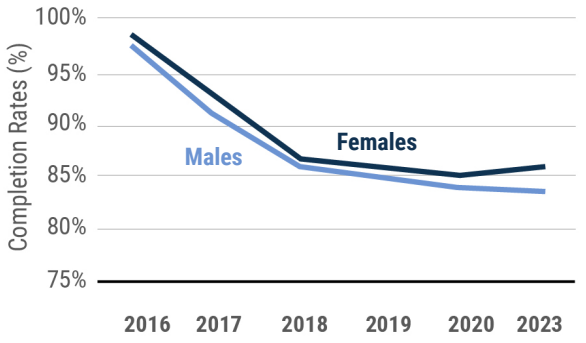
Lower secondary completion has been declining for both sexes. Between 2016 and 2023, the male completion rate dropped from 98 percent to 84 percent, and the female rate from 99 percent to 86 percent.[39] This means that each year, a growing number of students, boys in particular, are not progressing from lower to upper secondary school.

One possible contributor to this decline is the prevalence of adolescents living alone. As at 2020, 63 percent of Jamaica's most vulnerable children were engaged in child labour due to a lack of parental support. [40] PATH applications must be made at the household level by a parent or guardian; as such, adolescents who live without parental or guardian care, including street children, may be unable to access its benefits.[41] While there is limited data on how many such adolescents fail to complete lower secondary school, this group is likely to be at high risk of leaving school early due to extreme poverty. Expanding PATH eligibility to reach these marginalised students could help integrate them into, and retain them within, the secondary education system.

COMPLETION RATES AT THE LOWER SECONDARY LEVEL ARE DECLINING FOR BOTH GENDERS

FIGURE 11: LOWER SECONDARY COMPLETION RATES BY GENDER, 2016-2023

SOURCE: WORLD BANK GROUP (2025)



Although upper secondary school completion rates are high, fewer than a third of those students transition to pre-tertiary programmes such as sixth form (Grade 12), which are often required for matriculation into tertiary institutions. In 2021, only about 35 percent of students moved on to sixth form, contributing to the low tertiary enrolment rate discussed in the "Coverage" chapter. [42]

Before 2022, Jamaica's sixth form offerings were largely limited to the traditional pre-tertiary track, primarily the CAPE examinations. This structure excluded many students who graduated from Grade 11 but were interested in non-traditional areas of study.

To address this, the government introduced the Sixth Form Pathways Programme (SFPP), which extends secondary education from five to seven years, and offers three post-grade 11 options: the traditional academic track, a technical/vocational track, or a skills/employment-readiness track. [43]

A minimum standard in Jamaica's secondary school system is for students to graduate with passes in at least five CSEC subjects, including Mathematics and English.[44] In 2023, only 18 percent of students who sat CSEC examinations met this benchmark. [45] This shows despite a relatively high proportion of students reaching their final year of secondary school (Grade 11), many leave without the minimum qualifications considered necessary for further study or skilled employment.

Five out of every 10 Jamaicans of prime working age have no certification

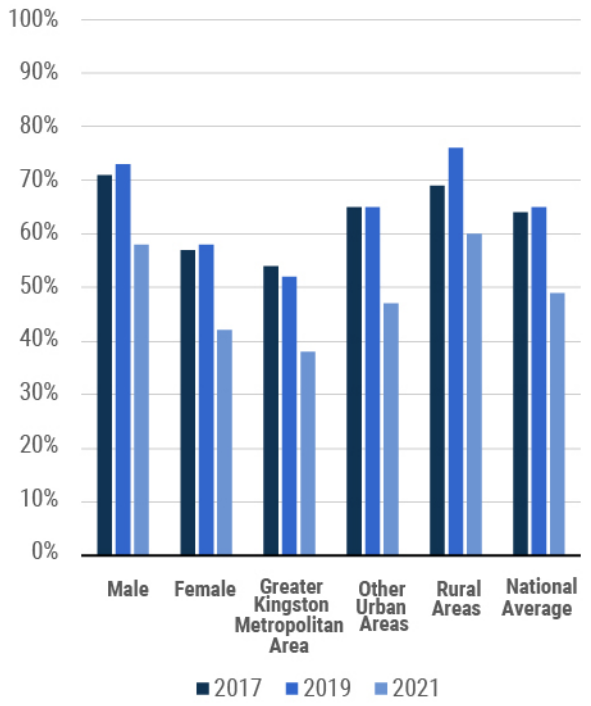
Low completion rates at the primary and secondary levels have long-term adverse implications for the quality of Jamaica's labour force. In 2019, 65 percent of Jamaicans in the prime working age group (25–54 years) had no educational certification. By 2021, however, encouragingly, this figure had fallen to 49 percent, suggesting that more individuals entering this age range during the pandemic had attained some form of certification. [46]

However, certification at higher levels remains limited. As of 2021, only 13 percent of the prime working age population held tertiary-level qualifications, 16 percent had achieved certification at the CSEC General level, and 9 percent had earned vocational skills certification. However, these figures may be even lower than the substantial number of Jamaicans that migrate after attaining educational certification, especially at the tertiary level.

CERTIFICATION ATTAINMENT IS IMPROVING, THOUGH NEARLY HALF OF WORKING AGE ADULTS STILL LACKED CERTIFICATIONS AS OF 2021

FIGURE 12: PRIME WORKING AGE POPULATION WITHOUT ANY CERTIFICATIONS BASED ON SEX AND LOCALE, 2017-2021

SOURCE: PLANNING INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA (2021)



Absenteeism drives dropout and weakens completion

The data on out of school rates suggests that dropout rates may be rising, especially at the lower secondary level, with boys, rural students, and those from low-income households particularly affected. On average, 20 percent at the lower secondary level are out of school while roughly 23 percent at the upper secondary. [47] Taken together, as long as completion rates in primary and lower secondary education continue to decline, students are more likely to leave school without mastering the skills required for further study or entry into the labour market.

When addressing dropout, indicators like classroom behaviour may be useful, but understanding absenteeism is key. Chronic absence can be widespread and often unaddressed until students are already disengaged. For many children, absenteeism may stem from poverty-related barriers such as lack of transport, household

responsibilities, or the need to contribute to family income. In rural areas, long travel times and costs can further increase the likelihood of irregular attendance. For others, absenteeism reflects disengagement from the learning process itself, especially where classrooms are overcrowded, under-resourced, or led by teachers struggling to manage diverse learning needs.

The current education system lacks a systematic mechanism to detect and respond to these early signs of disengagement. Schools are often only able to report dropout after students have been absent for extended periods, by which time the likelihood of return is low. This reactive approach contributes to Jamaica's low rates of secondary completion and low transition into tertiary education, with roughly 80 percent of youth aged 19–24 without the requisite certification to enter tertiary institutions.

EQUITY B ↓

ALTHOUGH SOME GAPS IN EQUITY HAVE BEEN NARROWING, JAMAICANS FROM LOW-INCOME QUINTILES, RURAL AREAS AND WITH DISABILITIES HAVE EXPERIENCED DECLINES IN EQUITY.

In this report, equity refers to how fairly resources and opportunities in education are distributed, and the extent to which this shapes student outcomes. The central question is whether some children are being left behind, and if so, which ones. To explore this, the chapter looks at gaps in enrolment, attainment, and learning outcomes across income groups, regions, gender, access to digital devices, and disability status.

Jamaica has made progress in reducing some disparities. Enrolment rates show relatively small differences across income quintiles, and gender parity in educational attainment has been achieved.

Yet inequities remain. Students from the poorest households continue to record lower levels of attainment. Rural students are less likely than their urban peers to reach expected proficiency levels. A digital divide persists, as low-income families often rely on tablets, which are less effective for schoolwork than laptops or desktops. Children with disabilities face the steepest barriers of all, with inadequate infrastructure, adapted resources, and trained personnel limiting their inclusion.

Most children, regardless of socioeconomic status, attend pre-primary school

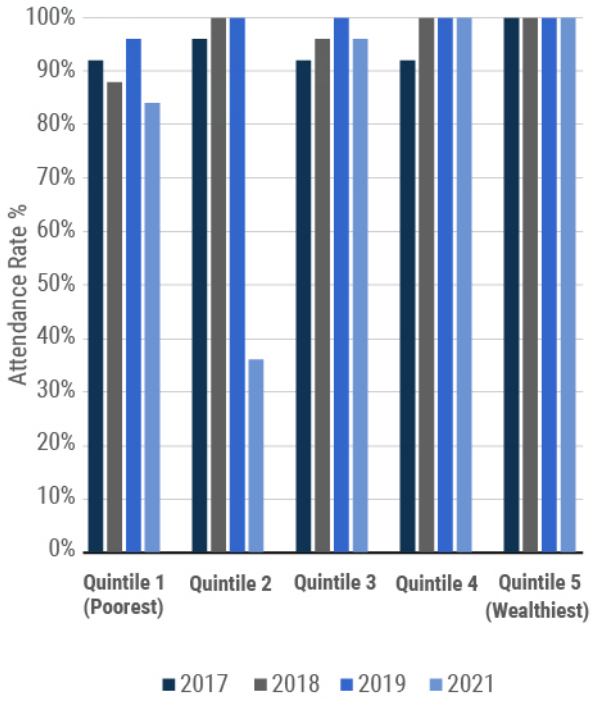
Preschool enrolment among three- to five-year-olds in Jamaica is high across all income groups, with only a four percent gap between the highest and lowest income quintiles in 2021. This narrow disparity, which has been stable for more than 15 years and has never exceeded five percent, reflects low inequality at this level, perhaps a reflection of the success of policies expanding access to early childhood education.[48]

However, overall pre-primary enrolment has declined since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. While children from the poorest quintile continue to benefit from targeted government support, those in the second poorest quintile face a more pronounced gap, with enrolment rates more than 15 percent lower than their peers in the highest quintile. This pattern may indicate that households just above the poverty line face barriers to participation that current financial aid programmes do not address, though further data would be needed to confirm this.

PRE-PRIMARY ATTENDANCE IS HIGH AND EQUITABLE, WITH ONLY MINOR INCOME DISPARITIES

FIGURE 13: SCHOOL ATTENDANCE RATE BY INCOME QUINTILE (3–5-YEAR-OLDS)

SOURCE: PLANNING INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA (2021)



The urban-rural gap in secondary enrolment is nearly closed, but learning outcomes reveal disparities

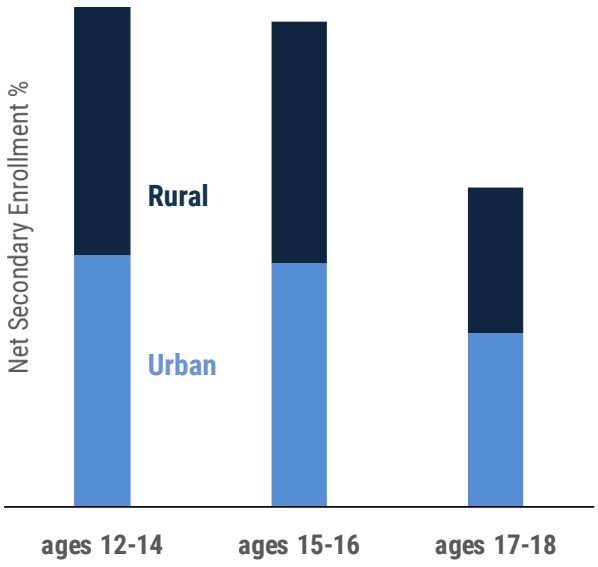
The gap in net secondary enrolment between urban and rural students in Jamaica is minimal, though some age groups show small variations. In 2021, the average overall gap was 4 percent in favour of urban schools. Among 12-14 year olds there is only a 1 percent gap, and for 15-16 year olds there is no gap at all, but for 17- 18 year olds the gap widens significantly to 11%. [49]

While these enrolment trends are encouraging, performance disparities remain stark. As noted earlier in the "Learning Outcomes" chapter, urban students outperformed rural students in all PISA assessments. [50]

ENROLMENT PARITY ACHIEVED, BUT RURAL LEARNING GAPS PERSIST

FIGURE 14: URBAN-RURAL GAP IN NET SECONDARY ENROLMENT

SOURCE: PLANNING INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA (2021)



Despite expanded access, the poorest Jamaicans are falling further behind in years of schooling

In 2021, adults aged 25 and older from the lowest income quintile had an average of 12 years of schooling — three years fewer than those in the highest quintile, who averaged 15 years. This gap has widened since 2017, when the difference was only two years, suggesting that the poorest Jamaicans are losing ground relative to wealthier groups.

