



BAHAMAS

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Mr. Ross Smith, Superintendent, North East District

COUNTRY PROFILE

The Bahamas is an archipelagic nation of over 700 islands and cays spread over some 100,000 square miles in the Western Atlantic Ocean. Some twenty-two of these islands and cays are inhabited by an estimated 303,611 (2000 census) people. The capital city is Nassau and is located on New Providence Island. New Providence, among the smallest inhabited islands, houses more than 65% of the national population; Grand Bahama is the next most populous island with more than 15%, and home to the second city, Freeport. The remainder of the population is spread among the rural areas of the country called the Family Islands. The population of The Bahamas, with an average annual growth rate of less than 2% since 1980, is considered young.

The Bahamas enjoys a relatively high standard of living. There is no system of income tax. Government revenue is derived principally from import taxes, real property tax, and business licence fees. The principal industries are tourism and financial services. Each of the twenty-two (22) inhabited islands is at a different point of development and has different economic potential. Agriculture, for example, is more important to the economy of Andros than it is to New Providence. Fishing is the greatest employer and producer of income in Abaco, while industry is characteristic of Grand Bahama. The Bahamas' task, therefore, has been to provide the same level and quality of education to a sizable school population scattered over wide and often sparsely populated areas, given the geographic, economic and social peculiarities of each island, the needs of the nation, and the dynamism of the global environment.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Structure of the Education System

The education system of The Bahamas consists of three progressive stages. These stages are primary education, secondary education, and tertiary education. Recently the Government has placed policy and financial emphasis on the development of pre-school instruction and facilities.

Education is provided at each stage by the State and by independent bodies, primarily ecclesiastical. However, it is the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture that guides the development and implementation of policies for the delivery of public and private education in The Bahamas. The Ministry is headed by the Minister of Education, who is assisted by a Permanent Secretary, Director of Education, and the Central Advisory Council for Education. The Permanent Secretary has responsibility for the organization and administration of the Ministry of Education. The Director of Education, the professional adviser and technical executive officer to the Minister, has responsibility for the Department of Education. The Department has authority over financial, personnel and other management operations related to the operation of schools. The National Advisory Council acts as a conductor of information on education between the public, educational bodies and institutions,

and the Ministry of Education. While the Minister of Education directs policy and regulations that affect public and private education institutions, the office has control only of the institutions that are wholly maintained from government funds.

**THE STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM
THE BAHAMAS**

AGE	EDUCATION LEVEL	GRADE	EXAMINATIONS
20+	TERTIARY LEVEL	THE COLLEGE OF THE BAHAMAS; SUCCESS TRAINING COLLEGE; COLLEGE OF SAINT BENEDICT / ST JOHN'S; SOJOURNER DOUGLAS COLLEGE; NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY; BAHAMAS BAPTIST COLLEGE; UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI; BAHAMAS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY	DEGREES: A. A., B.A., B.Ed. & B.Sc. CERTIFICATES & DIPLOMAS
19			
18			
17			
16	UPPER SECONDARY	12	BGCSE, RSA, PITMANS
15		11	
14		10	
13	LOWER SECONDARY	9	BJC
12		8 7	
11	PRIMARY	6	GLAT GRADES 3 , 6 WRITING ASSESSMENT
10		5	
9		4	
8		3	
7		2	
6		1	
5			
4	PRE-SCHOOL		NO FORMAL EXAMINATIONS
3			
2			
1			

Source: Ministry of Education

The Bahamas Government is the main provider of education at the primary and secondary stages. In the area of technical and vocational training the government is the only provider through the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI). At the tertiary stage, the government-owned College of The Bahamas is complemented by several local independent colleges and satellite campuses of American universities.

There are fourteen (14) school districts: four (4) on the island of New Providence and ten (10) throughout the Family Islands. Each district is headed by a Superintendent, who reports to the Director and facilitates the provision of services to schools. The superintendents are assisted in the management of the schools by School Boards. The School Board system which has spread to primary schools in New Providence, and primary and high schools in Grand Bahama was implemented in 1996 in the twelve (12) secondary schools in New Providence. The Boards, elected by the parents and guardians of children attending the school, are responsible for all non-teaching staff; the repair and maintenance of school premises, furniture and equipment; the acquisition of school books and materials; and improvements or extensions to school premises.

