

UNICEF BELIZE

Out-Of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI)

FINAL REPORT

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by

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PREFACE

(signed by a government official, a UNICEF and a UIS representative): pgs 1

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

5DE	Five Dimensions of Exclusion
BESS	Belize Education Sector Strategy
CEO	Chief Education Officer
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EWS	Early Warning System
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
ITVET	Institute for Technical and Vocational Education and Training
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MOEYSC	Ministry of Education, Youths, Sports, and Culture
MoRES	Monitoring Results for Equity System
NaRCIE	National Resource Centre for Inclusive Education
OOSC	Out of School Children
OOSCI	Out of School Children Initiative
OpenEMIS	Open Education Management Information System
PSE	Primary School Examination
SCLO	School Community Liaison Officers
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UNESCO	United Nation’s Education, Science and Culture Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2010, UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) launched a global Out-of-School Children Initiative (OOSCI). The aim of this initiative is to improve the analysis around the factors affecting the exclusion of children from education, leading to more targeted and effective policies and programmatic approaches.

The Five Dimensions of Exclusion (5DE) are central to the OOSCI approach, presenting groups of children for analysis and interventions.

Three of the dimensions represent children who are out-of-school, as follows:

- Dimension 1: Children of pre-primary school age who are not in pre-primary or primary school.
- Dimension 2: Children of primary school age who are not in primary or secondary school.
- Dimension 3: Children of lower secondary school age who are not in primary or secondary school.

Two dimensions are represented by children in school but at risk of dropping out, as follows:

- Dimension 4: Children who are in primary school but at risk of dropping out.
- Dimension 5: Children who are in lower secondary school but at risk of dropping out.

The OOSCI approach uses a framework, based on the Monitoring Results for Equity System (MoRES)¹. Four major sets of barriers to school completion are identified, with a total of 10 barrier categories within the major sets. The list of barriers is presented below.

Figure 1: Barriers to Education

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT	Social norms Policy/legal framework Budget/expenditure Institutional management/coordination
SUPPLY	Availability of essential commodities/inputs Availability of adequately staffed services, facilities and information
DEMAND	Financial access Social and cultural practices and beliefs Continuity of use
QUALITY	Quality of services and goods

¹ United Nations Children's Fund, 'Monitoring Results for Equity System', Briefing Note, UNICEF, New York, 1 February 2013; open PDF at www.unicef.org/about/employ/files/MoRES_Briefing_Note.pdf.

Belize Context

There are two levels of preschool or pre-primary school in Belize. Students in Belize are not required to attend preschool. About 45% of students do attend preschool but this varies by factors such as urban/rural location and parent's SES/income. Preschools normally charge a fee for attendance. Preschool age is considered to be 3 and 4 years old.

Primary school is compulsory up to age 14. There are 8 levels of primary school, Infant 1 and 2, and Standards 1 through 6. The expected age of attendance is from 5 to 12.

There are four levels of secondary school – First Form to Fourth Form. The expected ages of attendance are 13 through 16.

Fewer than half of children in Belize attend preschool. While almost all students complete primary school in Belize, there is a significant decline in secondary school with only two-thirds of students completing school at this level. There are difference in school completion rates that occur by district, family income, rural/urban location, gender, disabilities and other factors.

The Belize Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture (MOEYSC)²² drafted an Education Sector Strategy for 2011-2016. Among other objectives, the strategy aims to reduce barriers to school completion by increasing the equitable access through number of schools and spaces in school, improving accountability, and improving education quality and relevance.

Belize OOSCI Study

The Belize OOSCI Study was started in 2016 and completed in September 2017. The study used a number of quantitative and qualitative data collection and analyses, as advised in the OOSCI manual.

MOEYSC data were analyzed to determine patterns by District. Additionally, MICS (2011 and 2015), MOEYSC and census data were analyzed to present profiles of excluded children according to the OOSCI methodology.

Interviews were conducted with 69 stakeholders working in the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports, and Culture, and other agencies serving children and adolescents in Belize. Primary and secondary schools were selected in each of the six districts, to include both those with indicators of high and low numbers of children and adolescents at-risk or who had dropped out. A total of 45 schools were involved in the interviews. Interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, school counsellors, PTA members, parents, students and children and adolescents who had dropped out or who were at risk of dropping out. Finally, interviews were also carried out with clients of youth services agencies who had dropped out or who were at risk of dropping out of school.

²² The Belize Ministry of Education has recently changed from Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports to Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture. Some of the earlier documents will be under the different Ministry names but all references have been changed in this document to MOEYSC for ease of understanding. Interviewees often shorten the name to MOE.

Profiles of Excluded Children

Profile 1: Poor, Rural children 4 years old who are not in school

Poor, rural children 4 years old and not in school comprise 46.53% of Dimension 1, equivalent to 693 children in this profile. The children in this profile were 4 years old (in school year 2014), from rural areas, and from the poorest wealth quintile. Over half of the children in this profile were males (51.06%), and were mainly from 2 districts, namely, Cayo (21.28%) and Toledo (38.3%). The ethnicity of the head of household for children in this profile was reported mainly as Mestizo (40.43%) and Maya (34.04%). Based on the MICS5, 25.3% of children in this profile had disabilities³.

Profile 2: Poor, Rural children 5 to 10 years old who have never attended school

Poor, rural children 5 to 10 years old, who have never attended school, comprise 28.97% of Dimension 2, equivalent to 632 children in this profile. All children in this profile were from rural areas, from the 2 poorest wealth quintiles, and had never attended school. Most of the children in this profile were 5 years old (70.97%), and most were females (58.06%). Children in this profile were mainly from 2 districts, namely Orange Walk (38.71%) and Toledo (29.03%). The ethnicity of the head of household for the children in this profile was reported mainly as Mennonite (41.94%), Maya (29.03%), and Mestizo (25.81%). Based on the MICS5, 36.4% of children in this profile had 1 or more disability.

Profile 3: Out of school children 11 to 14 years who completed grade 8 of lower secondary

In 2015, 9.48% of children of lower secondary school age were out of school, equivalent to 3901 persons. Of these, 2278 completed grade 8 but did not continue further in lower secondary. OOSC of lower secondary school age who completed grade 8, comprise 58.38% of all OOSC of lower secondary age (Dimension 3). Children in this profile were mostly 14 years old (67.02%), over half (54.26%) were females. Most were from rural areas (84.04%) and from the 2 poorest wealth quintiles (69.15%). Children in this profile were mostly from 3 districts, namely Corozal (25.53%), Orange Walk (28.72%), and Cayo (21.28%). The ethnicity of the head of household for over half of the children in this profile was Mestizo (53.19%).

Profile 4: Children attending primary school who are repeating the current grade of primary education

Children repeating the current grade of primary education comprised 5.14% of all children attending primary education in 2015, equivalent to 2672 persons in this profile. Of the children in this profile, 66.4% were 1-year overage or at medium risk of drop out, and 33.6% were 2 or more years overage or at high risk of drop out. Most of the children in this profile were males (59.06%) and most were from rural areas (69.13%). Children in this profile were mostly from the 2 poorest wealth quintiles (60.40%) and were mostly from 3 districts, namely, Stann Creek (26.17%), Belize (18.12%), and Cayo (16.78%). The ethnicity of the head of household for over half of the children in this profile was Mestizo (51.68%).

³ Questions about disabilities and child labour were not included in the MICS5 survey.

Profile 5: Children in grades 9 and 10 of lower secondary who are 2 or more years overage for the grade attended

Children attending grades 9 and 10 of lower secondary who were 2 or more years overage comprised 21.88% of all children in grades 9 and 10 of lower secondary, equivalent to 2737 persons in this profile. By classification, all children in this profile are at high risk of drop out (2 or more years overage). It is important to note that 20.95% of children in this profile were repeating the current grade of lower secondary. Most of the children in this profile were 15 or 16 years (71.43%), and most were males (61.69%). Over half of the children in this profile were from rural areas (51.30%). Nearly half of the children in this profile were from 2 districts, namely, Belize (27.92%) and Toledo (20.13%). The ethnicity of the head of household for most of the children in this profile was Mestizo (41.56%) and Creole (24.68%).

Barriers to School Completion

The profiles illustrate that there are several factors associated with lack of school completion including poverty, disability, late entry and inadequate preparation for primary, living in rural areas, and other factors. The profiles were mapped against subgroups of children and adolescents at risk or who had dropped out of school, as identified through interviews. The profiles and corresponding subgroups are presented below.

Figure 2: Profiles

Profiles	Groups This May Include
Poor, Rural children 4 years old not attending early childhood education	• Invisible children: children with disabilities, not enrolled • Invisible children: immigrants not enrolled, not attending regularly • Rural children • Children living in poverty
Poor, Rural children 5 to 10 years old who have never attended school.	• Invisible children: children with disabilities, not enrolled • Invisible children: immigrants not enrolled, not attending regularly • Rural children • Children living in poverty
OOSC 11 to 14 years who completed grade 8 of lower secondary.	• Rural adolescents • Adolescents living in poverty • Adolescents without basic academic foundations • Adolescents with ongoing academic challenges • Boys in gangs • Adolescents with family stressors/challenges • Adolescents with psychological/behavioural coping challenges • Adolescents with family responsibilities/income earners • Adolescents who may prefer technical or other training

Children who repeated any grade of primary education.	• Rural children and adolescents • Children and adolescents living in poverty • Children and adolescents without basic academic foundations • Children and adolescents with ongoing academic challenges • Boys in gangs • Children and adolescents with family stressors/challenges • Children and adolescents with psychological/behavioural coping challenges • Children and adolescents with family responsibilities/income earners • Children and adolescents who may prefer or be better accommodated in technical or other training
Adolescents in grades 8 or 9 of lower secondary who are 2 or more years overage for the grade attended	• Adolescents living in poverty • Adolescents without basic academic foundations • Adolescents with ongoing academic challenges • Pregnant girls/young mothers • Boys in gangs • Adolescents with family stressors/challenges • Adolescents with psychological/behavioural coping challenges • Adolescents with family responsibilities/income earners • Adolescents not accommodated in regular school system • Adolescents that don't make the transition to secondary school • Adolescents over 14 • Adolescents who want to return but can't/aren't sure how

The barriers identified through the qualitative data collection and analysis are presented below, using the OOSCI framework that classifies barriers in terms of specific domains and categories. See Figure 3.

Figure 3: Barriers

Domain	Category	Critical Barriers
Enabling Environment	Legislation/Policy	• Compulsory school age only 5 to 14 • MOEYSC mandated oversight focused mainly on primary school • MOEYSC financed or subsidized education focused mainly on primary school (and first two forms) • School-level policies and disciplinary measures lead to school absences (e.g., pregnancy)
	Budget/Expenditure	• Education only partially subsidized • Varying levels of school fees (and costs) depending on schools, locations etc. • Need for more school counsellors at primary and secondary levels

	Management/Coordination	• Limited staffing at District level (especially truancy and officers working with children with disabilities) • Schools not reporting truancy data in a timely manner to District offices • Children not tracked through the system • Disciplinary practices at school discretion result in absences and early school leaving
	Social Norms	• Acceptance that education can end at age 14 • Immigrant children not registered in school (or not registered until 8 years of age)
Supply	Availability of Essential Inputs	• Overcrowded classrooms make individualized instruction impossible • Preschools are not available in many rural communities • Schools at all levels turn students away based on space, grades and other factors
	Access to Adequate Staffed Services, Facilities and Information	• Insufficient staff and training to work with children with disabilities in schools • Insufficient number of preschools • Insufficient transportation • Some schools in poor condition with limited supplies and equipment • Alternative (trades) education not available in all communities; not provided in some schools • Insufficient accommodations for children with disabilities
Demand	Financial Access	• Direct and indirect costs of education exceed family capacity • Family need for children to work to contribute income • School costs (fees and other) at all levels of educational system (pre-school, primary school, secondary school) exceed family capacity
	Social and Cultural Practices and Beliefs	• Compulsory school age ends at 14 and some families consider this the appropriate age to withdraw • Taking time out of classes to earn income for the family is considered appropriate • Gangs make children fearful of walking to school • Drugs, gangs, are considered alternative paths

	Timing and Continuity of Use	• Compulsory school age ends at 14 • Fees higher in secondary school; makes transition more difficult • Not having access to/not attending preschool • Leaving early but wanting to return at a later age • MOEYSC/Schools do not have system in place to track (and facilitate) transition from Standard 6 to First Form • Adult education options not adequately matched with students
Quality	Quality	• Students enter primary and secondary school not adequately prepared academically • Students face language barriers that are not addressed in the school setting • Students are promoted to higher grades even when they do not have the basic academic knowledge to be successful in subsequent grades • Teachers not always equipped to deal with children with disabilities (e.g., preferential treatment and stigma) • Schools don't cater to a variety of interests and learning styles

The above list of barriers was further reduced and clustered, and applied to the profiles. The final list of barriers are as follows:

Barrier	Dimensions Affected
Barrier 1: Restricted Age Range for Compulsory Education	1, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 2: Affordability of Education	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 3: Insufficient MOEYSC and School Staff (Truancy, Children with Disabilities, School Counsellors)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 4: Need for Increased MOEYSC Oversight (Tracking, Monitoring, Disciplinary Practices)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 5: Low Learning Outcomes and Limited Access to Remedial and Alternative Options	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 6: Insufficient Supply (Preschools, Primary and Secondary Classrooms)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 7: Parental/Social Norms and Values Not Supportive of Education	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 8: Insufficient Tracking of and Intervention for Students Who Drop Out	2, 3

Recommendations

Recommendations to reduce barriers to school completion address funding, policy, training, tracking and monitoring, and program development. These are clustered by dimension.

Several recommendations relate to all five OOSCI dimensions. These address the need for educational costs to be subsidized for families in need, extending the age range for compulsory education, increasing quality and service delivery through training, improving tracking of students through the system, and implementing standardized disciplinary practices across the system.

Recommendations specifically addressing Dimension 1 focus on increasing preschool spaces, standardizing the preschool curriculum (and including ESL, reading) and conducting outreach and working with parents. These recommendations also include the collection of data on children with disabilities based on UNICEF/ Washington Group questions, either at the country or at the school level.