Most of the poorest Jamaicans are completing at least basic primary education. However, while higher income groups recorded a one-year gain in average years of schooling between 2017 and 2021, the poorest made no progress. This divergence signals a growing equity challenge: children from disadvantaged households are still more likely to leave school earlier and with fewer opportunities to obtain the qualifications needed for further study or decent work.

Addressing this trend will require policies that go beyond financial access to education. Barriers such as child labour, household instability, and limited access to support services disproportionately affect low-income families, affecting their children's ability to remain in school. Strengthening programmes that promote retention and progression for disadvantaged students could help close the gap.

Gender parity in educational attainment has been achieved and sustained

Jamaica has achieved near parity in years of schooling between males and females. In 2021, adults aged 25 and older averaged 13 years of schooling for men and 13.7 years for women—a gap of just 0.7 years. [51] Between 2017 and 2021, both sexes gained an additional year of schooling on average, suggesting that improvements in education are being shared equally.

However, there are gender disparities at the tertiary level. At the University of the West Indies Mona (UWI Mona), only 28 percent of graduates in 2019 and 2021 were male.[52] At the University of the Commonwealth Caribbean (UCC), men accounted for just 20 percent of graduates in both 2021 and 2023. At the University of Technology (Utech), roughly one-third of enrolled students are male. [53] These patterns indicate that while parity has been achieved in basic educational attainment, men are less likely than women to continue into or complete tertiary education.

Programmes exist to widen opportunities for young men in post-secondary pathways, including HEART NSTA training programmes and the National Unattached Youth Programme (NUYP). Yet a study by the Institute of Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) found that many young men remain unaware of these options, pointing to challenges in communication and outreach. [54] Without stronger efforts to connect males to these opportunities, gender disparities in tertiary participation are likely to persist even as parity in basic schooling is maintained.

AVERAGE YEARS OF SCHOOLING VARY BY INCOME AND REGION, WHILE GENDER DIFFERENCES ARE MINIMAL, WITH FEMALES MAINTAINING A SLIGHT LEAD

TABLE 1: YEARS OF SCHOOLING (POPULATION 25+ YEARS OLD) BY REGION, QUINTILE AND SEX, 2021

SOURCE: PLANNING INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA (2021)

YEARS OF SCHOOLING FOR PERSONS 25+ YEARS OLD BY REGION, QUINTILE AND SEX, 2021		
	NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS	AVERAGE YEARS OF SCHOOLING
REGION		
Greater Kingston Metropolitan Area (GKMA)	1284	14.5
Other Urban Centres	1241	13.4
Rural Areas	1948	12.5
QUINTILE		
1 (Poorest)	764	11.9
2	819	12.5
3	876	13.0
4	943	13.5
5 (Wealthiest)	1071	15.1
SEX		
Male	2080	13.0
Female	2393	13.7
JAMAICA	**4473**	**13.4**

Device access at home varies by income, with poorer households relying more on tablets

A dimension of equity in education is access to digital tools for learning. Device ownership matters because laptops and desktops enable tasks such as typing assignments, running software, and participating in online classes—capabilities that are less well supported by tablets.[55] In 2021, the gap in household access to digital devices between the richest and poorest quintiles was 28 percent. While moderate by international standards, this level of disparity risks reinforcing inequities in educational outcomes. [56]

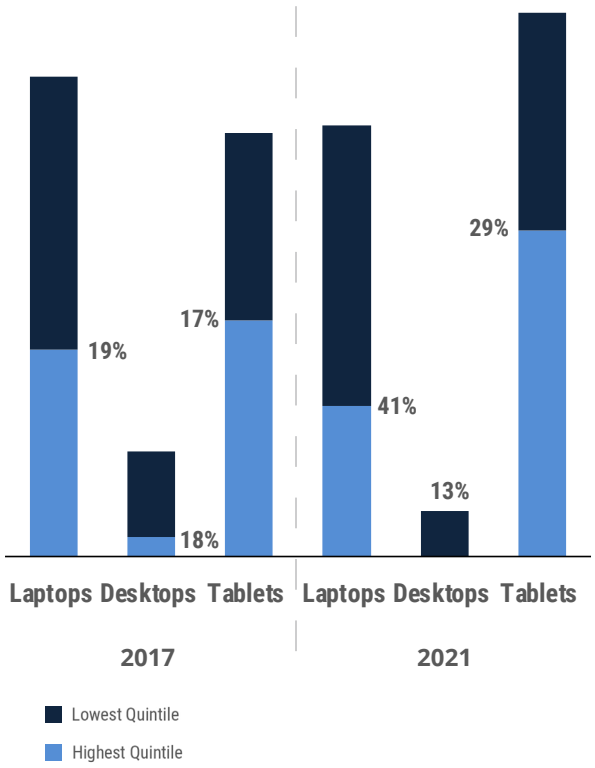
The largest gap is in laptop access: households in the highest quintile were 41 percent more likely to own a laptop than those in the lowest quintile. Desktop access is closer to parity, with a 13 percent gap. By contrast, tablet ownership is higher among poorer households, reflecting government distribution programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic that provided tablets to low-income students.[57] While these efforts supported continuity of learning during school closures, they also illustrate the limitations of prioritising speed and affordability over functionality. Tablets are less suitable for many core academic requirements, leaving poorer students at a disadvantage.

Trends since 2017 highlight a widening divide. Overall device access gaps have grown from 18 percent in 2017 to 28 percent in 2021. Among the poorest households, laptop ownership fell from six percent to one percent and desktop ownership dropped from 65 percent to 36 percent, while tablet access remained high. This reliance on tablets underscores how short-term policy choices can shape long-term equity outcomes.

SINCE 2017, GAPS IN ACCESS TO DIGITAL DEVICES HAVE WIDENED, WITH LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS RELYING MORE HEAVILY ON TABLETS

FIGURE 15: GAP IN ACCESS TO DEVICES BETWEEN THE LOWEST AND HIGHEST INCOME QUINTILE IN 2017 & 2021

SOURCE: PLANNING INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA (2021)



Children with disabilities face barriers to both access and attainment

Among the groups most at risk of being left behind are children with disabilities. Barriers begin with access: many schools lack the physical infrastructure, learning materials, and trained personnel needed to accommodate students with diverse needs. These access challenges, in turn, contribute to large gaps in attainment. As of 2011, while 68 percent of children without disabilities had completed secondary school, more than half (53 percent) of children with disabilities had not completed any level of formal education.[58]

Policy and legislative measures have sought to reduce this inequity. The Disabilities Act (2014) prohibits discrimination in access to education, and the 2021 Disabilities Regulations reinforced this by prohibiting institutions from denying entry on the basis of disability. Yet, by three years after the Act, only seven percent of primary schools and twelve percent of secondary schools had adapted facilities or resources for students with disabilities.[59] These commitments have therefore not translated into meaningful inclusion at the classroom level.

Some progress has been made through initiatives like the MOE's Shadow Programme, which assigns one-on-one support staff to students with certain disabilities. Shadows play an important role in helping students remain engaged in lessons and access learning materials.[60] However, the programme does not meet demand. Many parents are left to hire private support, which is costly and out of reach for most families already facing financial strain. This limits the programme's effectiveness in expanding equitable access.

STANDARDS AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS

JAMAICA'S EDUCATION STANDARDS HAVE BEEN MODERNISED, BUT CAN BE STRENGTHENED THROUGH BETTER MONITORING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE.

This chapter examines Jamaica's education system's standards and evaluation by assessing the extent to which there are clear and accepted expectations for what students should know and be able to do at different points in their schooling, and whether the education system measures and records what students know regularly and effectively.

Standards are formally set through the National Standards Curriculum (NSC), which outlines the knowledge, skills, and competencies students are expected to acquire across subjects and grade levels. These standards are reinforced by regional examinations such as CSEC and CAPE.

Evaluation of whether students are meeting these expectations relies on a mix of national assessments, external examinations, and inspections. PEP measures mastery of the NSC at the end of primary school, while CSEC and CAPE provide benchmarks at the upper secondary and sixth form levels. However, at the lower secondary level (Grades 7–9), there is no national standardised assessment, leaving implementation to the discretion of individual schools.

Beyond student testing, school performance is reviewed through the National Education Inspectorate (NEI), and teacher standards are overseen by the Jamaica Teaching Council (JTC). Jamaica has also begun to engage with international benchmarks, such as PISA, though participation is limited.

Together, these mechanisms provide a framework for setting expectations and monitoring outcomes, but there are shortcomings.[61] Gaps remain in coverage across education levels, monitoring and quality assurance are inconsistent, and Jamaica's limited use of international benchmarks restricts global comparability. More resources are required so that standards are not only set but also meaningfully measured and achieved.

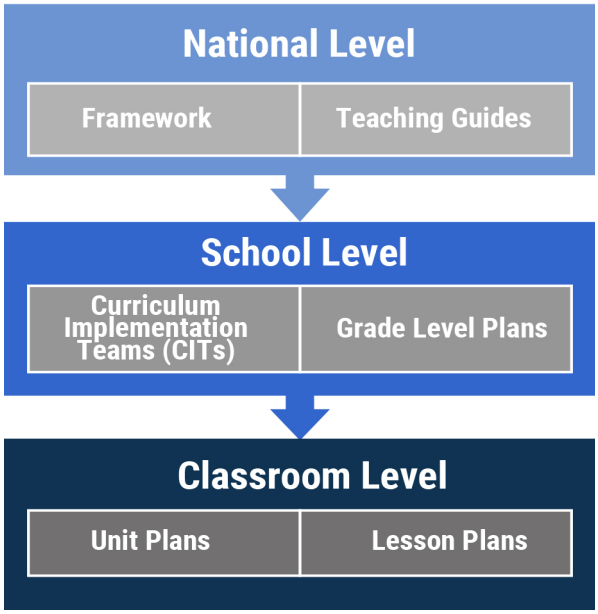
Content standards are guided by the NSC across four core areas, but implementation is hindered by resource and capacity gaps

In Jamaica, content standards for Grades 1–9 are set by the NSC, which emphasises problem-solving, project-based learning, and learner-centred pedagogy.[62] One if its aims is to equip students with critical thinking and practical skills relevant to the 21st-century labour market. From this design, provision is made for flexibility in meeting students' diverse learning needs. Therefore, at its core are unit plans, tailored to students' abilities, interests, and challenges.[63]

NATIONAL STANDARDS CASCADE FROM POLICY TO CLASSROOM LEVEL, SHAPING CURRICULUM DELIVERY AND SUPPORTING PERSONALISED LEARNING

FIGURE 16: BREAKDOWN OF HOW THE NSC FILTERS DOWN TO GRANULAR EDUCATIONAL LEVELS

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, YOUTH AND CULTURE (2020)