History of Education Provision

The policy of universal, compulsory education between the ages of five and sixteen, in The Bahamas, has set in motion unprecedented initiatives in the education system to ensure that all persons in The Bahamas have an opportunity to receive an education that equips them for life and work. Specific policies have been developed to guide the system's radical departure from the colonial philosophy of education for the selected few to education for the masses.

Primary education was reorganized and primary schools were added in densely populated areas of the capital island. Secondary schools were constructed on New Providence and Grand Bahama, and central high schools were placed on selected Family Islands, giving students throughout the archipelago greater access to secondary education. On islands and cays where there was no high school, secondary students were provided with scholarships to pursue secondary education on a major Family Island or on New Providence. Technical and vocational programmes were introduced in all high schools to meet the labour demands of the country. The College of the Bahamas was brought into being in 1974 through the integration of the sixth form of the then-only public high school – the Government High School, the Bahamas Teachers College, San Salvador Teachers' College, and C. R. Walker Technical College.

In 1990, additional steps were taken to identify the needs of the national system of education and to develop policies and programmes to ensure that schools were providing quality education for all students. National assessment, in the form of the Grade Level Assessment Test (GLAT), was introduced in 1991 for 3rd and 6th grades. The Bahamas General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) was developed and implemented in 1993. Programme SURE (Success Ultimately Reassures Everyone), an intervention programme to place 'at-risk' male students in a setting in which their needs could be addressed, was started in 1991.

Current Status & Recent Trends

The Bahamas education system today is characterised by universal access and high retention rates, particularly at the primary school level. All children between the ages of 5 years to 16 years are required to be enrolled in an approved educational programme. Since education is free for all persons in public schools, any child between the enrolment ages in the urban and rural areas of The Bahamas, irrespective of socioeconomic background, gender, physical or mental ability can receive primary and high school education. According to the March 1996 UNICEF report, The Bahamas has an Adult Literacy Rate of 98.2, with males slightly edging out females.

We have employed a range of strategies to ensure that our students, regardless of race, gender, religion, socio-economic status or disability, have access to the resources they need to obtain a quality education. Included in the resources identified are the infrastructure, teacher quality, school leadership, instructional program, technology – access, use and training, professional development, tertiary education and instructional matters.

Schools

The public education system comprises one hundred and thirteen (113) primary and all-age schools, thirty-four (34) junior and senior high schools, and eleven (11) Special Education Schools. Forty-seven (47) of the public schools are located on New Providence; and one hundred and seventeen (117) on Grand Bahama and the Family Islands.

The Government, recognising that the public school system cannot provide primary and secondary education for all of the children in The Bahamas, has provided funding (grant-in-aid) for the thirty-two (32) registered independent primary and all-age schools, fifteen (15) secondary schools, and one (1) Special Education School which operate mainly in New Providence and Grand Bahama.

Enrolment

Approximately 66,500 students (equal numbers of males and females) between the ages of 5 years and 20 years are enrolled in public and independent primary (including all-age schools) and secondary schools in The Bahamas, three-quarters of them in public schools. More than half of the student population is at the primary stage of education.

Included among the national student population are a significant number of children of illegal/undocumented Haitian immigrants, whose first language is Creole and not English. This group has posed several challenges for the public school system at the primary stage, where instruction and assignments are given, and expected, in English.

Special Institutions

The effort has been made consistently over the years to ensure that the children of The Bahamas, irrespective of ability, have access to education. The Special Services Division assists students whose abilities, physical or mental condition made the regular school programme inappropriate or impractical for them. Schools for the physically and mentally challenged (called Special Education Schools) operated jointly by Government and

community groups, are in place on New Providence and Grand Bahama for students with severe disabilities or handicaps.

Units for the hearing impaired and autism are attached to public schools in an attempt to create a realistic learning environment for all students. Teachers have been given a wide range of services in the areas of guidance and counselling, school attendance, speech therapy, school psychology and learning disabilities to assist them in the changing culture of the classroom. The School Welfare Section of the Ministry of Social Services is in place to support the work of the school in the areas of school attendance, teen pregnancy and other social problems. Attendance officers from Special Services Section are now posted in public schools to ensure that children are not regularly absent from school. The Section also administers the national lunch and school uniform programmes, which attempt to improve school attendance by providing lunch and uniforms to underprivileged children. It is therefore evident that the Bahamas Government is committed to the education of all children.