Recommendations specifically addressing Dimension 2 focus on increasing primary school spaces, standardizing acceptance and disciplinary practices, and having a process to intervene if space is unavailable at the start of the year.

Recommendations for Dimension 3 are similar for Dimension 2 but address the secondary school level, and include increasing secondary school spaces, standardizing acceptance and disciplinary practices, and having a process to intervene if space is unavailable at the start of the year.

Recommendations for Dimension 4 include emphasizing learning of language and reading skills in the first primary school years, increasing school counsellors and MOEYSC staff working on truancy and accessibility for children with disabilities, and providing alternative courses such as trades and agriculture in the primary school curriculum.

Recommendations for Dimension 5, of which many of the previously mentioned recommendations also address: increasing skilled school counsellors to work with adolescents and parents; providing timely remedial education to ensure basic foundations in English, reading and math; increasing anti-bullying programs and programs to address gangs, drugs and alcohol; and continuing to strengthen programs that help out-of-school adolescents to return to school; and increasing on-line learning and adult education options.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the Global initiative on Out-of-School Children

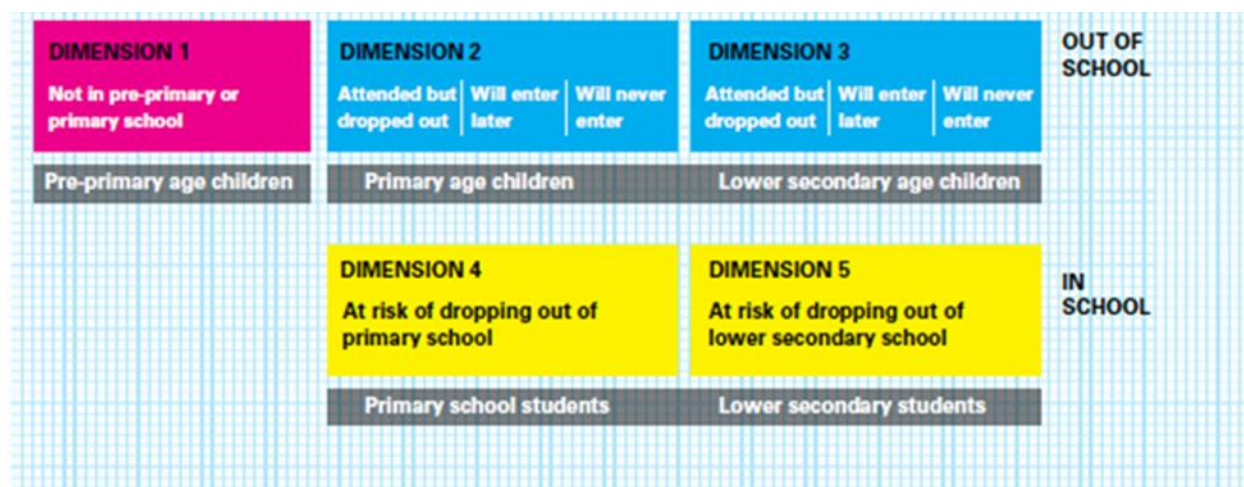
1.1.1 Background on the OOSCI

In 2010, UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) launched a global Out-of-school Children Initiative (OOSCI). The aim of this initiative is to improve the analysis around the factors affecting the exclusion of children from education, leading to more targeted and effective policies and programmatic approaches.

Those children who are still out of school often face deep rooted structural inequalities linked to income poverty, exposure to child labour, conflict and natural disasters, location, gender, HIV and AIDS, disability, ethnicity, language and religion. These are major barriers to education which place many countries at risk of not achieving universal primary or basic education.

The Five Dimensions of Exclusion (5DE) are central to the OOSCI approach, presenting groups of children for analysis and interventions as illustrated in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: The Five Dimensions of Exclusion⁴



The OOSCI approach uses a framework, based on the Monitoring Results for Equity System (MoRES)⁵. Four major sets of barriers to school completion are identified, with a total of 10 barrier categories within the major sets. The list of barriers is presented in Figure 5 below.

⁴ Global Out-of-School Children Initiative Operational Manual. Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Education Section, Programme Division, April 2015.

⁵ United Nations Children's Fund, 'Monitoring Results for Equity System', Briefing Note, UNICEF, New York, 1 February 2013; open PDF at www.unicef.org/about/employ/files/MoRES_Briefing_Note.pdf.

Figure 5: Barriers to Education

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT	• Social norms • Policy/legal framework • Budget/expenditure • Institutional management/coordination
SUPPLY	• Availability of essential commodities/inputs • Availability of adequately staffed services, facilities and information
DEMAND	• Financial access • Social and cultural practices and beliefs • Continuity of use
QUALITY	• Quality of services and goods

1.2 Education System in Belize

There are two levels of preschool or pre-primary school in Belize. Students in Belize are not required to attend preschool. About 49% of students do attend preschool but this varies by factors such as urban/rural location and parent's SES/income. Preschools normally charge a fee for attendance. Preschool age is considered to be 3 and 4 years old.

Primary school is compulsory up to age 14. There are 8 levels of primary school, Infant 1 and 2, and Standards 1 through 6. The expected age of attendance is from 5 to 12.

There are four levels of secondary school – First Form to Fourth Form. The expected ages of attendance are 13 through 16.

The MOEYSC subsidizes primary and secondary education, but there are some primary and secondary school fees that parents are required to pay. There are also costs for uniforms, textbooks, school supplies, transportation and food in some cases. Schools are managed by the government or by different religious denominations.

1.3 Country Context

1.3.1 School Dropout in Belize

Belize monitors key educational indicators including intake rates, transition rates, net and gross enrolment rates, resources, and internal efficiency. These are presented annually in the MOEYSC's Education's Abstract of Education Statistics. Progress on the main educational indicators over the past five years is presented in Table 1 below. Definitions provided for each of these indicators can be found in Annex B.

Table 1: Educational Indicators in Belize: 2011-2016⁶

INDICATORS	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015
Demographic, Social and Economic					
Apparent Intake Rate (Primary)	96.8%	97.3%	93.3%	91.6%	89.3%
Gross Enrolment Ratio (Preschool)	43.3%	44.5%	45.1%	44.6%	43.5%
Gross Enrolment Ratio (Primary)	106.7%	107.2%	103.8%	100.1%	97.0%
Gross Enrolment Ratio (Secondary)	64.2%	65.1%	66.3%	66.0%	66.3%
Access					
Net Intake Rate (Primary)	60.9%	61.3%	58.5%	56.8%	55.1%
Transition Rate (Primary – Secondary)	90.2%	85.0%	86.8%	83.5%	83.7%
Net Enrolment Ratio (Preschool, 3-4 yrs)	41.7%	42.4%	42.7%	42.7%	40.3%
Net Enrolment Ratio (Primary, 5-12 yrs)	94.6%	95.3%	92.0%	88.6%	86.3%
Net Enrolment Ratio (Secondary, 13-16 yrs)	49.6%	50.4%	51.3%	51.6%	52.1%
Resources					
% Trained Teachers at Primary Level	44.1%	51.4%	56.4%	63.3%	67.6%
% Trained Teachers at Secondary Level	30.3%	31.0%	27.0%	38.8%	39.6%
Number of Classrooms (primary)	2,845	2,857	2,943	3,056	3,063
Student-Teacher Ratio (primary)	22	22	23	22	22
Student-Teacher Ratio (Secondary)	14	14	15	15	16
Internal Efficiency					
Repetition Rate (Primary)	6.8%	6.2%	6.0%	6.3%	
Dropout Rate (Primary)	0.6%	0.7%	0.7%	0.8%	
Repetition Rate (Secondary)	7.1%	6.5%	7.6%	7.2%	
Dropout Rate (Secondary)	8.5%	8.4%	8.6%	8.3%	

As can be seen in the above table, fewer than half of children in Belize attend preschool, and this figure had not changed substantially over the past five years according to these statistics. Recent data collected through the Multiple Cluster Indicator Survey (MICS)⁷, however, suggests that there has been an increase in preschool enrollment between 2011 and 2016.

While almost all students complete primary school in Belize, there is a significant decline in secondary school with only two-thirds of students completing school at this level.

Many of the indicators show a slight decline over the five-year period, while others show a relatively stable pattern.

There is an apparent increase in the Net Enrolment Rate for secondary school over the five-year period. There is also an increase in the percent of trained teachers, particularly at the primary level, but also at the secondary level. There was also an increase in the number of primary school classrooms.

⁶ From Belize MOE, Abstract of Education Statistics, 2014/2015

⁷ UNICEF. Multiple Cluster Indicator Survey (2015).

The Belize Educational Sector Strategy (2011-2016) lays out a number of strategies that address three main policy objectives:

- Policy Objective 1: Increase Equitable Access to All Levels of Education
- Policy Objective 2: Improve the Quality and Relevance of Education at All Levels
- Policy Objective 3: Strengthen Governance Throughout the Sector with Emphasis on Increased Student Achievement

The strategies will be discussed in the relevant sections below.

1.4 Methodology, Data Sources, and Quality

1.4.1 Analysis of Existing Data

MOEYSC data were analyzed to determine patterns by District. These are presented in the Annex. Additionally, MICS and MOEYSC data were analyzed to present profiles of excluded children according to the OOSCI methodology.

1.4.2 Stakeholder Interviews

Interviews were completed with MOEYSC personnel at the headquarters and district offices. Additionally, interviews were held with youth service agencies and others. A complete list of stakeholders interviewed is presented in the Annex.

1.4.3 School-Based Interviews

Primary and secondary schools were selected in each of the six districts, to include both those with indicators of high and low numbers of children and adolescents at-risk. A total of 45 schools were involved in the interviews, with 272 individuals and groups. Interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, school counsellors, PTA members, parents, students and children and adolescents who had dropped out or who were at risk of dropping out.

It is important to note that, in Belize, secondary schools are able to establish acceptance criteria for admission and continued enrolment and so can refuse or expel students who do not meet these criteria. Students with poor grades and/or behavioral issues, therefore, are sometimes clustered in schools that open their doors to all applicants. Other factors that may be associated with high academic performance, such as parental support for education and financial capability, also may be more common in schools with stringent acceptance criteria. Thus, dropout rates in these schools may be largely a function of the starting characteristics of their school population. The school climate will also reflect the capability, performance and success of the students; in schools with more behavioural issues, for instance, other students may be drawn in to negative behavior.

1.4.5 Additional Interviews with Adolescents

Interviews were also carried out with 13 adolescents who were clients of youth services agencies and who had dropped out or who were at risk of dropping out of school. The agencies were 4H Club, Youth Cadet Corp, Skills Training Centre and the Conscious Youth Development Program.

1.4.6 Data Collection Challenges and Quality

Interviewers faced significant challenges arranging and carrying out interviews with adolescents identified by the schools who were at risk of dropping out, or who had dropped out. This ranged from interviewees being repeatedly unavailable at previously designated interview times, to outright hostility expressed toward the interviewer. In some cases, this appeared to be related to the perception that the interviewer was a government representative who would penalize the student or family, despite repeated assurances that we were independent. While we were successful in completing interviews with a total of 33 at-risk or out-of-school children and adolescents identified by schools, we recognized that it would be helpful to hear the perspectives of out-of-school adolescents identified through other sources, and particularly those who could relate their stories retrospectively having been out of the system for some time. Consequently, we interviewed another 13 adolescents at-risk or who had dropped out, and who were being supported to return.

CHAPTER 2: PROFILES OF EXCLUDED CHILDREN

2.1 Introduction

Grade Level	ISCED	Belize
Pre-primary	1 year: 4 years of age	2 years: ages 3 and 4
Primary	6 years, Grade 1 to Grade 6: ages 5 to 10	Infant 1 and 2, Standard 1 to Standard 6 (Primary): ages 5 to 12
Lower Secondary	4 years, Grade 7 to Grade 10: ages 11 to 14	First Form and Second Form (Secondary): ages 13 to 14
Upper Secondary	2 years, Grade 11 and Grade 12: ages 15 to 16	Third Form and Fourth Form (Secondary): ages 15 to 16

The following is an analysis of participation and exclusion in education for pre-primary, primary, and secondary education in Belize, firstly as defined by UNESCO for international comparison and secondly as defined by the national education system. The analysis was completed for two years (2010 and 2015) with data from 2 consecutive MICS⁸ (MICS4, MICS5).

Participation in education was highest at the primary school age (96.18%) where participation is compulsory. Participation drops to 90.53% at the lower secondary school age, and is lowest at the pre-primary age at 80.0%. There is practically no gender bias in participation at the primary school age, while at the pre-primary and lower secondary school ages boys tend to have slightly lower participation rates than girls. Relative wealth status, geographic location, and ethnicity are important factors which influence school participation and exclusion. At the primary school age poor, rural, Mestizo and Mennonite children experienced higher rates of exclusion from education. Poor, rural, Mestizo children of lower secondary school age living in the two northern districts, experienced higher rates of exclusion from education. At the pre-primary school age poor, rural, Mestizo, Maya, and Mennonite children experienced higher rates of exclusion from education. Meanwhile, children at risk of exclusion were mostly poor, rural, males of Mestizo, Maya, and Creole ethnicity living in the Belize and Toledo districts.

2.2 Data Gaps and Limitations

In mid-June 2017, a decision was made to re-run the OOSCI analysis using the MICS5 dataset, which was later released on June 22, 2017. The data collection for the MICS5 (2015) survey was carried out between October 2015 and January 2016 and the education data were referenced to school year 2015-16 (present school year) and school year 2014-15 (previous school year). Education data were collected for persons 5 to 24 years old at the time of the interview. As part of the OOSCI methodology, the ages of respondents were recalculated to correspond to the start of the present school year (September 2015). In order to assess the attendance rates of persons 4 years old, the attendance data for the previous school year was

⁸ Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (UNICEF).

analyzed and the ages were further adjusted to correspond to the start of the previous school year (September 2014).