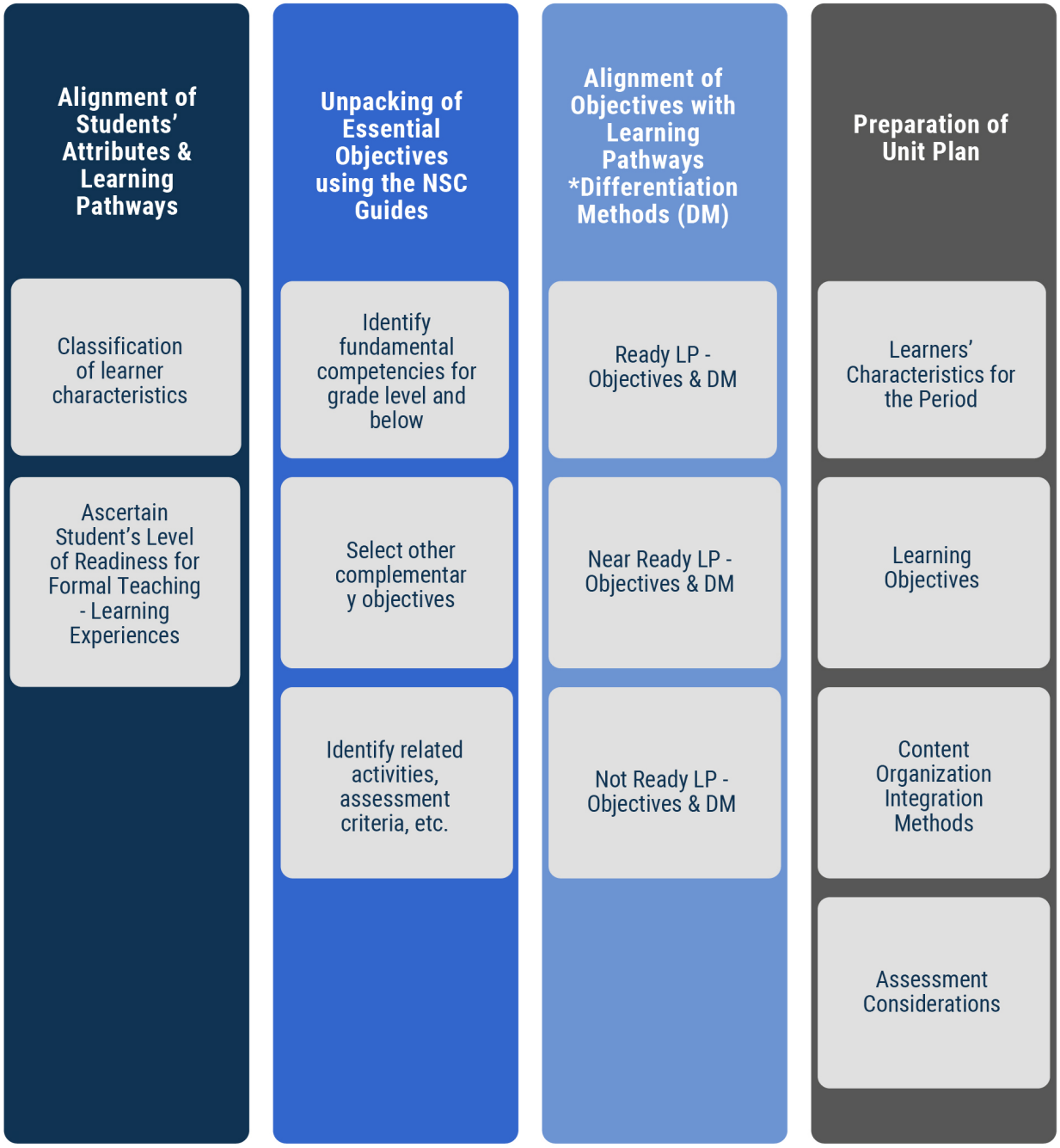


These plans are guided by "learning pathways," which classify students as "Ready", "Near Ready", or "Not Ready", allowing teachers to align learning activities and assessments to students' readiness levels. The intention is to prevent students from being exposed to content beyond their current capabilities while keeping them engaged through differentiated instruction.

NSC PROVIDES EDUCATORS WITH A FRAMEWORK FOR DESIGNING DIFFERENTIATED LESSONS, BUT UNIVERSAL IMPLEMENTATION HAS BEEN A GREATER CHALLENGE

FIGURE 17: PRELIMINARY PROCESSES FOR THE PREPARATION OF A CUSTOMIZED INCLUSIVE UNIT PLAN

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (2020)



However, this model's effectiveness depends on teachers' capacity to design and deliver differentiated instruction. A 2016 phenomenological study conducted shortly after the NSC's introduction found that many teachers lacked training in the pedagogical approaches the curriculum requires.[64] Large class sizes and inadequate resources such as insufficient prescribed textbooks and teaching aids, further compound this problem, making personalised learning difficult to sustain in practice. The support mechanism established, the Curriculum Implementation Team (CIT), operates inconsistently across some schools, resulting in uneven monitoring and weak follow-through.[65]

While the NSC provides a strong framework for differentiated and inclusive learning, inadequate teacher preparation, lack of resources, and limited institutional support undermine its effectiveness.

There are currently several standardised assessments for grades 1–6

At the primary level, student mastery of the NSC is assessed through the Grade One Individual Learning Profile (GOILP), Grade Three Diagnostic Test, and the Primary Exit Profile (PEP). Introduced in 2019 to replace the Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT), PEP moves away from memorisation and recall and instead evaluates competence in four core areas: Social Studies, Mathematics, Science, and Language Arts.[66] Using scaled scores and performance bands, it is designed to capture how well students are meeting the NSC's expectations for critical thinking and applied skills.

PEP highlights learning gaps previously masked by GSAT's limited assessment design

PEP aims to represent a shift in Jamaica's approach to primary-level assessment, by moving away from the memorisation-heavy model of the GSAT toward a more learner-centred, problem-solving framework. [67] Grounded in the NSC, PEP is designed to assess students over a three-year period, encouraging critical thinking, applied knowledge, and continuous learning. In contrast, GSAT was a single, high-stakes exam at the end of Grade 6 that focused primarily on rote recall.

This change not only reflects modern pedagogical best practices but has also revealed deeper learning challenges that GSAT may have obscured. In 2018, the final year of GSAT, 37 percent of students scored at the "highly proficient" level (equivalent to 75 percent and above). However, in the first year of PEP in 2019, only 9 percent of students reached that level.[68]

Lower secondary students do not have a standardised assessment as yet

For lower secondary (Grades 7–9), by contrast, there is no national standardised assessment of the NSC. Schools are expected to design their own examinations aligned with the curriculum's objectives. While this flexibility allows room for innovation, it also results in inconsistency across schools and makes it difficult to monitor whether students are meeting national standards. To close this gap, based on information provided by a ministry official, a standardised Grade Nine assessment is under development at the time of writing (September 2025).

The upper secondary curriculum follows regional standards, while sixth form offers more diverse pathways

At Grades 10–11, Jamaica's upper secondary curriculum is aligned with the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC). [69] This regional framework, overseen by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), ensures that Jamaican students earn qualifications recognised across CARICOM, supporting both higher education and labour market mobility within the region. The trade-off, however, is reduced national flexibility—curriculum design and assessment standards are largely determined externally, limiting Jamaica's ability to tailor content to local priorities.

For Grades 12–13, SFPP has expanded post-secondary options. Students may pursue the traditional CAPE path, which also follows regional standards, or take alternative routes such as technical and vocational programmes. This broader menu of options creates more inclusive opportunities for students with different interests and career aspirations. [70]

However, questions remain about the quality and recognition of these newer certifications. Unlike CSEC and CAPE, they are not yet consistently benchmarked or assured against established standards. Without stronger oversight, these alternative pathways risk producing uneven outcomes and may not provide students with qualifications that carry the same weight for further education or employment.

HEART/NSTA programmes offer alternative certifications but face challenges with oversight and quality assurance

The Human Employment and Resource Training Trust/ National Service Training Agency (HEART/NSTA) is Jamaica's primary provider of technical and vocational education. Its programmes offer students alternative pathways to certification beyond traditional academic routes like CAPE and CSEC, broadening access to skills development and workforce readiness. [71]

Concerns have been raised regarding the quality and consistency of these programmes. A 2020 performance audit by the Auditor General's Department revealed gaps in oversight, particularly for programmes delivered by External Training Providers (ETPs), which account for a substantial share of HEART/NSTA offerings.[72] The audit found weak monitoring mechanisms, limiting assurance that curricula, teaching methods, and assessments met established learning standards.

These deficiencies have had tangible consequences. As of 2020, only 45 percent of HEART/NSTA students achieved certification. This low rate raises questions about the system's effectiveness in equipping students with recognised qualifications and employable skills.

Addressing these challenges requires stronger quality assurance frameworks. This includes rigorous monitoring of ETPs, regular evaluations of curriculum alignment, and mechanisms to ensure teaching practices and assessments meet national standards.

Jamaica lacks standardised learning frameworks for students with disabilities

Jamaica has a strong legal foundation for protecting the educational rights of persons with disabilities, anchored in the Disabilities Act of 2014. The Act prohibits discrimination in access to education and mandates the development of codes of practice to guide implementation.[73] However, standardised learning frameworks tailored for students with disabilities remain underdeveloped. No national curricula or benchmarks exist for students with diverse or complex needs, leaving a major gap between legal commitments and practical delivery.

The MOE supports inclusive education through its Special Education Unit (SEU), which offers diagnostic services, financing, and guidance to schools serving students with special needs.[74] Yet, the SEU primarily facilitates modifications of the National Standards Curriculum (NSC) for students with mild learning disabilities.[75] There is currently no dedicated curriculum tailored to specific disability types; instead, educators must adapt a curriculum originally designed for non-disabled learners.

This gap places a considerable burden on schools and teachers, who are left without clear guidance on pedagogical approaches, assessment tools, or content standards for students with more profound learning needs.

To advance genuine inclusion, the MOE should prioritise the development of differentiated curricula and learning standards for specific disability categories. This would provide educators with structured, appropriate frameworks while advancing Jamaica's obligations under its disability legislation. Without such reforms, access to education for students with disabilities remains strong in law but weak in practice.

Jamaica's participation in international assessments is limited but expanding

Jamaica's education system has historically emphasised regional assessments, particularly with CSEC and CAPE, which is administered through CXC and aligns with a shared regional curriculum. This approach supports standardisation across CARICOM member states and facilitates regional comparability in educational outcomes.

Participation in international assessments has been limited, up until recently. In 2022 Jamaica took part in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for the first time. [76]

Jamaican students performed below the OECD average across all three subject areas and had fewer students scoring in the top proficiency levels. [77] While this performance gap is perhaps to be expected for a first-time participant, it raises questions about alignment between Jamaica's NSC and the cognitive demands of international benchmarks like PISA.

SCHOOL AUTHORITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS

MECHANISMS FOR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT ARE CLEARLY ESTABLISHED, AND SCHOOLS HAVE AUTONOMY, BUT ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS REMAIN WEAK AMONGST SCHOOL BOARDS.

In Jamaica, every public school is governed by a school board, which is legally mandated under the Education Act. Boards are appointed by the Minister of Education and are intended to serve as the primary governing authority for schools. They are responsible for overseeing the principal and senior management, ensuring the proper use of resources, supporting school improvement plans, and representing key stakeholders, including parents, teachers, alumni associations, and community members.

The framework is designed to delegate decision-making to schools in exchange for greater accountability for results. In principle, school boards should be able to adapt governance and resource allocation to the needs of their students and communities. In practice, however, this accountability exchange is weak. Boards often lack the training, oversight, and incentives to exercise their authority effectively. In addition, stakeholder participation—though formally provided for through parent-teacher associations, student councils, and teacher representation—is unevenly applied, and broader community involvement is minimal.

Schools also receive technical and operational support from the MOE, but weak oversight and limited funding constrain how far this support translates into improved results. While performance is monitored through inspections by the NEI, the absence of a coherent national education strategy undermines alignment between school-level accountability and system-wide goals. Strengthening the capacity of boards, making engagement mechanisms more effective, and linking delegated authority to clearer performance expectations could improve school autonomy and thereby drive higher quality education.

Weak school board governance undermines operational autonomy in public schools

In Jamaica's public pre-primary, primary, and secondary (PPS) schools, the school board and principal are granted significant authority to make key management decisions. However, this governance structure operates within the overarching policy framework of the MOE and the NSC, with some authority delegated to senior staff.

Thus, schools operate with relatively high levels of autonomy, but this has not always translated into effective school management. According to the most recent Chief Inspector's report from the NEI (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic) there is a strong correlation between poorly performing schools and underperforming school boards.[78] In many cases, boards fail to hold principals accountable, leading to weak leadership and stagnant or declining school performance.

Several structural issues contribute to the problem. There are standardised qualifications required for board membership, but no systematised mechanism to monitor the performance of board members and keep them accountable or remove them if proven to be unfit.[79] Furthermore, even though the National Council on Education can nominate members of a school board based on a set of criteria, regulation 79 of the Education Act gives the Minister of Education full discretion to appoint board members, a process that lacks transparency and opens the door to politicised or non-merit-based selections.

Additionally, board members serve on a voluntary basis without direct compensation, reducing incentives for active engagement and contributing to issues such as low attendance and failure to meet quorum requirements. In addition, the NCE stipulates that school boards should

be consulted when new school regulations and rules are being made. While these mandates seem worthwhile, there are few mechanisms to ensure its implementation. These governance gaps compromise the ability of boards to fulfil their oversight roles and support school improvement.