Inclusive Education: Approaches, Scope and Content

Inclusion – quality education for **All** – is embedded in the Government's philosophy of education: Emphasis is placed on instilling in all students the concept of tolerance, on helping to minimize mis-understanding and therefore prejudice, on promoting understanding of principles which underlie personal and social well-being, and on establishing good sportsmanship and positive values. The Bahamas Government having been at the forefront in formulating the definition for inclusion has agreed to adopt the internationally accepted definition and terminologies for use at the national level. Inclusion therefore involves educating exceptional students regardless of type or severity of disability in regular classrooms in their community schools. The Ministry of Education acknowledges that the critical aspects of conceptualization and definition of inclusive education in The Bahamas would be affected by:

- Changing societal/educators' attitudes from exclusion to inclusion
- Development of an effective awareness plan/programmed for an archipelagic nation
- Resources (Human and Material)
- Parental support and conviction
- Adequate funding
- Physical infrastructure
- Influence of other countries on the education landscape
- No agreed national definition of inclusive education
- Impact of national organization catering to specific disabilities groupings

The shift in inclusive education over the past ten years has been towards a more collaborative approach, involving all stakeholders NGOs, Media, Support Groups, Government Agencies, and advocacy groups. Increased funding for networking of these groups for collaboration and sharing of expertise has also been provided.

In addition the Ministry of Education has supported workshops, locally, regionally and internationally in order to address the issue of in-service training for serving teachers as well as provisions for scholarship in special education. Additionally, articulation agreements have been signed with College of The Bahamas COB/UOB, and universities in the United States and Canada to provide degree courses in special education.

To further forge ahead with inclusion The Bahamas Government negotiated a loan with the International Development Bank and instituted the creation of two specialized groups, the

National Task Force on Disabilities and the National Commission of Special Education (NCOSE). These groups provided widespread consultation and presented their final report to the nation in 1999 and 2005 respectively. Over the past ten years we have gradually moved away from special schools as the only forum for special education to inclusion in regular schools and classrooms. Today we have programs in a number of primary schools and secondary schools.

The focused groups over this period were the learning disabled, multiple disabilities and Autistic children. For the learning disabled, resource rooms were piloted in several of our primary and secondary schools throughout the country.

Throughout the struggle for inclusion, our main sources of exclusion were human based which included negative attitudes towards special students, low expectations and lagging professional development. While there are still challenges, the various consultative efforts undertaken have made positive strides in narrowing the exclusion gap. In addition, the question of equity in educational opportunities for these special groups of students still exists. For the most part disabled persons are not being given equal opportunity for access to employment.

Inclusive Education: Public Policies

The Task Force on Education Report, 1994, was probably the impetus for discussions of inclusion. Some of the major undertakings of the Government since this report was published include:

- IDB loan & special education component
- National Commission on Special Education
- Engagement of consultants with special education/psychology expertise
- On-going dialogue at Cabinet level
- Revision of the Education Act
- Provision of the Disability Bill (Presently being discussed publicly)
- Development of 10 year plan & implied budgeting (includes school Safety Net initiatives)
- Components of Special Education promoted on The Bahamas Learning Channel – MOEYS&C initiative)

The role of inclusive education is semi-participatory, Special Education teachers are utilized as experts on selected curriculum development and revision teams during the drafting of the documents. Greater focus is presently being given to the development of a national curriculum with content standards that are definitely giving greater access to children with special education needs.

The attention being given to inclusion can be seen in a shift from an academic performance of high achievers in national examination to one developed for 85% of the student population. Students with varied disabilities now participate in these examinations

The IDB loan provides for technical assistance and development of the human resources, procurement of furniture and equipment and curriculum development in an effort to improve the process. The National Commission on Special Education (NCOSE), the government appointed commission examined all aspects of provisions for special education. Its final report provided recommendations for the way forward in education. Some recommendations have been implemented, such as the appointment of teachers' aides, additional special officers, screening all preschool children. Others such the revision and

inclusion of certain laws to ensure proper compliance and the development of the ten year educational plan are in progress.

In order to provide for institutionalization of the change the focus is on the revision of the curriculum. Selected special education teachers are engaged in adaptation and modification of the curriculum to meet the needs of the cognitively challenged students and to ensure that the curriculum includes provision of technology such as special computers, talking computers and other specialist equipment for the visually and hearing impaired.

As the teaching and learning process is critical, the Special Services Section of the Ministry of Education provide the professional guidance and support to both public and private institutions. Included in the officers responsibilities are the examination of the teaching/learning factors, integration of the curriculum, strategies for teachers working in inclusive classrooms and adaptive and supportive regular classroom environments are and the provision of workshops and training opportunities.