Back in mid-March 2017, an earlier decision was made to use the MICS4 (2011) dataset for the OOSC analysis as the release of the final MICS5 (2015) dataset was considerably delayed. The MICS4 (2011) data were collected in summer of 2011 and education data were referenced to school year 2010-11 (present school year) and school year 2009-10 (previous school year). The ages of respondents were the ages in completed years at the time of the data collection (June to July 2011), hence ages were recalculated to correspond to the start of the present school year (September 2010). In order to assess the attendance rates of persons 4 years old, the attendance data for the previous school year was analyzed and the ages were further adjusted to correspond to the start of the previous school year (September 2014). This situation therefore afforded the analysis of the OOSC consecutive MICS datasets (MICS5, MICS4) and enabled the analysis of changes in the situation of OOSC between the 2 most recent MICS surveys.

Administrative data from the Ministry of Education at the school level were compiled for school year 2014-15 and 2015-16 on enrolment, repetition, and dropout by age, grade, and sex. The administrative data, however, could not provide the detailed individual characteristics of persons in-school for use in the profiles. The OpenEMIS database was still being populated by the MOE and was considered incomplete with respect to individual student information.

The Belize Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2016 was also considered as it included a set of Education questions for all persons 5 years and older, including the present education level for persons attending school, the highest level of education attained for persons not presently attending school, and reasons for not presently attending school.

2.3 The Five Dimensions of Exclusion

Table 1 below provides a summary of the 5 dimensions of exclusion based on the MICS5 (2015) data. The education levels referred to in the 5 dimensions are defined according to the UNESCO International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), which differ from the levels as defined in the national education system. Table 1 The 5DE, quantifies the size and rate of the exclusion for each of the 5 dimensions. Dimensions 1, 2, and 3 pertain to out of school children, in the specific age groups relating to pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education respectively. Dimensions 4 and 5 pertain to children attending primary and lower secondary respectively, regardless of age, and who are at risk of drop out.

Table 1. The 5DE Groups of children by exposure to education			
Type of Exclusion	Dimension	Size of exclusion	Severity of exclusion

EXCLUDED	Dimension 1⁹: Children of pre-primary school age who are not in pre-primary or primary school	1489 children 4-years old not in school	20.0% of 4-year olds not in school
	Dimension 2¹⁰: Children of primary school age who are not in primary or secondary school	2183 children 5 to 10 years old out of school	3.82% of children 5 to 10 years old out of school
	Dimension 3: Children of lower secondary school age who are not in primary, secondary, or post-secondary	3901 children 11 to 14 years old out of school	9.48% of children 11 to 14 years old not in school
AT Risk¹¹ OF EXCLUSION	Dimension 4: Children who are in primary school but at risk of dropping out	15,153 children in primary school at risk of drop out	29.13% of children attending primary were overage for the grade attended (at risk). Of these, 68.9% were at moderate risk (1-year overage) and 31.1% were at high risk (2 or more years overage) of dropout.
	Dimension 5: Children who are in lower secondary school but at risk of dropping out	12,389 children in lower secondary at risk of drop out	43.83% of children attending lower secondary were overage for the grade attended. Of these, 56.3% were at moderate risk (1-year overage) and 43.7% were at high risk (2 or more years overage) of dropout.

Dimension 1: Children of pre-primary school age who are not in pre-primary or primary school

Dimension 1 was quantified and characterized based on attendance in the previous school year (2014). This was necessary as only children who were 5 years or older at the time of the survey data collection (October 2015 to January 2016), were interviewed regarding school attendance. In order to obtain usable data on school attendance of 4-year old children, we needed to look back at school attendance one year earlier, that is, in the previous school year (2014). Ages of children were re-calculated to the beginning of school year 2014-15 in order to identify 4-year old children attending school in the previous school year.

Dimension 1: 20% of children 4-years old were not in school in 2015.

⁹ Dimension 1 was quantified based on attendance in the previous school year (2014)

¹⁰ Dimension 2 includes children of primary school age attending pre-primary and 'other' education

¹¹ Risk of drop out based on 1 or more years overage for the grade attended

There were 507 4-year olds in the sample (based on age at the beginning of the previous school year), of which 505 provided information on school attendance. A total of 101 4-year olds in the sample did not attend school in the previous school year, that is, 20.0% of 4-year olds in the survey did not attend school in the previous school year. This rate was then assumed as the out of school rate for the present school year (2015). This is equivalent to 1489 4-year old children in the population, not attending school in 2015. It is interesting to note that of the 80% of 4-year old children attending school in 2014, 43.37% were attending pre-primary while a significant percent (36.63%) were attending primary.

There were slightly more boys (52.5%) than girls (47.5%) in this dimension. Ethnicity of the head of household for 50.5% of children in this dimension was Mestizo, followed by Maya (17.8%) and Mennonite (16.8%). Most of the children in this dimension were from rural areas (78.8%), and nearly half (47.5%) were in the poorest wealth quintile. Half of the children in this dimension were from 2 districts, namely Orange Walk (26.3%) and Toledo (24.2%).

Dimension 2: Children of primary school age who are not in primary or secondary school

This dimension includes children 5 to 10 years old who (1) were not attending primary or secondary school, as well as (2) children in this age group attending pre-primary or 'other' education during the present school year (2015). There were 2809 children in this age group in the sample, of which 2803 provided information on school attendance. A total of 107 children in this age group were categorized as being out of school in the school year 2015, that is, 3.82% of children in this age group were out of school in 2015, equivalent to 2183 children in the population.

Dimension 2: 3.82% of children 5 to 10 years old were out of school in 2015.

It is important to note that of the 107 out of school children in the sample, 21 were actually attending pre-primary education in 2015 and 29 children were attending 'other' education which is assumed to be mainly home schooling and was therefore not considered formal education. In addition, 42 children in this dimension had never attended school (39.25%), while 15 children in this dimension have dropped out of school (14.02%).

Unlike dimension 1, there were just as many boys (50.5%) as girls (49.5%) in dimension 2. Nearly half of the children in this dimension were 5 years old (47.7%). The attendance rate for children 5 years old in primary was 89.84%, below the attendance rates of 97% for children 6 to 10 years. These children were mostly from rural areas (85%) and most were from the 2 poorest wealth quintiles (76.6%). The ethnicity of the head of household of children in this dimension was reported mainly as Mestizo (26.2%) and Mennonite (44.9%). Children in this dimension were mainly from the Corozal district (37.4%).

Dimension 3: Children of lower secondary school age who are not in primary or secondary school

This dimension includes children 11 to 14 years old who were not attending primary or secondary school. This dimension by definition also includes children who completed grade 8 (standard 6) but have not continued further in lower secondary. There were a total of 1700 children 11 to 14 years in the sample, of which 1699 children provided information on school attendance. A total of 161 children in this age group were out of school in school year 2015, that is, 9.48% of children in this age group were out of school in 2015, equivalent to 3901 children in the population.

Dimension 3: 9.48% of children 11 to 14 years old were out of school in 2015.

It is important to note that 94 children in this dimension had completed grade 8, that is, the majority of the children (58.4%) in this dimension completed grade 8 (standard 6¹²) but did not continue further in lower secondary. Another 48 children in this dimension had attended school in the past but were no longer in school, that is, 29.8% of the children in this dimension had dropped out of school. Another 9 children in this dimension had never attended school, that is, 5.6% of the children in this dimension have never attended school. The remaining 10 children in this dimension attended 'other' which was assumed to be mostly home schooling.

Similar to dimension 2, there were more males (53.6%) than females (46.4%) in dimension 3. Most of the children in this dimension were 13 and 14 years old (88.1%). Children in this dimension were mostly from rural areas (82.8%), and most were from the 2 poorest wealth quintiles (70.2%). Nearly half (49.0%) of the children in this dimension were from the 2 northern districts, namely Corozal (23.2%) and Orange Walk (25.8%). Ethnicity of the head of household was reported as Mestizo for half (50.3%) of the children in this dimension, followed by Maya (20.5%) and Mennonite (18.0%).

Dimension 4: Children who are in primary school but at risk of dropping out

NOTE: For the purpose of Dimension 4 and Dimension 5, overage for the current grade level attended was used as a proxy measure for risk of dropout. Children 1-year overage for the grade level attended are considered at medium risk of dropout. Children 2 or more years overage for the current grade level attended are considered at high risk of dropout.

This dimension includes children who were at least 1 year over age for the primary school grade level attended in school year 2015. By definition, this includes children attending grade 1 (Infant 1) thru grade 6 (standard 4), according to the UNESCO classification of primary education (ISCED). The definition does not limit or restrict the ages of children attending primary to the official age group for primary¹³. Based on the survey sample counts, there were a total of 2901 children attending primary school (grade 1 to

¹² In the Belize education system, these children completed/graduated from primary school

¹³ The official primary school age is 5 to 10 years corresponding with the UNESCO definition of primary education

grade 6) in 2015. Of this total, 2056 children attending primary were at or below the official age for grade, that is, the 70.87% of children attending primary were at or below the official age for grade in 2015. The remaining 845 children attending primary were 1 or more years overage for the grade level attended, that is, 29.13% of children attending primary were overage for the grade level attended in 2015. A further breakdown of the overage children in primary indicate that 582 children were 1-year overage for the grade level attended, that is, 68.88% of the overage children in primary were at medium risk of drop out in 2015. The remaining 263 overage children in primary were 2 or more years overage for grade attended, that is, 31.12% of overage children in primary were at high risk of drop out in 2015.

Dimension 4: 29.13% of children attending primary were at risk of drop out in 2015.

Most of the overage children in primary were males (58.9%) and more than half were between 9 to 11 years old (56.6%). The children in this dimension were mostly from rural areas (65.4%) and the most were from the 2 poorest wealth quintiles (62.1%). More than half (57.9%) of the children in this dimension were found in 3 districts, namely Belize (19.3%), Cayo (18.8%), and Toledo (19.8%). The ethnicity of the head of household for children in this dimension was reported mainly as Mestizo (50.2%), Maya (18.7%), and Creole (16.7%). A further analysis of the overage children in primary, indicate that 17.6% were repeating the current grade level in 2015. About 6.0% of the overage children in primary were actually new entrants to primary in 2015. Delayed entry into primary and repetition are two of the factors which contribute to overage children in primary school.

Dimension 5: Children in lower secondary school but at risk of dropping out

This dimension includes children who were at least 1 year over age for the lower secondary school grade level attended in the present school year (2015). By definition, this includes children attending grade 7 (Standard 5) thru grade 10 (Form 2), according to the UNESCO classification of lower secondary education. As with dimension 4, the definition does not limit or restrict the ages of children attending lower secondary to the official age group for lower secondary¹⁴. Based on the survey sample counts, there were 1581 children attending lower secondary (grade 7 to grade 10) in 2015. Of this total, 888 children in lower secondary were at or below the official age for grade attended, that is, more than half (56.17%) of the children in lower secondary were at or below the official age for grade attended in 2015. The remaining 693 children in lower secondary were 1 or more-year overage for the grade level attended, that is, 43.83% of children in lower secondary were 1 or more-year overage for the grade level attended in 2015. A further breakdown of the overage children in lower secondary indicate that 390 children were 1-year overage for the grade attended in 2015, that is, 56.3% were at medium risk of drop out. The remaining 303 overage children in lower secondary were 2 or more years overage for the grade attended in 2015, that is, 43.7% were at high risk of drop out.

¹⁴ The official age group is 11 to 14 years corresponding with the UNESCO definition of lower secondary education

Dimension 5: 43.83% of children in lower secondary were at risk of drop out in 2015.

More than half of the overage children in lower secondary were males (56.9%), and most were between 13 to 15 years old (65.9%). More than half of the overage children in lower secondary were from rural areas (56.6%). Nearly half (44.4%) of the children in this dimension were from 2 districts, namely Belize (23.7%) and Toledo (20.8%). Over half (51.2%) of the overage children in lower secondary were from the 2 poorest wealth quintiles. The ethnicity of the head of household for the children in this dimension was reported mainly as Mestizo (44.3%), Creole (21.5%), and Maya (18.9%). A further analysis of the overage children in lower secondary indicates that 11.5% were repeating the same grade level in lower secondary in 2015.

2.4 Demographic Differences Associated with School Attendance

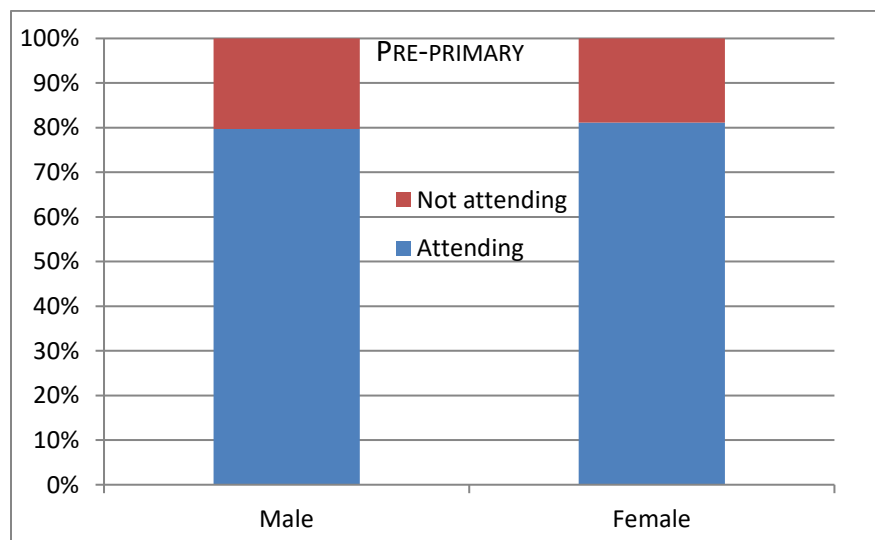
School attendance rates were examined for several demographic factors, including gender, age, urban-rural, district, wealth, and ethnicity. The analysis of school attendance was conducted on 3 separate age groups corresponding to pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary education as defined by UNESCO for international comparison. Ratios of school attendance were computed and were interpreted similar to the concept of a parity index.

i. GENDER

PRE-PRIMARY

Gender difference in school attendance is small for children of pre-primary age (4 years). The ratio of the attendance rate of boys of pre-primary age to the attendance rate of girls of pre-primary age is 0.98. This implies that the attendance rate of boys of pre-primary age is 1.77% lesser than the attendance rate of girls of pre-primary age. See Figure 7.