Formal associations and mandatory board membership facilitate engagement from families, teachers and students

Formal frameworks exist to represent the interests of parent, students and teachers. Parental engagement exists through parent-teacher associations (PTAs), which are mandated by the National Parent Teacher Association of Jamaica (NPTAJ). In 2016, only 21 percent of public schools had registered PTAs, which might indicate that many schools do not have functioning structures to engage parents in governance or decision-making in a consistent way, or simply that the PTAs are unregistered. [80] However, more recent interviews with ministry officials revealed that 87 percent of schools now have registered PTAs, which is an improvement.

The Education Act (1980) requires all public schools to establish student representative bodies. The National Council on Education (NCE), which is the official agency responsible for giving oversight and governance to school boards, mandates that a student representative sits on the board of all schools, facilitating their input on school level decisions. [81] The National Secondary Students Council (NSSC), established in 1975, provides a platform for students to voice concerns at the national level.

Teachers are formally represented through the Jamaica Teachers' Association (JTA), which advocates on their behalf and engages with national education policy. The academic staff elects one teacher representative to sit on the school board based on the prescriptions of the NCE.[82] Similar to students, this is one of the main ways teachers have a say in decisions at the school level.

Concerns have been raised about the JTA's internal representativeness and responsiveness. [83] Some teachers have publicly questioned whether the Council's advocacy primarily benefits principals and senior leadership rather than frontline educators. These governance concerns reduce trust in the mechanisms meant to ensure teacher accountability and professional integrity.

The NCE mandates community engagement, and it is a key metric that school boards are appraised on.[84] Based on the prescriptions of the NCE at least one member from a recognized local community group must be on the school board.[85] Additionally, the NCE mandates that public schools have a school improvement committee which must include one community member. This committee is responsible for planning and implementing school improvement plans which are strategies for improving the outcomes of students.[86] Some schools also rely on informal and ad hoc channels for communicating and engaging with community members.

Technical oversight and guidance are provided by the MOE and its agencies, but the benefit of this is hampered by poor leadership and financial constraints

Public schools in Jamaica are supported by seven regional education divisions, which are responsible for providing operational guidance and oversight. Each division is staffed by Education Officers, who serve as intermediaries between schools and the MOE. [87] Their functions include monitoring school operations, advising on curriculum delivery, and escalating institutional needs to the MOE.

In addition to regional oversight, schools have access to several national bodies—the JTC, NEI, NCE and the National College for Educational Leadership (NCEL). [88] These entities provide support in specific areas such as teacher professional development, leadership training, and performance monitoring.

School performance is measured, but accountability is weakened by the lack of a coordinated long-term strategy

Jamaica has formal mechanisms for evaluating school performance, but their effectiveness is constrained by the absence of a single, coordinated strategy that links school outcomes to national education goals. The NEI conducts performance audits of public primary and secondary schools every three years, providing reports and recommendations.[89] While these inspections may offer useful insights, the three-year interval is long and constrains timely responses to underperformance.

This is partly mitigated by Education Officers assigned to regional divisions, who provide ongoing monitoring and support. However, without a clear national framework, the data and feedback generated through inspections and officer oversight are not systematically connected to broader sector objectives.

Currently, Jamaica lacks a coherent medium- to long-term education strategy to guide school-level planning and accountability, instead there exists multiple long-term strategies that are not coordinated. The National Education Sector Plan (NESP) covered the period 2011 to 2020.[90] The Vision 2030 Education Sector Plan (ESP), developed by the Planning Institute of Jamaica (PIOJ) in 2009, remains in effect, but was structured differently and developed independently of the NESP.[91] More recently, the MOE launched the Transforming Education for National Development (TREND) initiative, based on the 365 recommendations of the 2021 Jamaica Education Transformation Commission Report.[92] TREND overlaps with the ESP but diverges in content and emphasis.

These overlapping timelines and divergent content point to a lack of strategic alignment within the education sector. While the Education Transformation Oversight Committee (ETOC) was established to provide strategic oversight of the sector, the absence of a single framework means schools are evaluated largely in isolation, and without consistent benchmarks or agreed priorities to connect performance outcomes to broader national objectives.

TEACHING PROFESSION C ↔

THE TEACHING PROFESSION STILL FACES CRITICAL CHALLENGES PERTAINING TO COMPENSATION, RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING.

The quality of any education system depends heavily on the quality of its teachers. This chapter examines whether Jamaica's system is structured to attract high-quality teachers to the classroom, whether teachers receive adequate preparation and ongoing support, and whether the profession is managed in a way that treats teachers as competent professionals with fair incentives and accountability. It also considers how teachers participate in education reform processes and contribute to system improvement.

In Jamaica, teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention face several challenges. While there are mechanisms for teacher training and certification, many programmes lack full accreditation, raising concerns about whether all new teachers are adequately prepared to implement the NSC. Recruitment practices have often focused on filling vacancies quickly rather than attracting and retaining top talent, and low compensation has contributed to attrition and emigration. These dynamics have left schools reliant on underqualified staff, retired teachers, or untrained graduates to cover gaps.

At the same time, teachers' autonomy in classroom instruction has expanded under reforms such as the NSC's differentiated planning model. However, their influence on decision-making at the school and national levels is limited. Representation through the JTA provides a voice in policy discussions, but internal and structural issues weaken the extent to which teachers feel equitably represented.

Reforms are underway, including performance-based pay proposals, expanded professional development, and new digital teaching tools. Yet these initiatives must be implemented with safeguards to ensure they are fair, transparent, and effective in improving instructional quality. Addressing the gaps in teacher preparation, compensation, and professional status will be essential if Jamaica is to ensure a stable, skilled, and motivated teaching workforce.

Teaching standards align with the NSC, but oversight of teacher preparation is weak

Jamaica has national teaching standards, set by the JTC, that align with the NSC. On paper, these standards emphasise critical thinking, student engagement, and preparing learners for the modern workforce. [93] Teacher training institutions are expected to equip new teachers with the skills required to meet these standards.

In practice, however, there is no binding mechanism to ensure training programmes actually meet these expectations. Since 2015, the Jamaica Tertiary Education Commission (JTEC) has worked with teacher training institutions to align certification programmes with the NSC, but compliance is voluntary. [94] Many teacher training programmes also lack accreditation, which further limits the ability of regulatory bodies such as the University Council of Jamaica (UCJ) to enforce quality. As a result, the preparation of new teachers is uneven. Some may enter classrooms without the instructional strategies the NSC assumes they will have, particularly in areas that depend on student-centred teaching and formative assessment.

For practising teachers, the JTC offers a wide range of in-service training.[95] Yet there is little to no system for monitoring whether these programmes actually change classroom practice. Without such evaluation, it is difficult to know which interventions, if any, improve teaching and which require adjustment. As such, there is likely a gap between the teaching standards that exist on paper and the capacity of training and professional development systems to consistently uphold them.

Accreditation gaps in teacher training institutions undermine instructional quality

A significant number of Jamaica's teacher training institutions operate without accreditation of their teacher training programmes by the UCJ, raising concerns about the rigour and consistency of teacher preparation.[96] The most recent available data shows that only 7 (out of fourteen) institutions have received UCJ accreditation for all their teacher education programmes.

Of the remaining institutions:

- Four (29 percent of the total) have no accredited teacher training programmes.
- One has 50 percent of their teacher training programmes accredited
- Three have 25 percent or fewer of their teacher training programmes accredited.

Overall, two out of every four teacher training institutions do not have all their teacher training programmes accredited.

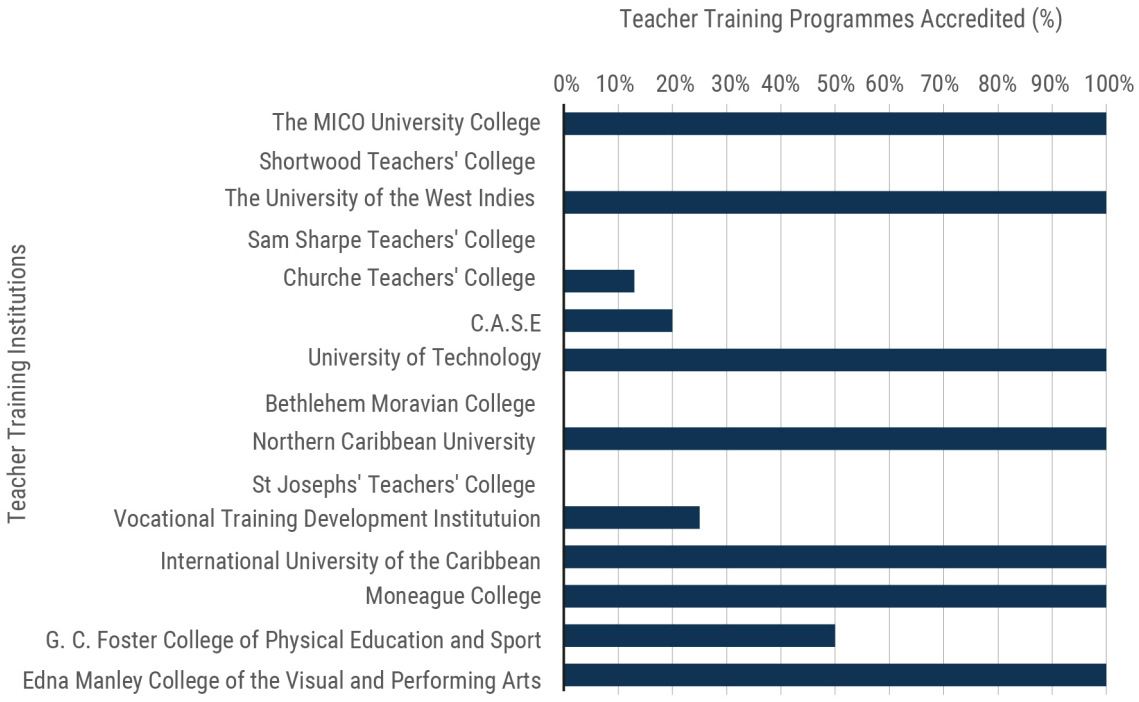
This means that several new teachers entering classrooms lack assurance that their training meets national standards. Graduates of unaccredited programmes may not have been adequately exposed to core competencies such as lesson planning, differentiated instruction, classroom management, and assessment—skills essential for implementing the NSC.

The persistence of low accreditation rates therefore undermines efforts to professionalise teaching, weakens accountability for training quality, and risks perpetuating uneven instructional standards across the system.

LOW ACCREDITATION SIGNALS RISKS TO TEACHER QUALITY AND OVERSIGHT

FIGURE 18: PERCENT OF TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMMES ACCREDITED BY THE UCJ

SOURCE: THE UNIVERSITY COUNCIL OF JAMAICA (2025)



Teacher evaluations promote accountability but lack enforcement mechanisms

Jamaica has a national evaluation system for teacher performance, overseen by the JTC, but its impact is limited because it does not carry enforceable consequences. [97] The evaluation framework considers subject matter knowledge and pedagogical competence; it has recently been revised to align with the NSC. [98]

The revised model prioritises teacher autonomy and developmental feedback, aiming to highlight strengths and identify areas for growth, rather than impose sanctions for poor performance. However, persistent underperformance is not tied to structured improvement plans or professional consequences, and teachers are not required to show progress in response to feedback. This absence of accountability mechanisms means evaluations function mainly as diagnostic tools. While the system generates useful information, it has little power to drive changes in classroom practice or to raise overall instructional quality.

Teacher recruitment strategies expand access but lack a merit-based selection framework

Jamaica's teacher labour market is shaped by persistent shortages in key subject areas and relatively high turnover, particularly in Mathematics, English, and Industrial Arts subjects. [99] In response, the MOE has developed a number of recruitment programmes to expand the teacher pipeline and address staffing gaps.[100] These include the Jamaica-Cuban Teachers Programme, which places Cuban specialists in high-demand subjects, and the Building Out Our Science Teachers (BOOST) initiative, which partners with the University of the West Indies to train high-performing science graduates.

Beyond these targeted schemes, schools frequently recruit new graduates from local teacher training institutions, as well as "pre-trained" graduates—individuals with subject-area degrees but no formal pedagogical training. Retired teachers may be rehired, and part-time staff or student-teachers sometimes fill vacancies.

While these measures ensure that classrooms are staffed, recruitment is not governed by a comprehensive, merit-based selection framework. There are no consistent mechanisms to assess candidates for teaching aptitude, classroom readiness, or long-term effectiveness. As a result, quality varies, and in some cases, vacancies are filled by individuals who lack the training required to deliver instruction effectively.