At the end of the school year students write national tests such as Grade Level Assessment Test (GLAT), Bahamas Junior Certificate (BJC) and Bahamas General Certificate in Secondary Education (BGCSE). The Evaluation and Assessment Division incorporates alternative assessment techniques for who write the examinations.

The development of a national school to work support model for the effective transition of students with special needs and in particular, school age youth with disabilities is being implemented incrementally in New Providence, Grand Bahama and the Family Islands. Two of the work s programs at the school level focus on the hearing impaired and the autism. Opportunities also exist for teachers to work with students who are home-bound, in the Adolescent ward at Sandilands Hospital, tutoring students at BTVI, COB/UOB and other training centres or schools.

Inclusive Education: Learners and Teachers:

The process of change is problematic and multi-dimensional. It requires that those involved to remain committed for the long term in order to realize the desired outcome. This means then that on - going curriculum reform is the vehicle for promoting inclusion at all levels of the educational system. The curriculum must be student centered, should cater to children with varying abilities and should be:

- Teacher preparation/re-training focus on learning styles
- Development policies, Legislation and Standards
- Implementation, Training and Capacity Building Initiative
- Development and Implementation of Demonstration School Project
- Awareness, Networking, and Communication Campaign
- Transition Programmes
- Early Childhood Screening

It is also important that teachers be equipped with the required competencies to attend to the growing needs of students with varying abilities. A structured professional development program is necessary to enable serving teachers and future teachers to acquire them the skills to teach in such classrooms. Educational technocrats at the local level share the view that if inclusion is to advance it must be grounded in five models which include "individual guided staff development, observation and assessment, involvement in the development/improvement process, training and inquiry.

An examination of these reveals that The Bahamas has focused on the Implementation, training and capacity building initiative, development and implementation demonstration school project awareness, networking and communication campaign, teacher preparation focus on learning styles, advocacy campaign and early screening. In addition the Ministry of Education encourages special education teachers to

- Utilize appropriate methodologies
- Develops and prepares each lesson ensuring its contribution toward the planned curriculum
- Develops specific goals and objectives for the class or classes assigned ensuring that these goals are consistent with the goals of the school
- Establishes programmes to ensure as much integration as possible
- Motivates and encourages students to achieve their full potential academically and otherwise
- Designs and develops curriculum materials for use in the classroom and with the curriculum development at the national level
- Provides materials for regular classroom teachers in the content area
- Assist with staff development at the national level
- Serve as resource persons to the administration & MOEYS&C
- Assist new and probationary teachers in the profession
- Work with students who are home-bound, in the Adolescent ward at Sandilands Hospital, tutoring students at BTVI, COB/UOB and other training centres or schools
- Assist in establishing programmes for the exceptional child in the regular class
- Assist the visually challenged students by reading, marking and translating Braille assignments for the teacher and student

Despite our many challenges our country continues to embrace inclusion in its on going effort to meet the needs of all students in Bahamian Schools.

In order to ensure that quality education is delivered in all of our schools, measures to strengthen the teaching force and its capabilities must be put in place. Reform is necessary in the subject matter standards, the curriculum content and the pedagogical skills, teachers are expected to acquire. More emphasis needs to be placed by the School of Education at the College of the Bahamas to acquire the necessary skills to work in a democratic, inclusive classroom.

The Ministry must also partner with the College of the Bahamas to examine the conditions for teacher-certification, and licensure in order to sustain a well-prepared and stable teacher workforce and to promote teacher accountability for student outcomes.

As we move towards a more student centred learning environment and the expectations of students are raised, expectations for teachers are consequently raised. If teachers are to meet these new expectations of mastering new skills and changing their current practices, the Ministry must devise ways to provide teachers with more time and opportunities to work with colleagues, to revise curriculum, and to reflect on current trends in education.

A concerted effort to attract a greater percentage of males into the teaching profession must be made in order to provide more positive role models for male students.

In addition attention must be given to the needs of teachers beyond updating their knowledge and skills -focus must also be on their **wellness**. Such a focus will allow for a greater degree of commitment to realizing our goals of inclusion.

We must not value the expertise of teachers and continue to involve them from the beginning in the articulation of standards and in the development of policies and practices as they relate to inclusion and also recognise and reward excellent work in order to raise the profile and morale of teachers.

Our Government is committed to investing the time and resources needed to adequately prepare our teachers for the process of inclusion to competently equip our students for the challenges of this twenty-first century.