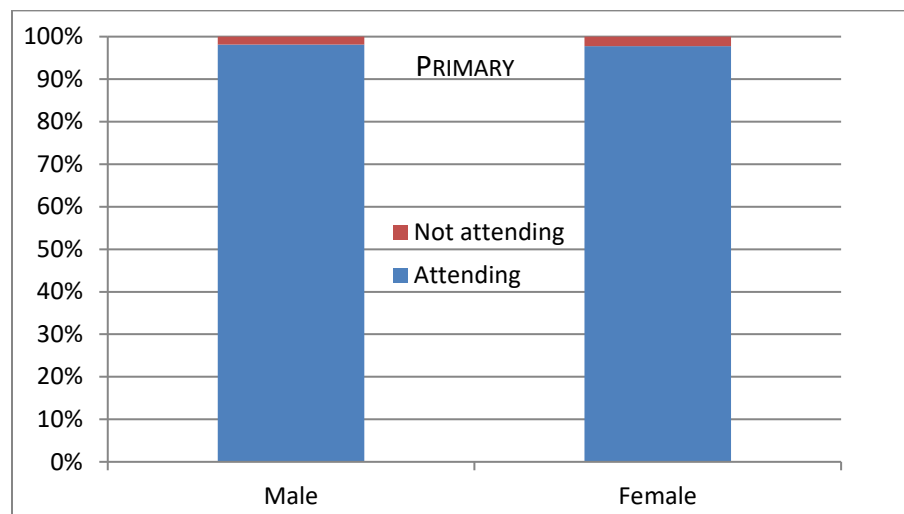
Figure 6: Gender Differences in School Attendance at Pre-Primary Level



PRIMARY (ISCED)

Gender difference in school attendance is practically nil for children of primary (ISCED) school age (5 to 10 years). The ratio of the attendance rate of boys of primary school age to the attendance rate of girls of primary school age is 1.00. See Figure 8. This implies that the attendance rate of boys of primary school age is 0.42% greater than the attendance rate of girls of primary school age, which for practical purpose implies that there is no gender difference in school attendance for children at the primary school age.

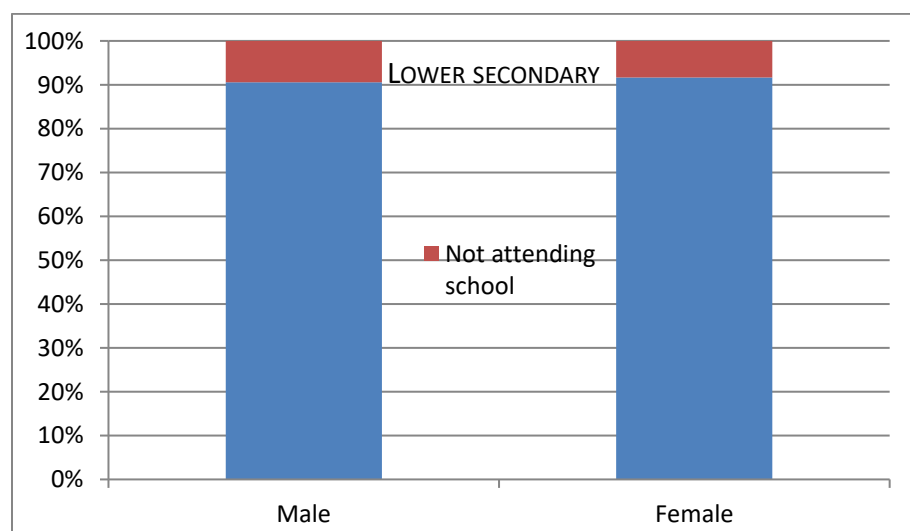
Figure 7: Gender Differences in School Attendance at Primary Level



LOWER SECONDARY (ISCED)

Gender difference in school attendance is small for children of lower secondary (ISCED) school age (11 to 14 years). The ratio of the attendance rate of boys of lower secondary school age to the attendance rate of girls of the same age group is 0.99. See Figure 9. This implies that the attendance rate for boys of lower secondary school age is 1.26% lesser than the attendance rate of girls of the same age group.

Figure 8: Gender Differences in School Attendance at Lower-Secondary Level

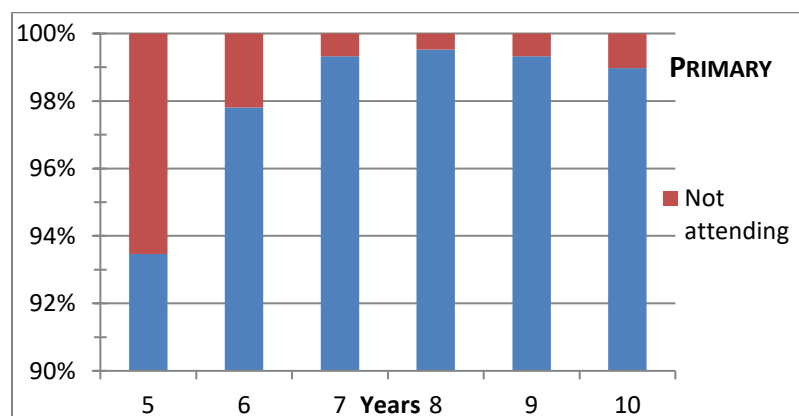


ii. AGE

PRIMARY (ISCED)

The analysis of school attendance by age for children of primary (ISCED) school age (5 to 10 years) indicate that the lowest rate of attendance was at age 5 years. Comparison was made to school attendance of children 8 years old where the rate of attendance was highest. The ratio of the attendance rate of children 5 years old to the attendance rate of children 8 years old was 0.94. This implies that the attendance rate at age 5 years is 6.09% lesser than the attendance rate at age 8 years. See Figure 10.

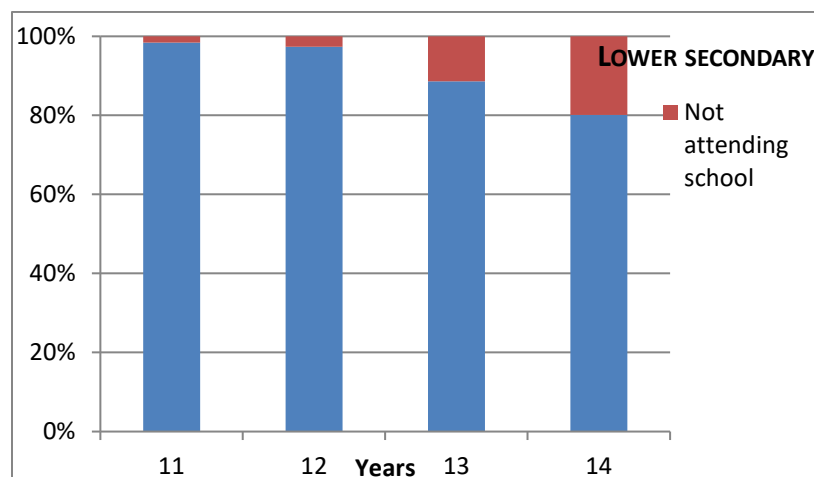
Figure 9: Age Differences in School Attendance at Primary Level



LOWER SECONDARY (ISCED)

The analysis of school attendance by age for children of lower secondary (ISCED) school age (11 to 14 years) indicate that the lowest rate of attendance was at age 14 years. Comparison was made to school attendance of children 11 years old where the rate of attendance was highest. The ratio of the attendance rate of children 14 years old to the attendance rate of children 11 years old was 0.81. This implies that the attendance rate at age 14 years is 18.56% lesser than the attendance rate at age 11 years, which represents a large difference in attendance.

Figure 10: Age Differences in School Attendance at Lower-Secondary Level

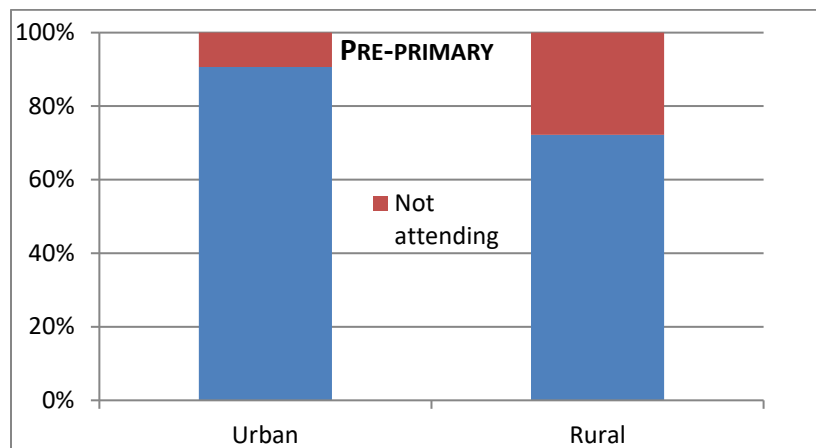


iii. URBAN/RURAL

PRE-PRIMARY

Urban-rural difference in school attendance is very pronounced for children of pre-primary age (4 years). The ratio of the attendance rate of urban children of pre-primary age to the attendance rate of rural children of pre-primary age is 1.25. See Figure 12. This implies that the attendance rate of urban children of pre-primary age is 25.45% greater than the attendance rate of rural children of pre-primary age.

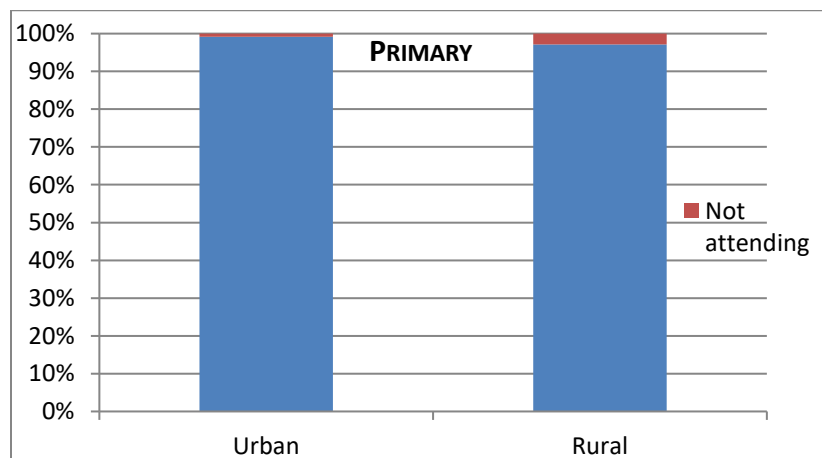
Figure 11: Urban/Rural Differences in School Attendance at Pre-Primary Level



PRIMARY (ISCED)

Urban-rural difference in school attendance is small for children of primary (ISCED) school age (5 to 10 years). The ratio of the attendance rate of urban children of primary school age to the attendance rate of rural children of primary school age is 1.02. See Figure 13. This implies that the attendance rate of urban children of primary school age is 2.06% greater than the attendance rate of rural children of primary school age.

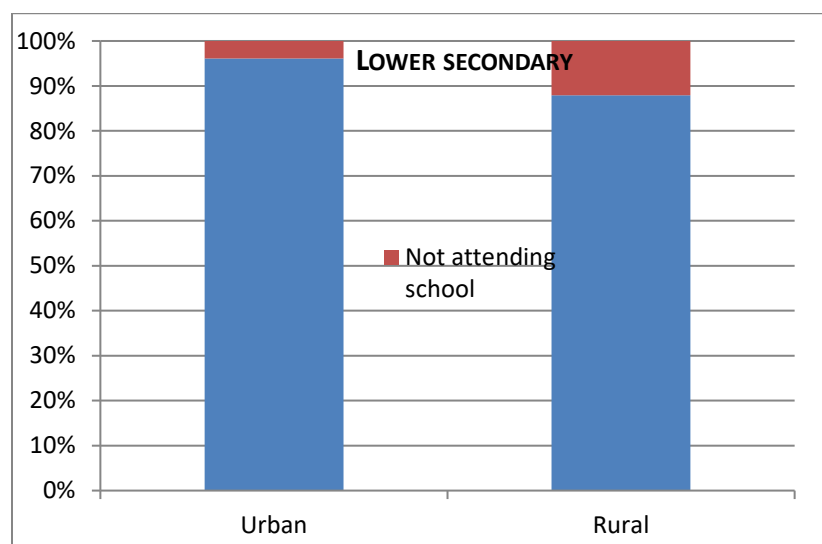
Figure 12: Urban/Rural Differences in School Attendance at Primary Level



LOWER SECONDARY (ISCED)

Urban-rural difference in school attendance is significant for children of lower secondary (ISCED) school age (11 to 14 years). The ratio of the attendance rate of urban children of lower secondary school age to the attendance rate of rural children of the same age group is 1.09. See Figure 14. This implies that the attendance rate for urban children of lower secondary school age is 9.30% greater than the attendance rate for rural children of the same age group.

Figure 13: Urban/Rural Differences in School Attendance at Lower-Secondary Level



iv. DISTRICT

PRE-PRIMARY

The analysis of school attendance by district for children of pre-primary age indicate that the lowest rates of school attendance were in 3 districts, namely Orange Walk, Cayo, and Toledo districts. Comparisons were made to the Belize district where school attendance of children of pre-primary age was higher. The ratios of the attendance rates of children of pre-primary age in Orange Walk, Cayo, and Toledo districts to the attendance rate of children of pre-primary age in the Belize district were 0.71, 0.80, and 0.81 respectively. See Figure 15. This implies that the attendance rate of children of pre-primary age in Orange Walk, Cayo, and Toledo districts were 28.72%, 19.77%, and 19.14% lesser than the attendance rate of children of pre-primary age in the Belize district.

PRIMARY (ISCED)

The analysis of school attendance by district for children of primary (ISCED) school age (5 to 10 years) indicate very small differences in school attendance among districts with the lowest rate of attendance in the Orange Walk district. Comparison was made to the Belize district where school attendance of children of primary school age was highest. The ratio of the attendance rate of children of primary school age in Orange Walk to the attendance rate of children of primary school age in the Belize district was 0.97. See Figure 16. This implies that the attendance rate of children of primary school age attending school in Orange Walk was 3.09% lesser than the attendance rate of children of primary school age in the Belize district.