This emphasis on quantity over quality leaves schools vulnerable to uneven teaching standards, particularly in subject areas where instructional capacity is most needed.

Low teacher compensation is driving attrition, undermining education quality, and contributing to internal conflict

Although Jamaica spends nearly 80 percent of its education expenditure on compensation, teacher salaries are low by regional standards and in comparison to similar professions in the country.[101] Jamaica's secondary teacher salaries are higher than that of the Dominican Republic, but below those in the Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana and Trinidad & Tobago, despite Jamaica allocating a larger portion of GDP to education.[102]

These low pay levels have fuelled widespread dissatisfaction, reflected in strikes and industrial action across all tiers of the system.[103] The result is a steady outflow of teachers through emigration and early attrition, while discouraging new entrants into the profession. In response, the government has relied on stopgap measures: employing untrained graduates, recalling retirees, and extending retirement ages.[104] These approaches keep classrooms staffed but dilute teaching quality.[105]

The shortages also force schools to merge classes and increase class sizes, undermining individualised instruction. This weakens student learning outcomes and erodes confidence in the education system, making it even harder to attract and retain talent.

Unrest regarding compensation continues amongst Jamaica's teachers reflecting deeper issues within the wage negotiation framework and the broader system of teacher representation. Although the Jamaica Teachers' Association (JTA) regularly negotiates with the government, agreements have often been followed by strikes or industrial action, suggesting a disconnect between negotiated settlements and the expectations of the wider profession.[106]

Many teachers argue that the JTA does not represent them equitably. Perceptions of bias in favour of principals and senior administrators, who have reportedly received more favourable increases, have eroded trust in the union's ability to advocate for classroom teachers.[107] This has heightened feelings of unfairness within the profession.

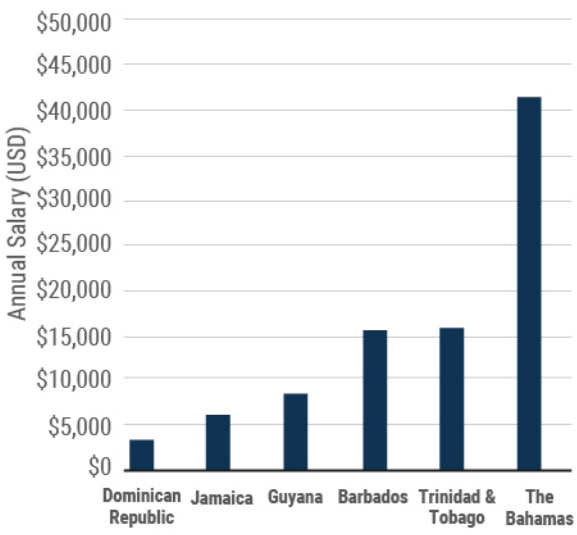
Compensation structures are further undermined by weak enforcement. Annual salary increments, promised under the formal framework, have been unreliable.[108] Teachers experienced delays in payments and a three-year freeze on salary increases between 2022 and 2025. [109] Such inconsistencies undercut morale and reinforce incentives to leave the profession or migrate abroad.

The combination of a negotiating body that lacks legitimacy among members and agreements that are not consistently honoured diminishes the credibility of the bargaining process. Over time, this breakdown weakens professional cohesion and accelerates attrition and brain drain, leaving the education system vulnerable to staffing shortfalls and declining quality.

JAMAICA'S TEACHER SALARIES LAG BEHIND REGIONAL PEERS, CONTRIBUTING TO CHALLENGES IN RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION ACROSS THE EDUCATION SECTOR

FIGURE 19: AVERAGE ANNUAL SALARY FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN THE CARIBBEAN (IN USD)

SOURCE: WORLD SALARIES (2025)



Performance-based pay is under consideration but must account for student inequities

Wages offered to teachers in Jamaica is currently tied to years of service, with fixed increments within each salary band.[110] This rewards experience but does little to recognise or encourage teaching excellence.

The MOE has proposed shifting towards a performance-based system to strengthen motivation and improve outcomes.[111] While this could provide stronger incentives, international experience shows that such systems can also create distortions if not carefully designed. In particular, teachers working in under-resourced schools or with students facing greater barriers to learning risk being unfairly penalised when evaluations rely too heavily on raw achievement scores.

A fair model would require multiple measures of teacher effectiveness. These could include classroom observations, peer and supervisor reviews, professional development participation, and evidence of pedagogical growth. Any performance-linked pay framework must also account for the teaching context--such as class size, student demographics, and availability of resources—if it is to be equitable and effective.

Virtual learning tools help mitigate the effects of teacher shortages

In response to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Jamaica rapidly expanded its use of remote learning tools and digital education platforms. Support was provided through agencies such as the NCEL and the JTC, which developed resources not only for classroom teachers but also for education leaders, including principals and deans.[112]

During the pandemic, schools increasingly adopted asynchronous learning methods, allowing students to access recorded or pre-recorded lessons and digital materials at their own pace. [113] existing teachers or third-party virtual learning providers do these recorded lessons. This approach reduced the reliance on real-time, face-to-face interaction and proved essential in maintaining instructional continuity during prolonged school closures. This approach did not eliminate the presence of teachers, who instead utilized these technological advancements as tools. There have been studies which confirm that

asynchronous learning has a positive effect of learning outcomes, but the use of it must be managed to ensure student engagement, especially for younger students below the tertiary level. [114]

As Jamaica continues to grapple with teacher attrition and workforce shortages, these virtual learning models remain highly relevant. Asynchronous and technology-enhanced learning—particularly when paired with artificial intelligence and adaptive learning platforms—can help bridge instructional gaps where qualified teachers are unavailable. The MOE has already at a preliminary level began to test the use of these methods, in combination with artificial intelligence, to determine how it can make the learning process more custom tailored to students and efficient. [115] However, because of the emerging nature of these innovations there hasn't been any national evaluation of the impact of asynchronous methods of teaching on student's learning outcomes in Jamaica, but as discussed in the Learning Outcomes chapter, the CSEC and PEP results during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic didn't show a major decline in overall results.

Teacher autonomy is strong in classrooms but limited at school and national levels

Teachers having adequate levels of autonomy within the classroom is ideal for learning because teachers can adapt how and what they teach based on student's leaning characteristics. The NSC grants teachers a high degree of autonomy at the classroom level. Through tools such as the Differentiated Unit Plan (DUP), teachers are empowered to tailor instruction to individual students' learning styles, abilities, and needs—one of the NSC's defining features.[116]

However, this autonomy diminishes as decision-making scales upward. At the school level, governance is concentrated among principals, senior staff, and school boards, with limited formal mechanisms for including classroom teachers in broader institutional planning.

At the national level, teacher representation is even more restricted. While the JTA advocates on behalf of educators and contributes to public discourse, it has no direct authority over regulatory decisions. The JTC bill, which would govern teacher qualifications, standards, and certification requirements, will install a new regulatory body. Yet, teacher influence within the body is minimal: only six of its thirty-one board members may be affiliated with the JTC, and only 11 members are needed to form a quorum, with no requirement that teachers be among them.[117] This structure limits the profession's input into critical policy decisions that affect its members' careers and responsibilities.

FINANCING B ↔

INEFFICIENCIES STILL EXIST IN HOW PUBLIC MONIES ARE ALLOCATED AND EXPENDED WITHIN THE EDUCATION SECTOR.

Jamaica allocates one of the highest proportions of its national budget to education in the Caribbean, consistently meeting international benchmarks for overall investment. The key questions, however, are whether this level of spending is sufficient to educate all children and whether resources are allocated and used in ways that maximise efficiency and equity.

Although expenditure levels are high relative to regional peers, challenges remain in how funds are distributed and applied across different levels of the system. For example, early childhood education, which is widely regarded as critical to later learning, receives a comparatively small share of resources. Staff compensation consumes the majority of the budget, leaving limited room for infrastructure or targeted interventions. These patterns raise questions about whether Jamaica's education financing is aligned with national priorities and whether current allocation methods adequately address disparities between schools and communities.

This chapter examines both the adequacy and efficiency of Jamaica's education financing, asking how well resources are targeted to improve outcomes, reduce inequities, and support long-term system goals.

Jamaica's education spending meets global benchmarks, but allocation efficiency remains a concern

Jamaica consistently meets international benchmarks for education spending, in line with the Education 2030 Framework for Action, which recommends that countries allocate 4 to 6 percent of GDP to education. In 2023, Jamaica spent 5.7 percent of its GDP on education, with an average of 5.5 percent across the 2014–2023 period. This level of investment exceeds that of many comparable countries in the Caribbean region. Yet high spending has not translated into better educational outcomes. Under-enrolment at the tertiary level, low CSEC pass rates, and high teacher attrition are some of the several issues that all point to weak returns on investment.

One way to assess both the adequacy and efficiency of education financing is through the Learning Adjusted Years of Schooling (LAYS) indicator. LAYS combines two dimensions: the number of years students spend in school and the quality of learning achieved within those years. This measure recognises that time in school does not automatically translate into the expected learning outcomes for that level.

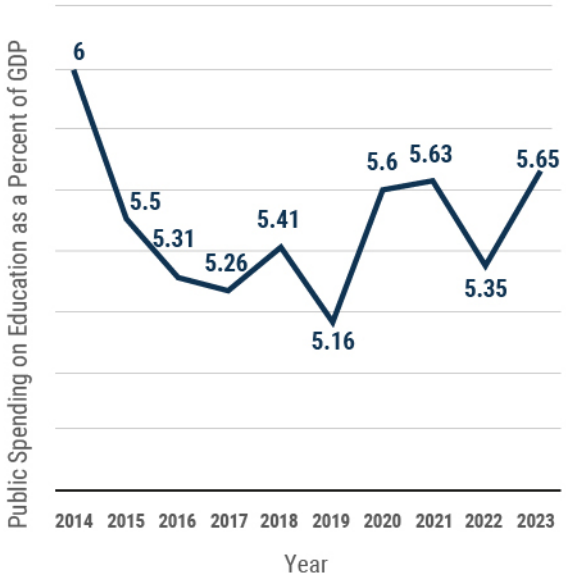
For Jamaica, the LAYS was seven in 2020, compared to an average of 12 years of schooling. This five-year gap shows that while Jamaican students are spending time in school, their learning outcomes fall significantly short of what would normally be expected. In other words, the quantity of schooling is not matched by quality.

This disconnect raises questions about how effectively Jamaica's relatively high education spending is being translated into results. Other middle-income countries, including Antigua and Barbuda, Albania, and Ecuador, spend a smaller share of government budgets on education but record higher LAYS, suggesting that resources there are being used more efficiently to generate learning. It may also be that the desired outcomes are not attainable through the education system.

EDUCATION SPENDING HAS HELD STEADY AS A SHARE OF GDP

FIGURE 20: JAMAICA'S PUBLIC SPENDING ON EDUCATION AS A PERCENT OF GDP

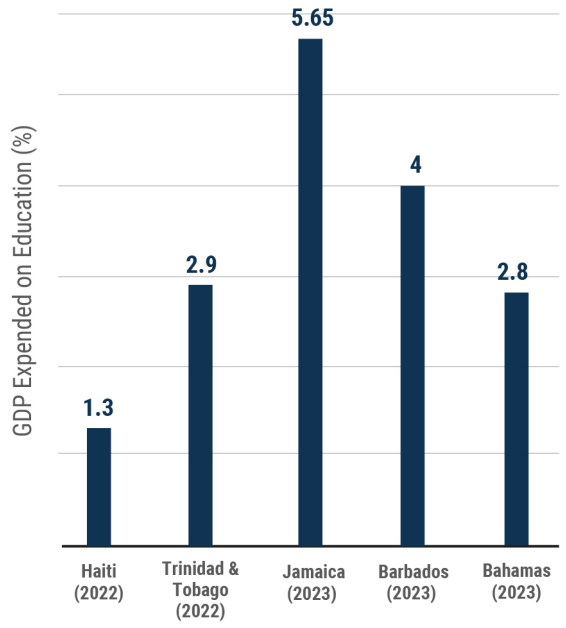
SOURCE: WORLD BANK GROUP (2023)



JAMAICA'S EDUCATION SPENDING IS COMPARABLE TO REGIONAL PEERS, BUT PERSISTENT GAPS IN ACCESS AND OUTCOMES RAISE CONCERNS ABOUT WHETHER CURRENT INVESTMENT LEVELS MEET SYSTEM NEEDS

FIGURE 21: CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES' EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION AS A PERCENT OF GDP

SOURCE: WORLD BANK GROUP (2023)



Pre-primary education is underfunded relative to its foundational role in long-term learning, and public funding at the tertiary level benefits mostly higher income Jamaicans

In 2025, Jamaica allocated approximately J$7.4 billion to pre-primary education, compared to J$52.6 billion for primary, J$55.1 billion for secondary, and J$30.7 billion for tertiary education.[118] This funding pattern reveals a strong bias toward higher levels of education, with pre-primary education receiving the smallest share of public investment. Although spending tapers at the tertiary level, it remains significantly higher than pre-primary allocations.