Figure 14: District Differences in School Attendance at Pre-Primary Level

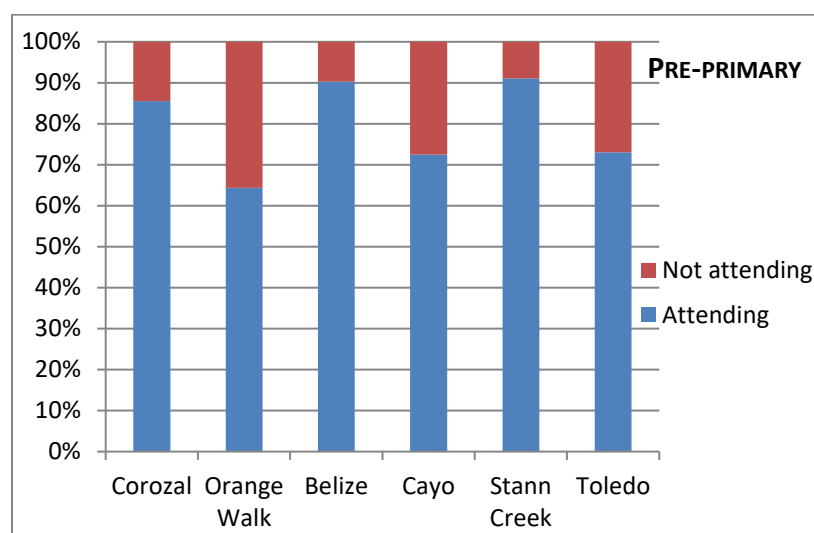
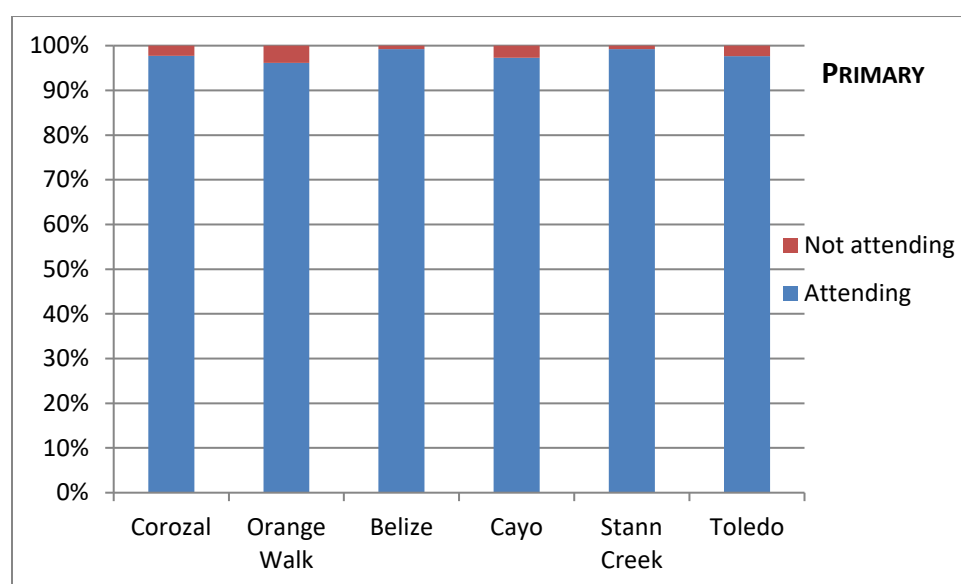


Figure 15: District Differences in School Attendance at Primary Level

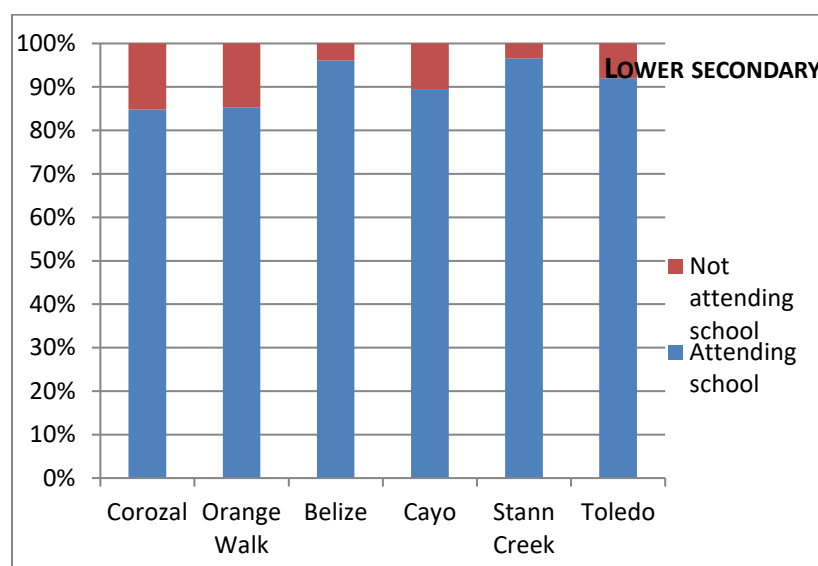


LOWER SECONDARY (ISCED)

The analysis of school attendance by district for children of lower secondary (ISCED) school age (11 to 14 years) indicate that the lowest rates of attendance were in the 2 northern districts, namely Corozal and Orange Walk districts. Comparisons were made to the Belize district where the attendance rate of children of lower secondary school age was higher. The ratios of the attendance rates of children of lower secondary school age in Corozal and Orange Walk districts to the attendance rate of children of lower secondary school age in the Belize district were 0.88 and 0.89 respectively. See Figure 17. This implies that the attendance rates of children of lower secondary school age in Corozal and Orange Walk districts

were 11.73% and 11.21% lesser than the attendance rate of children of lower secondary school age in the Belize district.

Figure 16: District Differences in School Attendance at Lower-Secondary Level



v. WEALTH QUINTILE

PRE-PRIMARY

The analysis of school attendance by wealth quintile for children of pre-primary age shows a significant gap in school attendance between the lowest (poorest) wealth quintile and the highest wealth quintile. The ratio of the attendance rate of children of pre-primary age in the lowest wealth quintile to the attendance rate of children of pre-primary age in the highest wealth quintile was 0.67. See Figure 18. This implies that the attendance rate of children of pre-primary age in the lowest wealth quintile was 32.54% lesser than the attendance rate of children of pre-primary age in the highest wealth quintile.

PRIMARY

The analysis of school attendance by wealth quintile for children of primary (ISCED) school age (5 to 10 years) shows a small difference in school attendance between the lowest (poorest) wealth quintile and the highest wealth quintile. The ratio of the attendance rate of children of primary school age in the lowest wealth quintile to the attendance rate of children of primary school age in the highest wealth quintile was 0.97. See Figure 19. This implies that the attendance rate of children of primary school age in the lowest wealth quintile was 3.26% lesser than the attendance rate of children of primary school age in the highest wealth quintile.

Figure 17: Wealth Quintile Differences in School Attendance at Pre-Primary Level

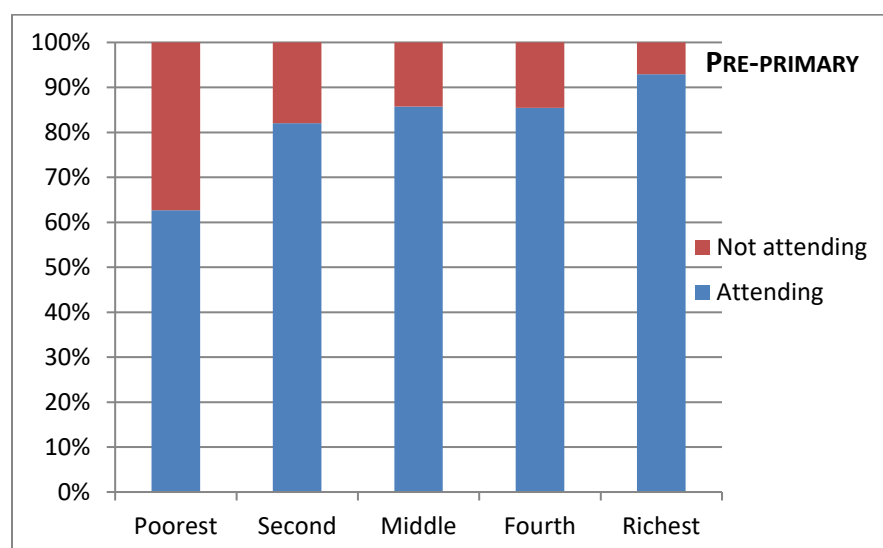
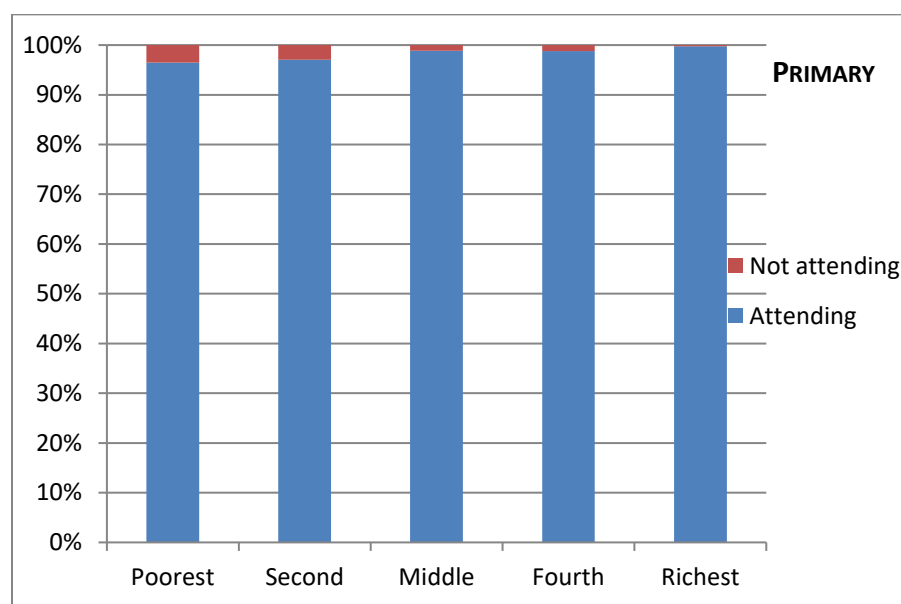


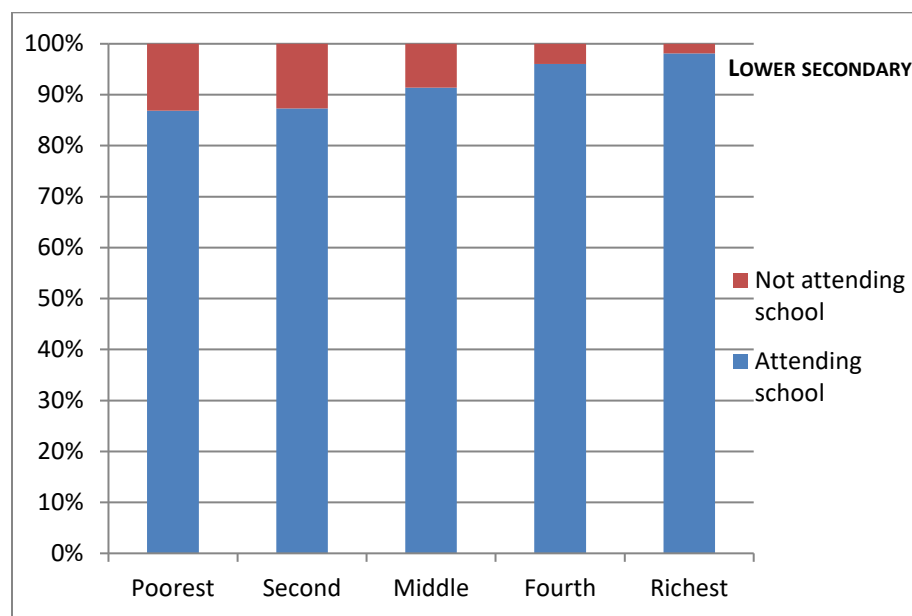
Figure 18: Wealth Quintile Differences in School Attendance at Primary Level



LOWER SECONDARY

The analysis of school attendance by wealth quintile for children of lower secondary (ISCED) school age (11 to 14 years) shows a significant gap in school attendance between the 2 lowest (poorest) wealth quintiles and the highest wealth quintile. The ratios of the attendance rate for children of lower secondary school age in the 2 lowest wealth quintiles to the attendance rate of children of lower secondary school age in the highest wealth quintile were 0.89 and 0.89 respectively. See Figure 20. This implies that the attendance rates of children of lower secondary school age in the 2 lowest wealth quintiles were 11.48% and 11.03% lesser than the attendance rate of children of lower secondary school age in the highest wealth quintile.

Figure 19: Wealth Quintile Differences in School Attendance at Lower-Secondary Level



ETHNICITY (OF THE HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD)

PRE-PRIMARY

The analysis of school attendance by ethnicity shows that pre-primary age children of Mennonite households have the lowest rate of school attendance. Comparison was made to pre-primary age children of Creole households where school attendance was higher. The ratio of the attendance rate of pre-primary age children of Mennonite households to the attendance rate of pre-primary age children of Creole households was 0.22. This implies that the attendance rate of children of pre-primary age in Mennonite households was 77.92% lesser than the attendance rate of children of pre-primary age in Creole households. See Figure 21. This represents a very large gap in school attendance for pre-primary age children of Mennonite households, however some caution must be urged as this estimate was based on a sample of only 20 Mennonite children of pre-primary age.

PRIMARY

The analysis of school attendance by ethnicity shows that primary school age children of Mennonite households have the lowest rate of school attendance. Comparison was made to primary school age children of Creole households where school attendance was highest. The ratio of the attendance rate of primary school age children of Mennonite households to the attendance rate of primary school age children of Creole households was 0.83. See Figure 22. This implies that the attendance rate of children of primary school age in Mennonite households was 16.70% lesser than the attendance rate of children of primary school age in Creole households. This represents a significant gap in school attendance for primary school age children of Mennonite households.

Figure 20: Ethnicity Differences in School Attendance at Pre-Primary Level

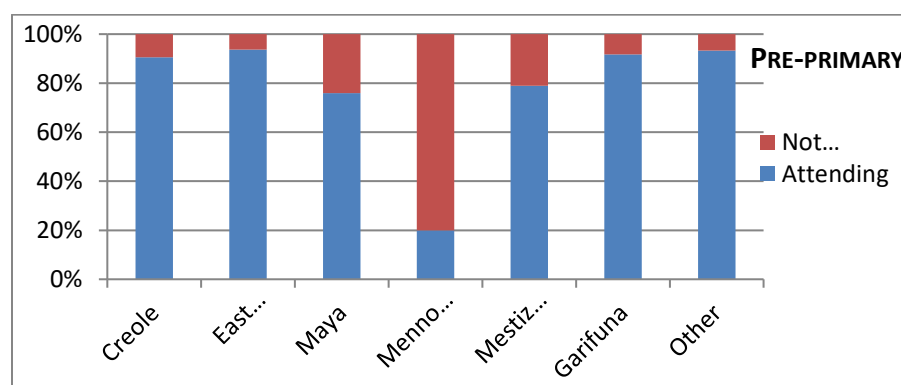
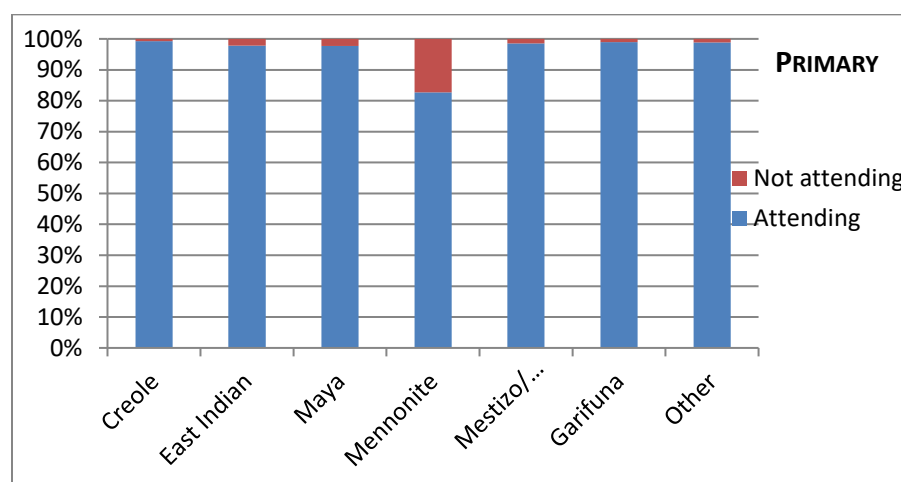


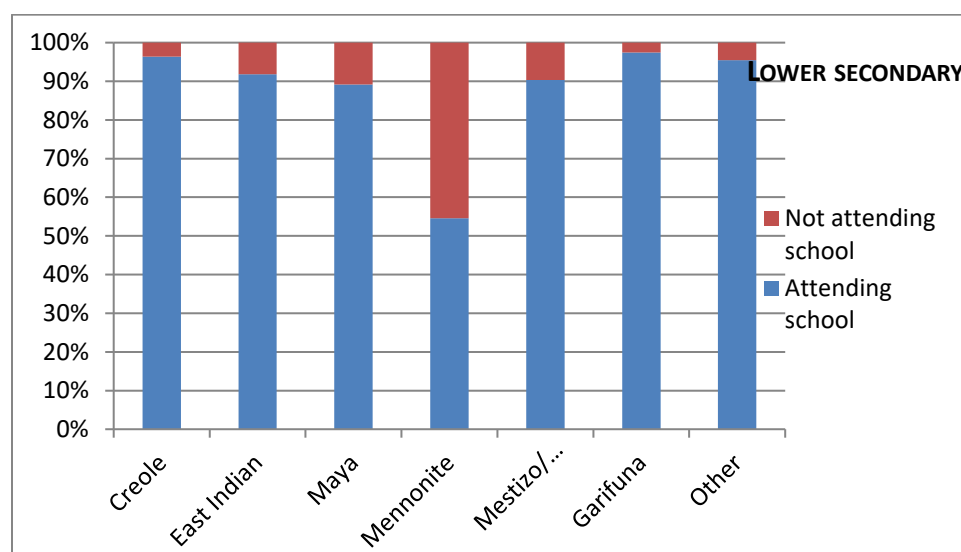
Figure 21: Ethnicity Differences in School Attendance at Primary Level



LOWER SECONDARY

The analysis of school attendance by ethnicity shows that lower secondary school age children of Mennonite households have the lowest rate of school attendance. Comparison was made to lower secondary school age children of Creole households where school attendance was higher. The ratio of the attendance rate of lower secondary school age children of Mennonite households to the attendance rate of lower secondary school age children of Creole households was 0.57. This implies that the attendance rate of children of lower secondary school age in Mennonite households was 43.42% lesser than the attendance rate of children of lower secondary school age in Creole households. See Figure 23. This represents a very large gap in school attendance for lower secondary school age children of Mennonite households.

Figure 22: Ethnicity Differences in School Attendance at Lower-Secondary Level



2.5 Key Profiles of Excluded Children

Profiles of exclusion	Dimensions of Exclusion					Size of exclusion	Severity of exclusion
	1	2	3	4	5		
Poor, Rural children 4 years old not in school	X					Poor, rural children not in school comprise 46.53% of Dimension 1, equivalent to 693 children in this profile.	
Poor, Rural children 5 to 10 years old who have never attended school		x				Poor, rural children 5 to 10 years who have never attended school comprise 28.97% of Dimension 2, equivalent to 632 children in this profile.	
Out of school children 11 to 14 years who completed grade 8 of lower secondary			x			Out of school children of lower secondary age who completed grade 8 comprise 58.38% of Dimension 3, equivalent to 2278 persons in this profile.	In 2015, 9.48% of children of lower secondary school age were out of school, equivalent to 3901 persons. Of these 2278 completed grade 8 but never continued to complete lower secondary.
Children in primary who are repeating the				x		Children repeating the current grade of primary education comprised 5.14% of all children attending	Of the children in this profile, 66.4% were at medium risk (1-year overage) of drop out, and 33.6% were at high risk (2

current grade of primary education						primary education, equivalent to 2672 persons in this profile.	or more years overage) of drop out.
Children in grades 9 or 10 of lower secondary who are 2 or more years overage for the grade attended					X	Children attending grades 9 and 10 of lower secondary who were 2 or more years overage comprised 21.88% of all children in grades 9 and 10 of lower secondary, equivalent to 2737 persons in this profile.	All children in this profile are considered at high risk of exclusion (2 or more years overage).

Profile 1: Poor, Rural children 4 years old who are not in school

Similar to dimension 1, the children in this profile were selected based on school attendance in the previous school year (2014). Poor, rural children 4 years old and not in school comprise 46.53% of Dimension 1, equivalent to 693 children in this profile. All children in this profile were 4 years old (in school year 2014), from rural areas, and from the poorest wealth quintile. Over half of the children in this profile were males (51.06%), and were mainly from 2 districts, namely, Cayo (21.28%) and Toledo (38.3%). The ethnicity of the head of household for children in this profile was reported mainly as Mestizo (40.43%) and Maya (34.04%).

Profile 2: Poor, Rural children 5 to 10 years old who have never attended school

Poor, rural children 5 to 10 years old, who have never attended school, comprise 28.97% of Dimension 2, equivalent to 632 children in this profile. All children in this profile were from rural areas, from the 2 poorest wealth quintiles, and had never attended school. Most of the children in this profile were 5 years old (70.97%), and most were females (58.06%). Children in this profile were mainly from 2 districts, namely Orange Walk (38.71%) and Toledo (29.03%). The ethnicity of the head of household for the children in this profile was reported mainly as Mennonite (41.94%), Maya (29.03%), and Mestizo (25.81%).

Profile 3: Out of school children 11 to 14 years who completed grade 8 of lower secondary

In 2015, 9.48% of children of lower secondary school age were out of school, equivalent to 3901 persons. Of these, 2278 completed grade 8 but did not continue further in lower secondary. Out of school children of lower secondary school age who completed grade 8, comprise 58.38% of all out of school children of lower secondary age (Dimension 3). Children in this profile were mostly 14 years old (67.02%), over half (54.26%) were females. Most were from rural areas (84.04%) and from the 2 poorest wealth quintiles (69.15%). Children in this profile were mostly from 3 districts, namely Corozal (25.53%), Orange Walk (28.72%), and Cayo (21.28%). The ethnicity of the head of household for over half of the children in this profile was Mestizo (53.19%).

Profile 4: Children attending primary school who are repeating the current grade of primary education

Children repeating the current grade of primary education comprised 5.14% of all children attending primary education in 2015, equivalent to 2672 persons in this profile. Of the children in this profile, 66.4% were 1-year overage or at medium risk of drop out, and 33.6% were 2 or more years overage or at high risk of drop out. Most of the children in this profile were males (59.06%) and most were from rural areas (69.13%). Children in this profile were mostly from the 2 poorest wealth quintiles (60.40%) and were mostly from 3 districts, namely, Stann Creek (26.17%), Belize (18.12%), and Cayo (16.78%). The ethnicity of the head of household for over half of the children in this profile was Mestizo (51.68%).

Profile 5: Children in grades 9 and 10 of lower secondary who are 2 or more years overage for the grade attended

Children attending grades 9 and 10 of lower secondary who were 2 or more years overage comprised 21.88% of all children in grades 9 and 10 of lower secondary, equivalent to 2737 persons in this profile. By classification, all children in this profile are at high risk of drop out (2 or more years overage). It is important to note that 20.95% of children in this profile were repeating the current grade of lower secondary. Most of the children in this profile were 15 or 16 years (71.43%), and most were males (61.69%). Over half of the children in this profile were from rural areas (51.30%). Nearly half of the children in this profile were from 2 districts, namely, Belize (27.92%) and Toledo (20.13%). The ethnicity of the head of household for most of the children in this profile was Mestizo (41.56%) and Creole (24.68%).

2.6 Analytical Summary

The summary below includes a comparison of findings from the MICS4 (2011) and MICS5 (2015) data.

OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN

The following analysis pertains to out of school children in the different school age ranges for pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary education as defined by the UNESCO international standard classification of education (ISCED).

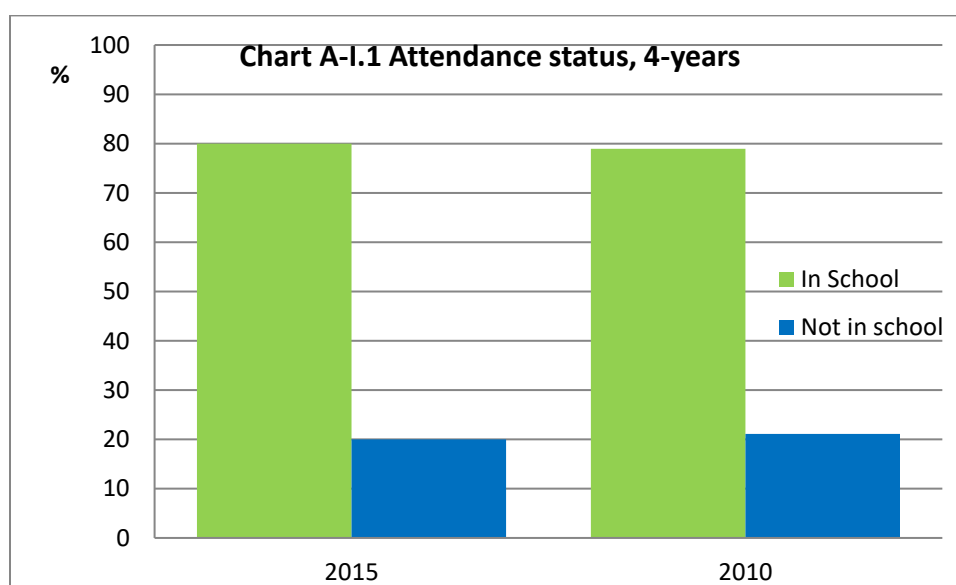
Pre-Primary Education: Children of Pre-Primary Age Not in School (Dimension 1)

In Belize, primary education begins at age 5 (years). In the OOSCI methodology, pre-primary age is defined as 1 year before the official starting age of primary. In the Belize education system, pre-primary would therefore include children 4-years old.

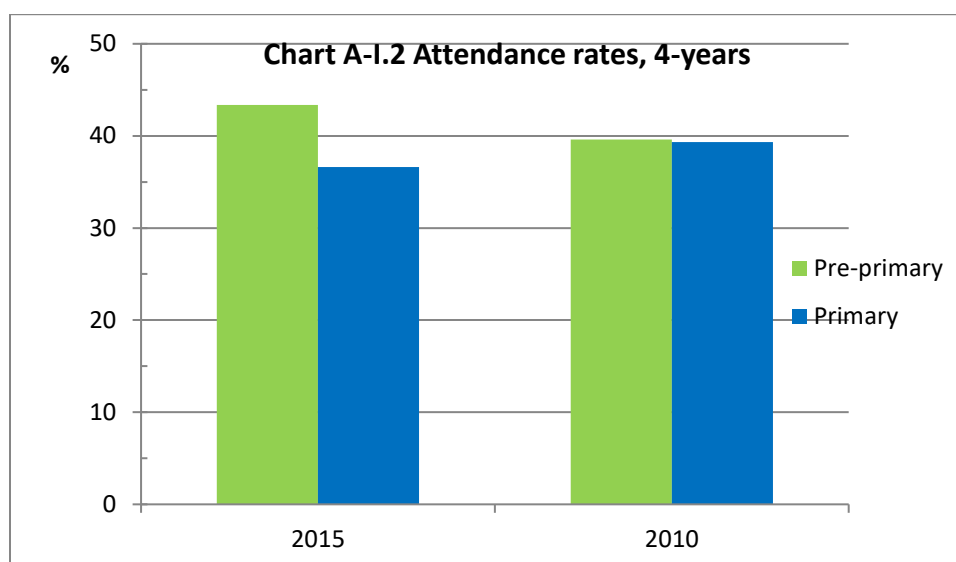
Table A-1. PRE-PRIMARY INDICATORS, ISCED (2015, 2010)							
Indicator	Total		Male		Female		Comments
	2015	2010	2015	2010	2015	2010	
The percent of pre-primary age children in pre-primary (NAR)	43.37	39.60	43.75	39.15	42.97	40.00	Children 4-years old attending pre-primary
The percent of pre-primary age	36.63	39.32	35.16	42.32	38.15	36.64	Children 4-years old attending primary

children in primary							
The percent of pre-primary age children in pre-primary and primary (ANAR)	80.00	78.92	78.91	81.48	81.12	76.64	Children 4-years old attending pre-primary and primary
The percent of pre-primary age children not in school	20.00	21.08	21.09	18.52	18.88	23.36	The percentage of children 4 years old not in school (100 – ANAR)
The number of children of pre-primary age not in school	1489	1594	782	724	707	871	The number of children 4 years old not in school
Population of children 4 years old	7443	7633	3773	3906	3670	3727	Sources: 2010 Belize Population and Housing Census & September 2015 Belize Labour Force Survey (SIB)

The analysis of the school attendance status of children 4 years old was possible using education data based on attendance in the previous school year (2014-15 and 2009-10). The percentages derived from the analysis of attendance in the previous school year (2014, 2009) were used as an estimate of the attendance rates for the present school year (2015, 2010).