This imbalance is more pronounced when measured on a per-student basis. In 2025, the government allocated J$769 per pre-primary student—far below the J$2,412, J$3,050, and J$3,400 allocated per student at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, respectively.[119] While higher levels of education naturally require more specialised resources, Jamaica's per-student pre-primary investment remains low even when compared to other middle-income countries which achieve higher enrolment rates at the pre-primary level. For example, Belize, Grenada, and Peru spend US$2,200, US$1,187, and US$2,240 per pre-primary student, respectively. This funding disparity is concerning given the major impact pre-primary education has on future educational outcomes, which has consistently been verified in varying empirical studies. [120] Underinvestment at this stage can therefore undermine future learning, hinder transition rates, and widen achievement gaps. [121]

In addition, the distribution of public education investment in Jamaica disproportionately benefits different income groups depending on the education level. At the primary level, where education is universally accessible and tuition-free, students from the lowest income quintiles are the primary beneficiaries. In contrast, at the tertiary level—where tuition fees are still required despite some government subsidies—enrolment is concentrated among students from higher-income households.

As a result, a larger share of public investment at the tertiary level supports individuals who are already more likely to have the financial means to access higher education, while students from lower-income backgrounds are underrepresented. This pattern reinforces inequities in access and outcomes across the education system.

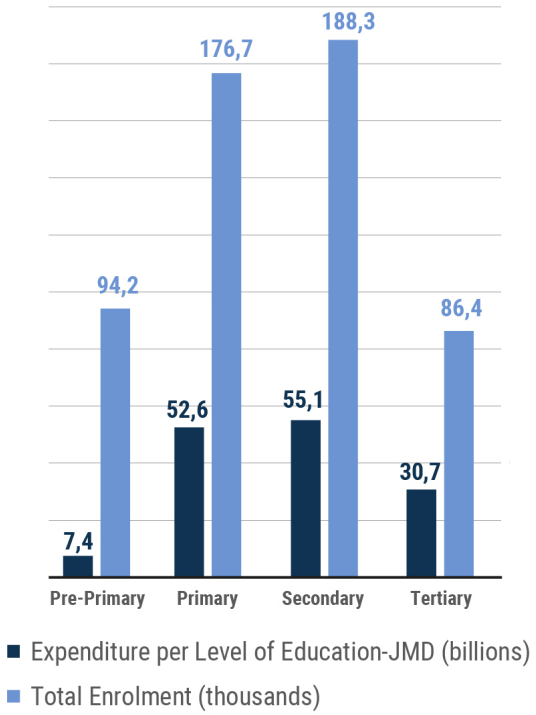
Given the foundational role of primary education in determining future academic progression, there is a strong case for reallocating a portion of public tertiary spending toward strengthening the primary level. Evidence from the PIOJ's Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions (JSLC) shows that financial barriers remain a leading cause of absenteeism among primary students. These early disruptions increase the risk of low academic performance, reduce the likelihood of successful transition to secondary school, and ultimately limit tertiary enrolment.

EDUCATION FUNDING IS SKEWED TOWARD TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS, WITH LOWER LEVELS RECEIVING LESS PER-STUDENT INVESTMENT DESPITE BROADER ENROLMENT AND FOUNDATIONAL IMPORTANCE

FIGURE 22: EXPENDITURE PER LEVEL OF EDUCATION IN JAMAICA, 2025 -26

SOURCE: MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND THE PUBLIC SERVICE (2025)

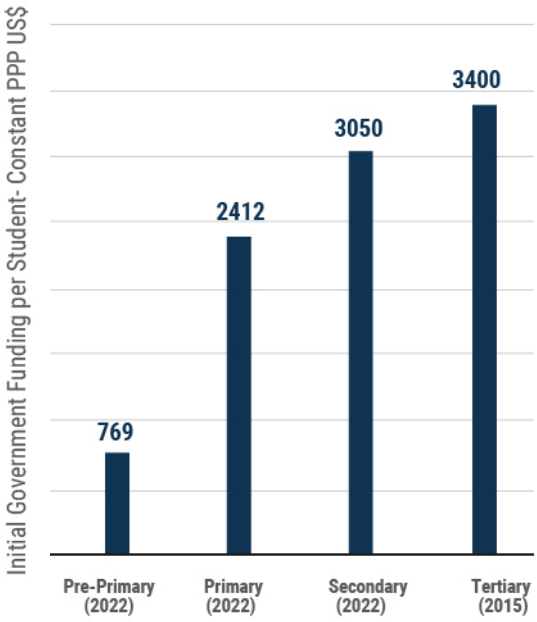
SOURCE: PLANNING INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA (2023)



LOWEST FUNDING AT THE FOUNDATIONAL LEVEL SIGNALS UNDERINVESTMENT

FIGURE 23: INITIAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING PER STUDENT FOR EACH LEVEL OF EDUCATION CONSTANT PPP US$

SOURCE: UNESCO INSTITUTE FOR STATISTICS (2025)



High enrolment in private pre-primary schools reduces the public funding burden

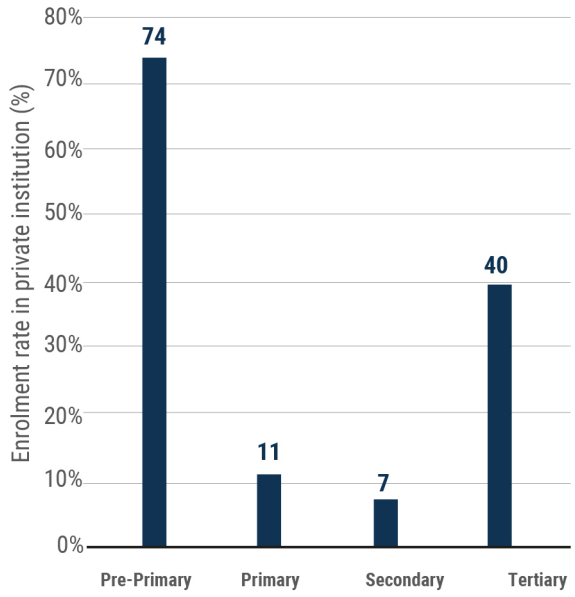
One reason for the relatively low public investment in early childhood education is the dominance of private providers. Among all levels of education, pre-primary has the highest rate of private enrolment, with the majority of students attending non-government institutions. As of 2023, approximately 74 percent of children of pre-primary age were enrolled in private institutions, which operate independently and are largely self-financed.[122] The remaining children are either enrolled in public institutions or are not registered in school.

This high level of private participation reduces the financial obligation of the government to directly fund early childhood education through the public system, but there are equity concerns. Reliance on private provision can lead to disparities in quality and access, particularly for children from low-income households who may be unable to afford tuition at well-resourced private institutions.

PRIVATE ENROLMENT REFLECTS GAPS IN PUBLIC PROVISION AT KEY LEVELS

FIGURE 24: ENROLMENT RATE IN PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS FOR EACH LEVEL OF EDUCATION

SOURCE: UNESCO INSTITUTE FOR STATISTICS (2025)



Greater spending on staff compensation and limits investment in school infrastructure, despite overcrowding in urban areas

Teacher salaries and staff emoluments absorb the largest share of Jamaica's education budget: around 76 percent in 2023.[123] This level of spending reflects the labour-intensive nature of education and the central role teachers play in learning outcomes. At the same time, teachers themselves continue to express deep dissatisfaction with compensation levels and wage negotiation outcomes, as discussed in an earlier section. While the budget is heavily weighted toward personnel costs, it is still insufficient to fully address concerns about fairness, retention, and morale.

The heavy tilt toward salaries also constrains resources for other pressing needs, particularly infrastructure. Urban schools are operating at 104 percent of their designed capacity, while rural schools are underutilised by 25 percent.[124] This imbalance highlights structural inefficiencies: classrooms in cities are overcrowded, while some rural institutions, especially all-age and junior high schools, struggle to fill seats.

Without structural reform, the country risks a cycle where teachers remain underpaid despite absorbing most of the budget, while students face overcrowded classrooms and under-resourced learning environments, and there is very limited fiscal flexibility to address long-term challenges.

Public funding allocation methods are inefficient and reinforce inequities between schools

Jamaica's method of distributing public education funds—particularly through per-student grants and subventions—does not provide the precision or flexibility needed to support schools equitably. While headcount-based allocations are convenient for budgeting, they fail to reflect the real costs of operating schools of different sizes, infrastructure conditions, and student needs. This produces a pattern where some schools are chronically underfunded, while others receive more than is necessary.[125]

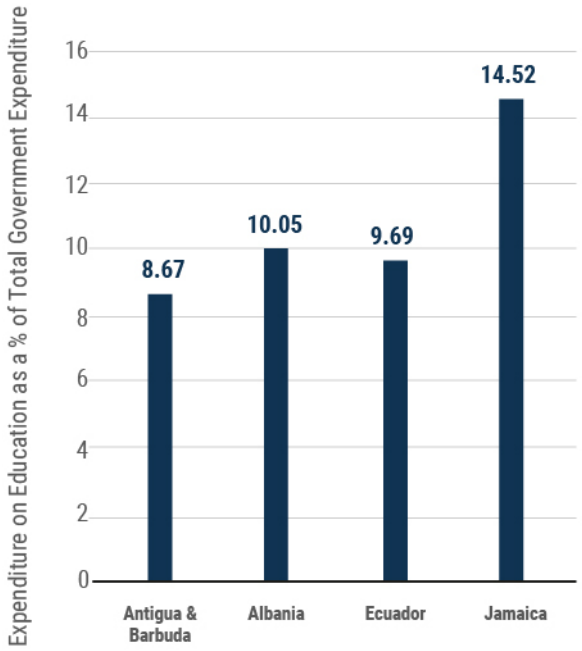
The formula also overlooks the variation in schools' ability to attract private support. Institutions with strong alumni networks or church affiliations can supplement government grants with donations and fundraising. By contrast, schools serving lower-income or rural communities often have no such support. Yet the state applies the same baseline funding rules to both, effectively embedding existing disparities into the allocation system.[126]

These inefficiencies are worsened by the absence of a centralised monitoring system that tracks how resources such as private contributions flow into and are spent within individual schools. Without reliable expenditure data, the MOE has no mechanism to recalibrate allocations to match actual need or to channel more funds to under-resourced schools.

DESPITE COMPARATIVELY HIGH EDUCATION SPENDING, JAMAICA'S LOW LEARNING-ADJUSTED OUTCOMES POINT TO INEFFICIENCIES IN HOW RESOURCES ARE USED

FIGURE 25: EXPENDITURE ON EDUCATION AS A % OF TOTAL GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE IN MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES IN 2023

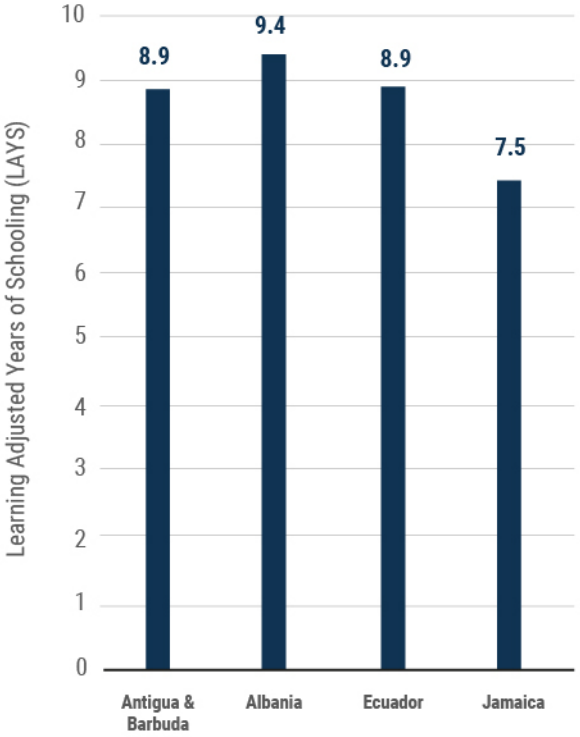
SOURCE: UNESCO INSTITUTE FOR STATISTICS (2025)



JAMAICA LAGS IN LEARNING OUTCOMES AMONG MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES

FIGURE 26: LEARNING ADJUSTED YEARS OF SCHOOLING (LAYS) IN MIDDLE -INCOME COUNTRIES IN 2020

SOURCE: WORLD BANK GROUP (2025)



RECOMMENDATIONS

Jamaica's education system represents a paradox. Despite devoting one of the highest shares of GDP in the Caribbean to education, the country continues to struggle with weak learning outcomes, high dropout rates, and persistent inequities between schools and students. These challenges reflect structural inefficiencies in how resources are allocated, how at-risk students are identified and supported, how early learning is funded and regulated, how teachers are distributed across the system, and how achievement and equity are monitored. Addressing these issues effectively requires not incremental adjustments, but targeted reforms that confront the roots of inequity and inefficiency.