Early childhood education in Belize is open to children 3 and 4 years old and is non-compulsory. The out of school rate for children 4 years old was 20% in 2015. A significant percentage of children 4-years old, over 36%, attended primary in 2015.



In 2015, 79.2% of children 4-years old not in school were from rural areas and nearly half (48.5%) were in the poorest wealth quintile. These children were mainly from households where the ethnicity of the head of household was Mestizo (49.5%), Maya (17.8%), and Mennonite (16.8%). Children in this group were mostly males (53.5%) and were nearly half were from 2 districts, namely Orange Walk (25.7%) and Toledo (23.8%).

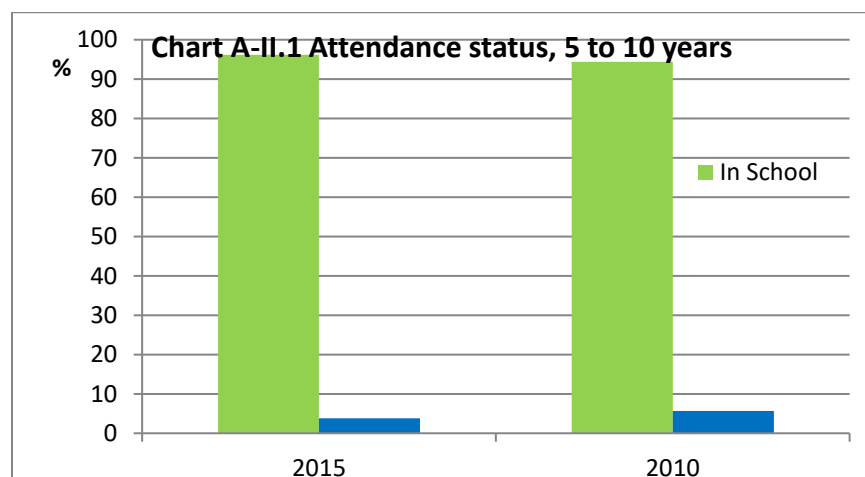
Primary Education: Out of School Children 5 to 10 Years Old (Dimension 2)

According to the UNESCO international classification of education (ISCED), Primary education includes the first 6 grades of the education system. In the Belize Education system, this would include Infant 1 through Standard 4. The corresponding school age range for primary would therefore be 5 to 10 years, covering the first 6 grades of primary.

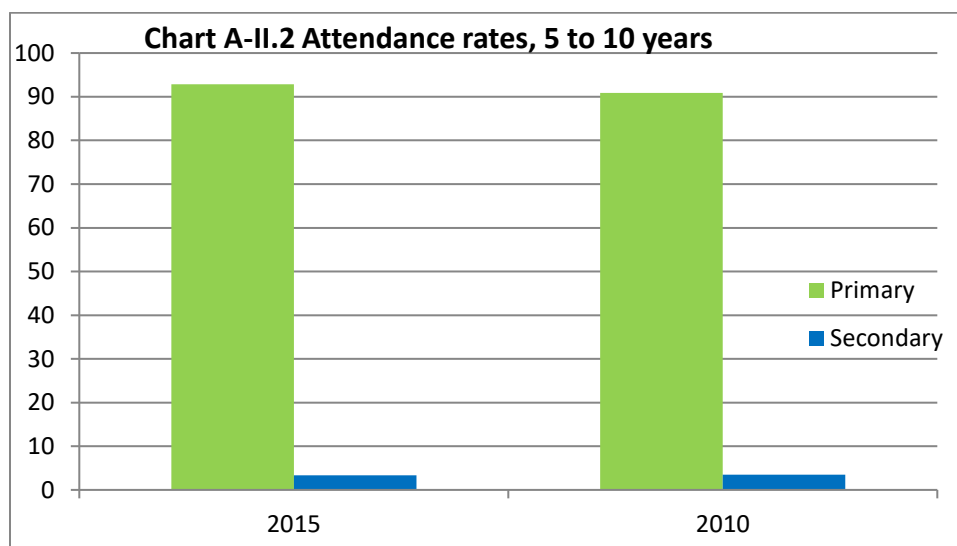
TABLE A-2. PRIMARY INDICATORS, ISCED (2015, 2010)							
Indicator	Total		Male		Female		Comments
	2015	2010	2015	2010	2015	2010	
Primary Net Attendance Rate (NAR)	92.83	90.88	93.59	91.66	91.99	90.09	The percent of children 5 to 10 years old attending Primary
Percent attending Secondary	3.35	3.47	2.73	2.73	4.04	4.24	The percent of children 5 to 10 years old attending Secondary

Primary Adjusted Net Attendance Rate (ANAR)	96.18	94.36	96.32	94.38	96.03	94.33	The percent of children 5 to 10 years old attending Primary and Secondary
Out-of-school rate for children of primary school age	3.82	5.64	3.68	5.62	3.97	5.67	The percent of children 5 to 10 years old out of school (100 – ANAR)
Number of out-of-school children of primary school age	2183	2682	1034	1347	1149	1335	The number of children 5 to 10 years not attending school
Population of children 5 to 10 years	57,191	47,526	29,941	23,978	27,250	23,548	Sources: 2010 Belize Population and Housing Census & September 2015 Belize Labour Force Survey (SIB)

The attendance rates for children 5 to 10 years show some small gains between 2010 and 2015. The net attendance rate for primary was 92.83% in 2015, up by nearly 2% since 2010. Only a small percentage (3.35%) of children in this age group attended secondary in 2015, which was similar to the rate in 2010. The out of school rate for children 5 to 10 years was 3.82% in 2015, down by nearly 2% since 2010. It is interesting to note that the attendance rates are slightly higher for boys than girls at the primary level.



In 2015, 85% of the out of school children 5 to 10 years were from rural areas, and most were from the 2 poorest wealth quintiles (76.6%). Nearly half (47.7%) of the out of school children were 5 years old and there were as many males (50.5%) as females (49.5%). Most of the children in this group were from the Corozal district (37.4%). Most were from households where the ethnicity of the head of household was Mennonite (44.9%) and Mestizo (26.2%). More than a third (39.3%) of these out of school children had never attended school, and 14% had dropped out of school prior to 2015.



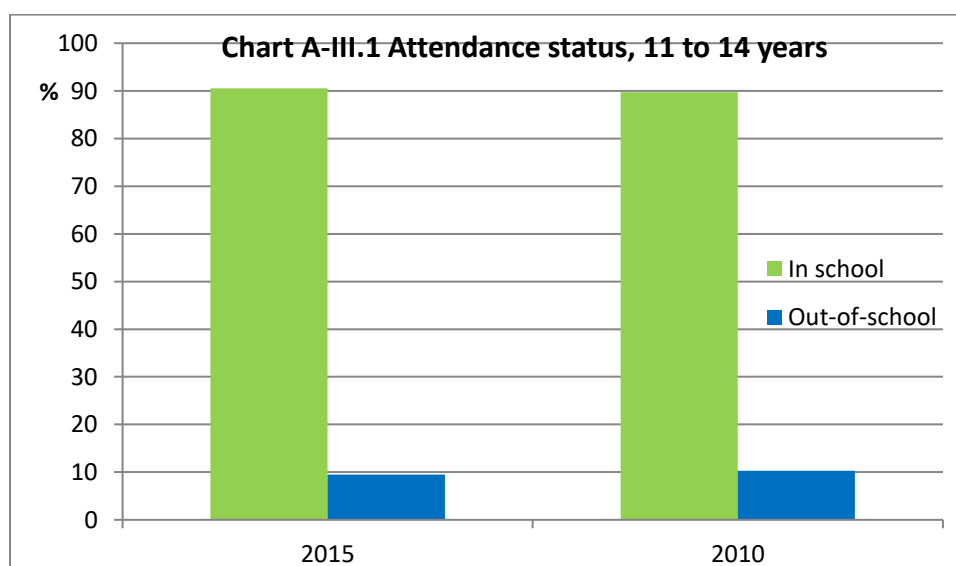
Lower Secondary: Out of School Children of Lower Secondary Age (Dimension 3)

The UNESCO International classification of education (ISCED) defines Lower secondary as comprising grades 7 through 10. In the Belize education system this would correspond with Standard 5 and 6 of Primary and Form 1 and 2 of Secondary. The corresponding age group for Lower secondary would therefore include children 11 to 14 years old.

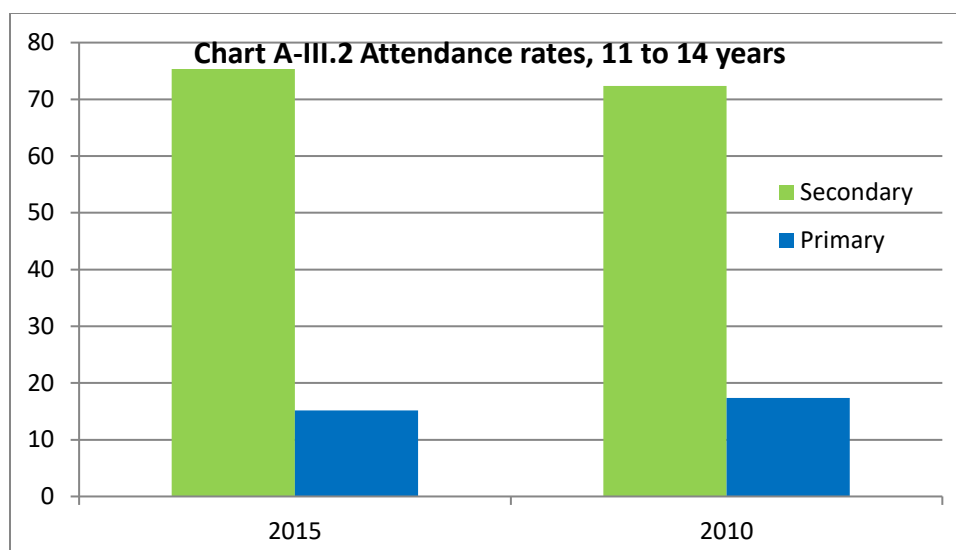
TABLE A-3. LOWER SECONDARY INDICATORS, ISCED (2015,2010)							
Indicator	Total		Male		Female		Comments
	2015	2010	2015	2010	2015	2010	
Lower Secondary Net Attendance Rate (NAR)	72.34	69.55	69.74	69.90	74.97	69.22	The percent of children 11 to 14 years attending Lower secondary
Lower Secondary Adjusted Net Attendance Rate (ANAR)	75.34	72.34	72.08	71.72	78.65	72.94	The percent of children 11 to 14 years attending Secondary and Post-Secondary
Attendance rate in Primary	15.19	17.37	17.64	19.06	12.69	15.74	The percent of children 11 to 14 years attending Primary
Out-of-school rate for children of	9.48	10.29	10.28	9.23	8.66	11.32	The percent of children 11 to 14 years out of

Lower Secondary school age							school (100 – ANAR- Attendance rate in Primary)
Number of out-of-school children of Lower Secondary school age	3901	3025	2093	1352	1808	1669	The number of children 11 to 14 years not attending school
Population of children 11 to 14 years	41,168	29,396	20,741	14,645	20,426	14,751	Sources: 2010 Belize Population and Housing Census & September 2015 Belize Labour Force Survey (SIB)

The net attendance rate for children 11 to 14 years old in lower secondary was 72.34% in 2015, up by nearly 3% since 2010. Compared to the net attendance rate for primary (92.73%), this represents a substantial drop of over 20% in attendance as children move up to lower secondary. Only 3% of children 11 to 14 years attended upper secondary or post-secondary in 2015, while over 15% of children in this age group attended primary in 2015. This represents age-grade lag or overage for a significant percentage of children 11 to 14 years attending primary. The out of school rate for children of lower secondary school age was 9.48% in 2015, which represents a marginal decrease of less than 1% over 2010.



Despite the marginal decrease in the out of school rate in 2015, the number of out of school children in 2015 showed an increase over 2010. This is as a result of the significant 40% growth in the population of this age group between 2010 and 2015. The high population growth of this age group may be as a result of high immigration, but may also represent an over estimate of the population derived from the September 2015 Labour Force survey.