This report identifies four priority areas where action is most urgent. First, reforming the school financing model to a weighted formula would ensure that resources flow to the schools and students most in need, correcting imbalances that may favour better-resourced institutions. Second, the creation of an Early Warning Student Support System would allow schools to intervene before absenteeism leads to dropout, improving retention and reducing disparities in completion. Third, expanding and upgrading early childhood education would strengthen the foundation of the entire system, giving every child an equitable start to learning. Fourth, a bonus incentive programme for teachers, based on a three-year evaluation cycle, would attract high-performing educators to underperforming schools, addressing inequities in teacher distribution and improving student outcomes where they lag most. Finally, developing an Educational Achievement and Equity Dashboard, integrated with EMIS, would provide policymakers and the public with a transparent view of learning outcomes across groups and regions, ensuring that decisions are informed by evidence and linked directly to resource allocation.

Together, these recommendations form a roadmap for a stronger, fairer education system—one that gives all children the opportunity to complete their schooling and acquire the skills needed for Jamaica's social and economic development.

1. Adjust School-weighted Formula to Promote Equity

A central issue in the current education system is the current per-capita grant system, which distributes funds equally across students without accounting for school size, infrastructure conditions, or the socioeconomic background of learners. This leaves disadvantaged schools underfunded while better-resourced schools, often with active alumni or church support, are able to supplement government allocations. Instead of correcting disparities, the system reproduces them.

The MOE should replace this model with a weighted financing formula that allocates more resources to schools with greater needs. Evidence from other countries shows that such formulas improve both equity and outcomes.[127] Chile's 2008 Preferential School Voucher (SEP) reform demonstrates how directing more resources to disadvantaged students can improve equity and outcomes. The reform increased the voucher value by 50 percent for the poorest 40 percent of households, while also providing concentration bonuses to schools that enrolled high numbers of these students. Schools receiving this funding were required to eliminate tuition fees, stop selective admissions, and participate in an accountability framework.

In the five years following implementation, average mathematics scores increased and the achievement gap between rich and poor students narrowed by about one-third.[128] Researchers attribute these improvements largely to the infusion of additional resources at the school level and the accountability mechanisms tied to funding.[129] Other studies confirmed overall gains in student performance and a reduction in inequality in test outcomes occurred, even if debates remain about whether long-term learning improvements were solely connected to the SEP programme.[130]

This evidence shows that weighted finance models—where disadvantaged students attract higher levels of public

resources—can both raise aggregate achievement and reduce inequality. Introducing a weighted school financing formula would similarly ensure that students in poorer households and under-resourced schools receive the additional support required for meaningful improvements in learning outcomes.

For Jamaica, the formula should consider weightings for

1. School size and infrastructure,
2. The socioeconomic profile of the student body,
3. Access to private contributions.

This would mean that a rural school serving low-income households would receive a higher allocation per student than an urban school with strong alumni funding.

Implementation should be phased accordingly with a pilot of the weighted formula in two education regions in the 2026/27 budget cycle, supported by an evaluation system measuring its effects on equity, school resourcing, and student outcomes. Based on results, the formula should be refined and scaled nationally by 2028.

To underpin the reform, the MOE must establish a centralised Education Expenditure Information System (EEIS) that consolidates public allocations, private contributions, and school-level spending data. An EEIS is a centralised platform designed to track, analyse, and report how education funds are allocated and spent across the system. Unlike traditional budget reporting, which usually presents only national or ministerial aggregates, an EEIS follows resources down to the school level and captures multiple income streams—government allocations, parental contributions, alumni support, and donor funding. By providing this level of detail, the system exposes disparities in how much money schools actually have to spend, helping policymakers understand whether current financing mechanisms reinforce or reduce inequality.

In practical terms, an EEIS acts as both a transparency tool and a policy lever. It allows the MOE to monitor whether funding reaches the schools and students who need it most, and it creates the evidence base for reforms such as weighted funding formulas. The data can be linked with performance indicators to show not only where resources are going but also what impact they are having on learning outcomes, equity, and efficiency.

Several countries provide useful examples. In Uganda, the government strengthened financial accountability by publishing detailed data through its Education Management Information System, which tracks how grants are distributed to schools and has been used to reduce "leakages" of funds that previously went missing before reaching classrooms.[131] In Chile, the MOE's reporting system for school subsidies allows parents, policymakers, and researchers to see exactly how much each school receives under the national voucher programme, creating a transparent basis for accountability and reform.[132] In the Philippines, the Basic Education Information System incorporates expenditure tracking alongside enrolment and performance data, enabling the Department of Education to monitor whether resources are aligned with student needs and school conditions.[133]

For Jamaica, an EEIS would fill a critical gap. At present, while the country spends nearly six percent of GDP on education, there is no mechanism to see how those funds are distributed once they reach schools. An EEIS would give the MOE a clear view of these imbalances, allowing resources to be adjusted and targeted where they are needed most. By linking expenditure data with outcomes, Jamaica could also identify which types of investment deliver the greatest improvements in learning and equity.

By shifting from a flat per-capita system to a needs-based model, Jamaica can align spending with equity goals, ensure more efficient use of resources, and improve learning outcomes across the system.

2. Build an Early Warning Student Support System

Although Jamaica has achieved near universal enrolment at the primary and lower secondary levels, completion rate and students in rural areas and low-income households, disengage from school well before completing secondary education. The challenge is compounded by the fact that absenteeism and dropout are often identified only after students have left the system, leaving little opportunity for timely intervention. Without structured mechanisms to track attendance and respond to early signs of disengagement, Jamaica risks losing large numbers of students who might otherwise complete their education.

The MOE should respond by developing a national Early Warning Student Support System (EWSSS) integrated within the Education Management Information System (EMIS). The system should track real-time attendance and performance, generating automatic alerts for students who

show repeated absenteeism, declining grades, or other risk indicators. These alerts should trigger immediate and direct follow-up by school administrators and guidance counsellors, who would be supported by a case management protocol linking at-risk students to relevant services from the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, the Child Protection and Family Services Agency, and the relevant education agencies.

Evidence from other countries demonstrates the effectiveness of such systems. In the United States, early warning systems using "ABCs" (Attendance, Behaviour, and Course performance) have helped districts in mitigating absenteeism and dropout. The 2016 U.S. Department of Education brief on early-warning systems emphasizes that the three ABC indicators are reliable predictors of a student's risk of dropping out. Attendance data are available early in the school year and can flag chronic absenteeism, which the brief notes is correlated with later course failure and disengagement. [134] Behavioural records (e.g., suspensions, disciplinary referrals) capture social-emotional challenges that often precede academic decline, while course-performance metrics (grades, failing marks) directly reflect academic mastery. By combining these three signals, districts can identify at-risk students well before they leave school, allowing for timely interventions such as tutoring, counselling, or family outreach. The brief reports that schools that systematically monitor the ABCs and act on the data see measurable improvements in graduation rates, though it does not provide a single national figure.

To ensure feasibility, implementation should be phased. By 2026, the MOE should convene an inter-ministerial task force to design the system, establish data-sharing protocols, and pilot the approach in two regions with high dropout rates. By 2028, the early warning framework should be scaled nationally, fully integrated into EMIS, and supported by trained staff in every school.

By identifying students at risk earlier and linking them to the support they need, Jamaica can mitigate declining completion rates, improve equity, and ensure more young people finish their schooling with the skills required for further study or employment.

3. Expand and Upgrade Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education is the foundation of Jamaica's education system, yet it remains the most underfunded and unevenly developed subsector. Despite broad recognition that early year's investment yields the highest returns in learning and life outcomes, Jamaica devotes the smallest share of its education budget to pre-primary education. Per-student spending is lower than at any other level, leaving many centres unable to provide adequate learning environments. At the same time, a large share of institutions remains uncertified, especially in poor communities, and quality varies widely depending on access to trained practitioners, infrastructure, and materials. This weak foundation contributes directly to readiness gaps that surface at the primary level, where too many children begin school without the literacy and numeracy skills required for success.

The MOE should take decisive steps to expand and upgrade early childhood provision. First, the government should increase the share of education spending allocated to early childhood, bringing per-student financing closer to primary levels. Second, it should accelerate the integration of infant departments into primary schools, ensuring that all children aged three to five have access to a structured, regulated environment. Third, the Brain Builder Programme, which targets ages zero to three, should be scaled nationally to provide stimulation during the most critical developmental period. These measures should be supported by an expanded pipeline of trained and certified practitioners, incentivised through scholarships and loan forgiveness for graduates who commit to serving in underserved communities.

Regulatory reform must also accompany investment. All early childhood centres should be required to meet and maintain certification standards, with legislative amendments to make compliance mandatory utilizing enforcement and evaluation mechanisms to support upgrading where possible. The Early Childhood Commission should be resourced to monitor compliance consistently, and uncertified institutions should either be improved to meet standards or absorbed into the regulated system.

By 2026, the MOE should expand the Brain Builder Programme and prioritise upgrading uncertified centres in the poorest communities. By 2027, new financing rules should ensure increased allocations to early childhood, with a target of closing the per-student spending gap with primary education. By 2028, integration of infant departments should be completed, and mandatory certification fully enforced.

Upgrading early childhood education in Jamaica would address inequities at the root, give every child a fair start, and lay the groundwork for stronger performance across the entire education system.

4. Introduce a Bonus Incentive Programme to Attract Teachers to Underperforming Schools

The existing system for teaching placements means that Jamaica's lowest-performing schools—often in rural areas or disadvantaged communities—struggle to attract and retain experienced, high-quality teachers. These schools typically face higher levels of student absenteeism, weaker resources, and lower achievement outcomes, and may be found staffed disproportionately by novice or unqualified teachers. Without targeted incentives, the gap between better-resourced schools and underperforming ones will continue to widen, reinforcing educational inequality.

To address this imbalance, the MOE should establish a bonus incentive programme designed to attract and retain strong teachers in underperforming schools. Under this scheme, teachers would become eligible for bonuses based on a three-year evaluation cycle that reviews their professional practice, student progress, and contribution to school improvement. Teachers who meet the performance benchmarks, indicating the ability to produce significant student learning gains in their classrooms, and agree to relocate to designated underperforming schools, would receive the financial bonuses and be eligible for annual bonuses upon review, as long as they remain teaching in high-need schools.

The evaluation process should be transparent and based on multiple measures: classroom observations, student progress relative to baseline achievement, participation in professional development, and peer or school leader reviews. This would ensure that incentives reward genuine teaching effectiveness rather than raw test scores alone. Teachers demonstrating consistent effectiveness would then be encouraged and rewarded for transferring to schools identified by the National Education Inspectorate as most in need of support.

Empirical evidence from Chile illustrates both the promise and limitations of teacher-bonus initiatives in improving retention and student outcomes. Researchers analyse the Pedagogical Excellence award, a cash bonus for teachers who commit to low-income schools, and find that recipients are more likely to remain in disadvantaged schools for at least three years compared to peers without the bonus.[135] The incentive also reduces teacher turnover into higher-performing schools, with positive effects observed among teachers with higher prior test performance, suggesting that the scheme successfully retains effective educators in the schools where they are most needed. Complementing this, further research evaluates Chile's merit-based National System to Evaluate School Performance (Sistema Nacional de Evaluación del Desempeño (SNED)) scheme which rewards teachers whose students meet or exceed national learning standards.[136] Their analysis shows that the programme raises student achievement by approximately 0.15–0.25 standard deviations, though impacts vary widely across regions depending on implementation fidelity, school leadership, and baseline resources. Understood together, these studies show that targeted financial incentives can both retain high-quality teachers in disadvantaged schools and boost student performance, though effectiveness is mediated by local conditions.

In the United States, the Talent Transfer Initiative (TTI) provides direct evidence that financial incentives can move high-performing teachers into low-performing schools and improve student outcomes.[137] Under the programme, districts identified the top 20 percent of teachers based on value-added scores and offered each a $20,000 bonus, paid in instalments over two years, to transfer to a designated low-achieving school. The incentive was explicitly tied to the transfer decision through a clear logic model and recruitment process. The results show a substantial impact on teacher movement: 88 percent of treatment vacancies were filled by eligible high-performing teachers, compared with lower rates in the control condition where no bonus was offered. Retention was also strong, with roughly 92 percent of transfer teachers remaining in their new schools after one year, a higher rate than their non-incentivised peers. Most importantly, the initiative generated meaningful gains in student learning. In elementary classrooms that received a TTI teacher, test-score improvements ranged from 0.10 to 0.25 standard deviations (equivalent to about four to ten percentile points) in both mathematics and reading over a two-year period. When elementary and middle school data were combined, impacts remained statistically significant in mathematics in both years and in reading in the second year. Overall, these findings confirm that a considerable monetary incentive successfully attracted high-performing teachers to low-performing schools while producing measurable improvements in student achievement.

Implementation in Jamaica should begin with a pilot covering the 2026–2029 evaluation cycle in two education regions with the widest achievement gaps. Based on the pilot's impact on teacher movement and student outcomes, the programme could be scaled nationally by 2030. By combining accountability with meaningful incentives, this reform would make teaching in underperforming schools more attractive and ensure that students most in need of quality instruction have access to Jamaica's best teachers.

5. Create an Educational Achievement and Equity Dashboard

Jamaica's education system continues to struggle with weak student learning outcomes, particularly in mathematics and science, where fewer than half of students reach minimum proficiency. While reforms such as the National Standards Curriculum and the Primary Exit Profile (PEP) have modernised the framework for learning, evaluations show that performance remains below both regional and international benchmarks. The country's first participation in PISA (2022) revealed that Jamaican 15-year-olds score below the OECD average, though the impact of socioeconomic background on performance is smaller than in many other countries. These results highlight both the need to improve overall achievement and the necessity to track student outcomes. Moreover, existing assessment data are not always linked systematically to equity concerns—such as the performance of rural students, children with disabilities or those from the poorest households—which obscures where gaps are most persistent.

From these concerns, the MOE should establish an Educational Achievement and Equity Dashboard, disaggregating assessment data by region, gender, income quintile, disability status, and school type. An Educational Achievement and Equity Dashboard is a tool that brings together student performance data and equity indicators into a single, accessible platform. The goal is to provide policymakers, educators, and the public with a transparent view of how well students are learning and whether outcomes are fairly distributed across groups and regions.

Developing an Educational Achievement and Equity Dashboard would involve a series of deliberate steps that build on Jamaica's existing Education Management Information System (EMIS). The first step is data integration. EMIS should be expanded to include results from national and international assessments, such as PEP, CSEC/CAPE, and PISA, and link them with existing student- and school-level information already in the system, including enrolment, attendance, geographic location, and available resources. This would create a more comprehensive view of both performance and context.

The second step is equity disaggregation. To ensure that disparities are visible, achievement data must be broken down by key categories, including gender, income quintile (using PATH eligibility as a proxy for poverty), geographic region (urban versus rural, and by parish), school type, and disability status. This would make it possible to identify which groups of students are consistently underperforming or underserved.

Once the data are integrated and disaggregated, the next step is to develop indicators. A core set of indicators should be created to track progress and highlight inequities. These would include average test scores in literacy, mathematics, and science by group; completion and transition rates across different education levels; the achievement gap between the highest- and lowest-performing groups; and the proportion of students reaching minimum proficiency benchmarks.

With indicators established, the MOE should move to develop a visualisation platform. This would be a user-friendly interface that displays the data through interactive charts, maps, and trend lines. Policymakers could use this tool for planning and monitoring, while a public version could be released to promote transparency and build trust in the education system.

Equally important are policy linkages. The dashboard should not only display data but also connect it directly to decision-making. For example, schools flagged as low-performing or showing large equity gaps could be prioritised for additional funding under a weighted financing formula, assigned targeted teacher development programmes, or provided with expanded remedial interventions.

Finally, the system will only be effective if it is used. This means investing in capacity and training for MOE staff, regional officers, and school leaders, equipping them to interpret the data, use the dashboard to monitor progress, and design interventions informed by evidence.

APPENDIX

LANGUAGE AND ARTS SUBJECTS HAVE SHOWN MODERATE SUCCESS, WITH PERFORMANCE PEAKING DURING THE 2020 PANDEMIC YEAR

TABLE 2: PASS RATE IN CSEC LANGUAGE AND ARTS SUBJECTS (2019-2023)

SOURCE: PLANNING INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA (2023)

YEARS	CARIBBEAN HISTORY	ENGLISH LANGUAGE	ENGLISH LITERATURE	FRENCH	GEOGRAPHY	MUSIC	RELIGIOUS EDUCATION	SOCIAL STUDIES	SPANISH
2019	65%	83%	69%	68%	73%	77%	78%	64%	60%
2020	77%	86%	83%	77%	79%	78%	89%	77%	68%
2021	70%	73%	62%	64%	60%	80%	69%	51%	57%
2022	70%	73%	71%	63%	59%	79%	57%	51%	52%
2023	74%	78%	68%	58%	54%	76%	64%	53%	51%

CSEC SCIENCE SUBJECTS CONSISTENTLY REGISTER THE LOWEST PASS RATES, SIGNALLING THE NEED FOR TARGETED CURRICULUM REFORM

TABLE 3: PASS RATE IN CSEC SCIENCE SUBJECTS (2019-2023)

SOURCE: PLANNING INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA (2023)

YEARS	MATHEMATICS	ADDITIONAL MATHEMATICS	BIOLOGY	CHEMISTRY	HUMAN AND SOCIAL BIOLOGY	INTEGRATED SCIENCE	PHYSICS
2019	55%	74%	77%	67%	50%	53%	72%
2020	55%	68%	86%	75%	49%	53%	72%
2021	43%	53%	72%	59%	65%	57%	62%
2022	37%	65%	76%	57%	63%	54%	62%
2023	45%	65%	71%	62%	68%	57%	59%

BUSINESS SUBJECTS CONTINUE TO OUTPERFORM OTHER AREAS, WITH CONSISTENTLY HIGH PASS RATES ACROSS ALL YEARS

TABLE 4: CSEC PASS RATE (%) IN BUSINESS SUBJECTS (2019-2023)

SOURCE: PLANNING INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA (2023)

YEARS	ECONOMICS	OFFICE ADMINISTRATION	PRINCIPLES OF ACCOUNTS	PRINCIPLES OF BUSINESS
2019	73%	87%	78%	91%
2020	75%	92%	87%	94%
2021	69%	77%	61%	81%
2022	69%	82%	69%	83%
2023	71%	88%	72%	83%

VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS MAINTAIN EXCEPTIONAL PASS RATES, ESPECIALLY IN SKILLS-BASED FIELDS

TABLE 5: CSEC PASS RATE IN VOCATIONAL TECHNICAL SUBJECTS (2019-2023)

SOURCE: PLANNING INSTITUTE OF JAMAICA (2023)

YEARS	AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE (SINGLE AWARD)	AGRICULTURAL SCIENCE (DOUBLE AWARD)	ELECTRONIC DOCUMENT PREP & MGMT	FAMILY AND RESOURCE MGMT	FOOD NUTRITION AND HEALTH	INDUSTRIAL TECHNOLOGY (BUILDING)	INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	PHYSICAL EDUCATION & SPORTS	TECHNICAL DRAWING	TEXTILES, CLOTHING AND FASHION	THEATRE ARTS	VISUAL ARTS
2019	91%	98%	86%	85%	91%	85%	91%	97%	82%	86%	84%	73%
2020	91%	94%	97%	87%	92%	83%	90%	95%	77%	84%	86%	72%
2021	87%	95%	77%	79%	88%	80%	86%	93%	73%	87%	86%	85%
2022	87%	94%	86%	85%	88%	83%	78%	94%	71%	71%	86%	75%
2023	83%	99%	82%	87%	88%	71%	82%	95%	73%	70%	90%	74%

CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES REMAIN SIGNIFICANTLY UNDERREPRESENTED IN SCHOOLS, HIGHLIGHTING SYSTEMIC BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND THE NEED FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION REFORMS

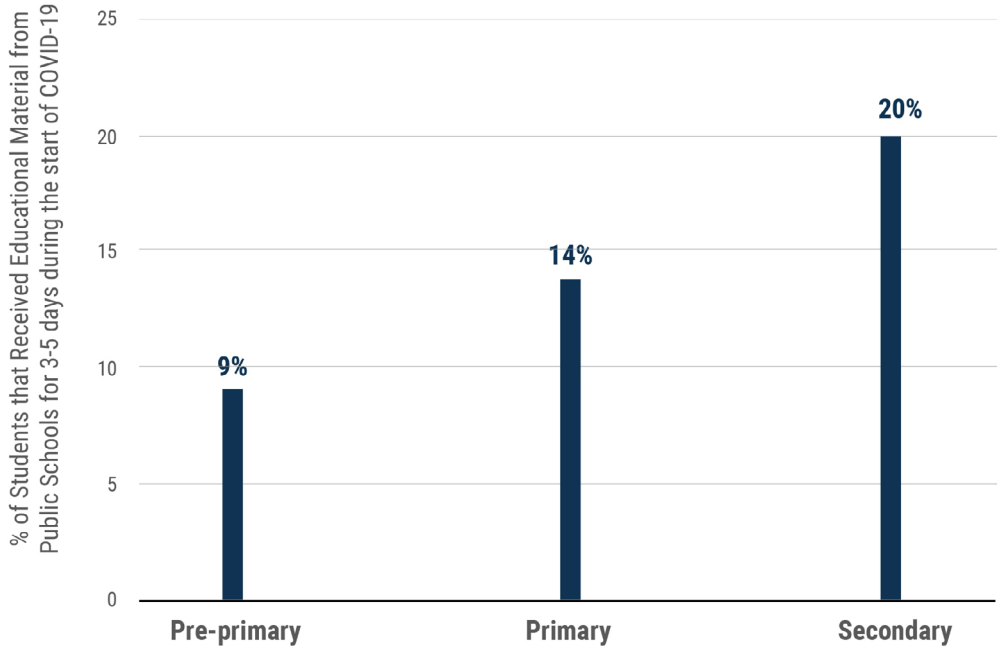
TABLE 6: DISTRIBUTION OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE BY TYPE AND DISABILITY STATUS FOR POPULATION AGED 5–17 YEARS (%)

SOURCE: UNESCO (2020)

LAST SCHOOL ATTENDED	POPULATION 5-17 YEARS (%)	
	CHILDREN WITHOUT DISABILITIES	CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES
	TOTAL (N=29227)	TOTAL (N=1546)
NONE	2.7	52.9
PRE PRIMARY	0.7	4.4
PRIMARY/ALL AGE/ ELEMENTARY	17.7	14.0
SECONDARY HIGH	62.5	9.6
VOCATIONAL HIGH	1	0.5
COMMERCIAL/BUSINESS COLLEGE	0.3	0.3
UNIVERSITY	0	0
COMMUNITY COLLEGE	0.3	0.2
OTHER TERTIARY	0.3	0.2
HUMAN EMPLOYMENT AND RESOURCE TRAINING	1.0	0 +

A RELATIVELY SMALL PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS RECEIVED CONSISTENT LEARNING MATERIALS EARLY IN THE PANDEMIC, POINTING TO UNEQUAL ACCESS AND SYSTEM-LEVEL GAPS IN EMERGENCY EDUCATION DELIVERY

FIGURE 27: PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS THAT RECEIVED EDUCATIONAL/LEARNING MATERIAL FROM PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOR 3-5 DAYS DURING THE START OF COVID-19



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