CHILDREN AT RISK OF EXCLUSION

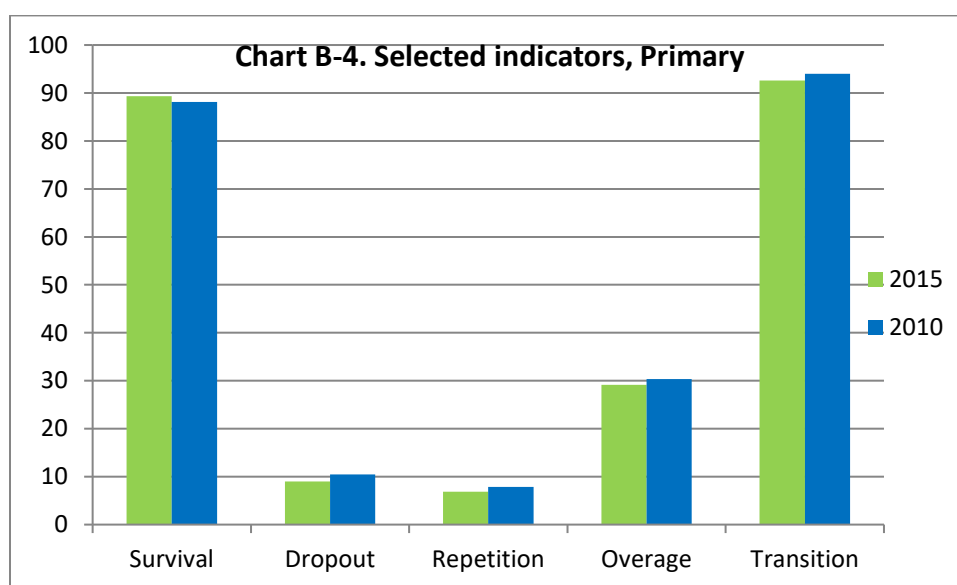
The following is an analysis of children at risk of exclusion in primary and lower secondary education levels as defined by the UNESCO international standard classification of education (ISCED).

Primary Education: Children who are in Primary School but At Risk of Dropping Out (Dimension 4)

TABLE B-4. SELECTED PRIMARY INDICATORS, ISCED (2015, 2010)							
Indicator	Total		Male		Female		Comments
	2015	2010	2015	2010	2015	2010	
Survival rate to the last grade (6) of primary	89.32	88.12	84.88	87.41	94.19	88.87	Source: EMIS data, Policy and Planning Unit, Ministry of Education
Percent of children in primary who drop out before reaching the last grade (6)	9.01	10.48	12.54	11.22	5.16	9.68	Source: EMIS data, Policy and Planning Unit, Ministry of Education
Percent of new entrants to grade 1 of primary without early childhood education	23.90	20.27	24.39	19.95	23.38	20.54	
Percent of new entrants to grade 1 of primary over 5 years old	14.78	20.30	14.63	24.03	14.94	17.14	Children entering grade 1 of primary who are 1 or more-year overage as a percent of new entrants
Repetition rate in primary	6.88	7.83	8.20	9.14	5.46	6.45	Source: EMIS data, Policy and Planning Unit, Ministry of Education

Transition rate to lower secondary	92.57	94.02	92.68	93.31	92.44	94.84	Transition rate from grade 6 (standard 4) to grade 7 (standard 5)
The percent of children attending primary who are at risk of drop out	29.13	30.32	32.27	34.00	25.55	26.49	Risk of drop out is measured by 1 or more years overage for the grade attended
Number of children attending primary who are at risk of drop out	15813	15730	8739	9066	6374	6680	

In 2015, the survival rate for primary indicates that nearly 90% of children who attend primary progress to the last grade. In 2015, the survival rate was about 10 percentage points higher for girls than for boys. In 2015, 9% of children in primary were expected to drop out before the last grade of primary. Notably, the drop out percent for boys was more than 2 times the rate for girls in 2015. The percent of new entrants to grade 1 of primary without early childhood education was nearly 24% in 2015, which represents a significant percent of children entering primary who may not be fully prepared for primary school. In 2015, the percent of new entrants to primary over 5 years old was nearly 15%, which contributes to the overage situation for these children in primary. In 2015, the repetition rate in primary was under 7%, and was nearly 3% higher for boys than girls. Meanwhile the transition rate from primary to lower secondary was over 92% in 2015. This indicates that of the 89% of children who reached the last grade of primary in 2015, around 92% of the children in the last grade of primary enter lower secondary. In 2015, the percent of children who were 1 or more-year overage for the grade attended in primary was around 31%. In the OOSCI methodology, the percent of children 1 or more years overage for grade is used as a proxy measure for the risk of drop out.



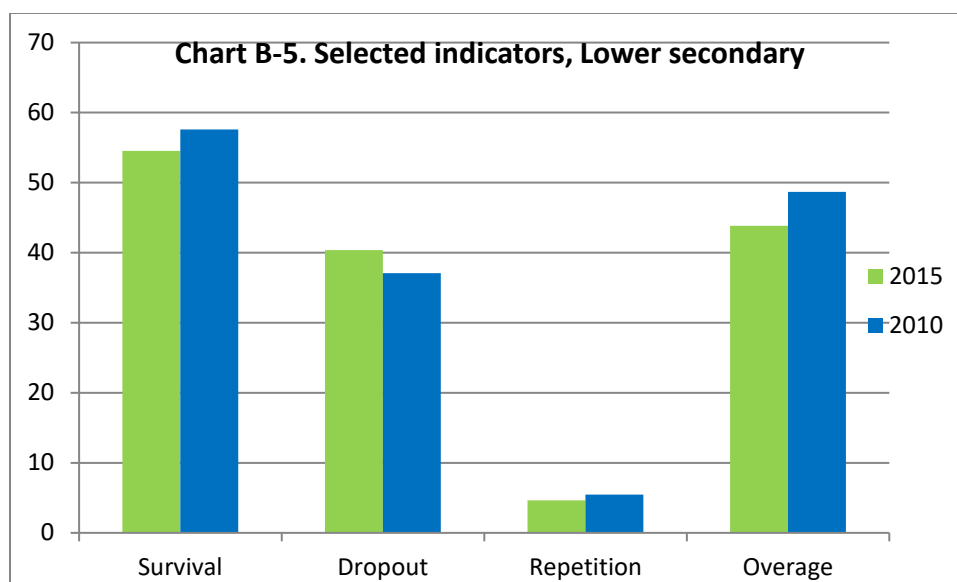
Children attending primary who are 1 or more-year overage for the grade attended are classified as being at risk of dropout. Children in this at-risk group were mostly males (58.9%), and 40% were 10 and 11 years

old. Most were from rural areas (65.4%) and most belonged to the 2 poorest wealth quintiles (62.1%). About half (50.2%) belonged to households in which the ethnicity of the head of household was Mestizo. Over 17% of these children were repeating the grade attended in primary in 2015.

Lower Secondary Education: Children who are in Lower Secondary School but At Risk of Dropping Out (Dimension 5)

TABLE B-5. SELECTED LOWER SECONDARY INDICATORS, ISCED (2015,2010)							
Indicator	Total		Male		Female		Comments
	2015	2010	2015	2010	2015	2010	
Survival rate to the last grade (10) of Lower secondary	54.54	57.61	49.04	52.26	60.13	63.23	Source: EMIS data, Policy and Planning Unit, Ministry of Education
Percent of children in Lower secondary who drop out before reaching the last grade (10)	33.40	32.00	38.74	35.98	27.92	27.92	Source: EMIS data, Policy and Planning Unit, Ministry of Education
Repetition rate in lower secondary	4.62	5.45	5.72	6.43	3.53	4.49	Source: EMIS data, Policy and Planning Unit, Ministry of Education
Percent of children attending Lower secondary who are at risk of dropout	43.83	48.67	50.19	53.77	37.56	43.89	Risk of drop out is measured by 1 or more years overage for the grade attended
Number of children attending Lower secondary who are at risk of dropout	12389	12686	7072	6904	5324	5804	

The survival rate to the last grade of Lower secondary was over 54% in 2015. This implies that of the children who were in grade 7 (Standard 5) in 2015, 54% were expected to progress to grade 10 (Form 2) of lower secondary. Notably, the survival rate for girls was 11% higher than the rate for boys. In 2015, over 33% of children in lower secondary were expected to drop out before reaching the last grade of lower secondary. Notably, the dropout rate for boys was over 10% higher than the rate for girls in 2015. In 2015, over 43% percent of children in lower secondary were 1 or more years overage for the grade attended. Over 50% of boys in lower secondary were overage which can be contributed to the higher repetition rate for boys. In the OOSCI methodology, children 1 or more years overage for the grade attended are classified as being at risk of dropout.



More than 43% of the children attending lower secondary were 1 or more years overage for the grade attended in 2015 and were classified as being at risk of dropout. Most of the children in this at-risk group were 13 to 15 years (65.9%), were mostly males (56.9%), and were mostly from rural areas (56.6%). They were mainly from 2 districts, namely Belize (23.7%) and Toledo (20.8%). Most of the children in this group were from households in which the ethnicity of the head of household was Mestizo (44.3%), Creole (21.5%), and Maya (18.9%).

OUT OF SCHOOL CHILDREN (NATIONAL)

The following analysis is based on the National Education system which differs from the UNESCO International Classification of Education (ISCED).

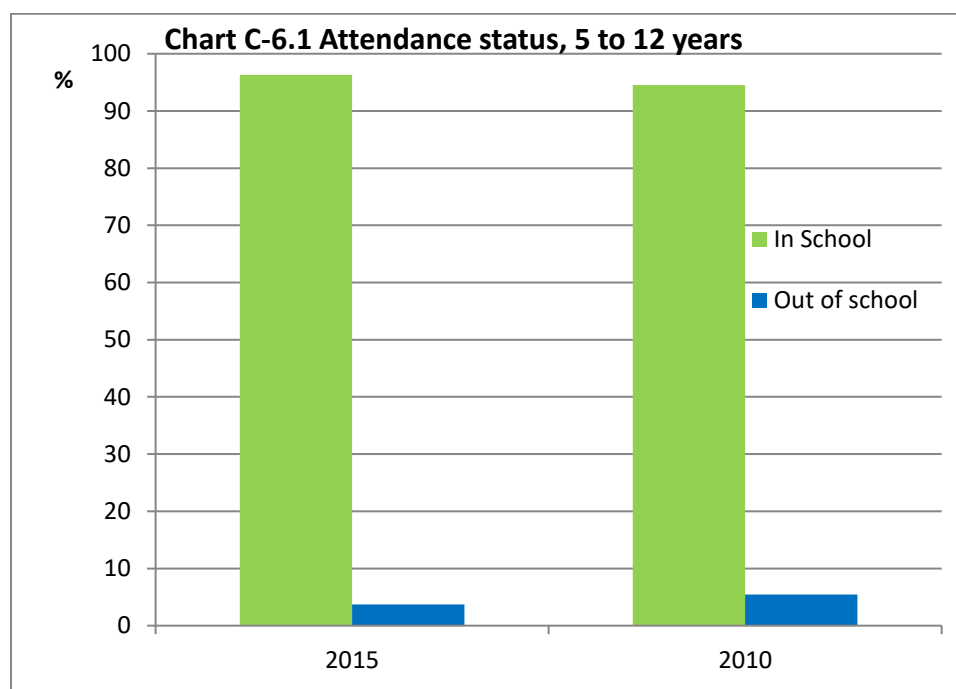
Primary Education

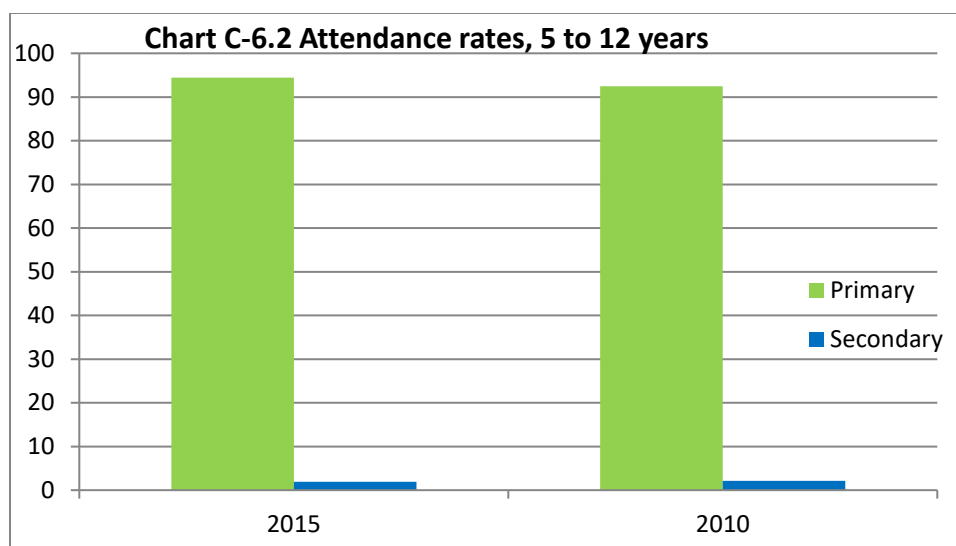
Primary education in the national education system consists of the first 8 grades of education. This includes the 2 grades of lower primary (Infant 1 and 2) and 6 grades of middle and upper primary (Standard 1 to Standard 6). The official age group corresponding to primary education is 5 to 12 years. In Belize, participation in primary education is compulsory up to age 13.

TABLE C-6. PRIMARY INDICATORS, NATIONAL (2015, 2010)							
Indicator	Total		Male		Female		Comments
	2015	2010	2015	2010	2015	2010	
Primary Net Attendance Rate (NER)	94.43	92.42	94.68	92.50	94.16	92.34	The percent of children 5 to 12 years old attending Primary
Percent attending Secondary	1.88	2.13	1.63	2.04	2.15	2.22	The percent of children 5 to 12 years old attending Secondary

Primary Adjusted Net Attendance Rate (ANAR)	96.31	94.55	96.31	94.55	96.32	94.55	The percent of children 5 to 12 years old attending Primary and Secondary
Out-of-school rate for children of primary school age	3.69	5.45	3.69	5.45	3.68	5.45	The percent of children 5 to 12 years old out of school (100 – ANAR)
Number of out-of-school children of primary school age	2897	3398	1429	1711	1468	1686	The number of children 5 to 12 years not attending school
Population of children of 5 to 12 years	78,576	58,949	40,726	29,668	37,851	29,282	Sources: 2010 Belize Population and Housing Census & September 2015 Belize Labour Force Survey (SIB)

In 2015, the net attendance rate in primary was over 94%, with similar rates for boys and girls. The attendance rate in secondary for children 5 to 12 years was below 2% in 2015. In 2015, the out of school rate for children 5 to 12 years was 3.69%. The number of out of school children 5 to 12 years was nearly 2900 in 2015, down from nearly 3400 in 2010.





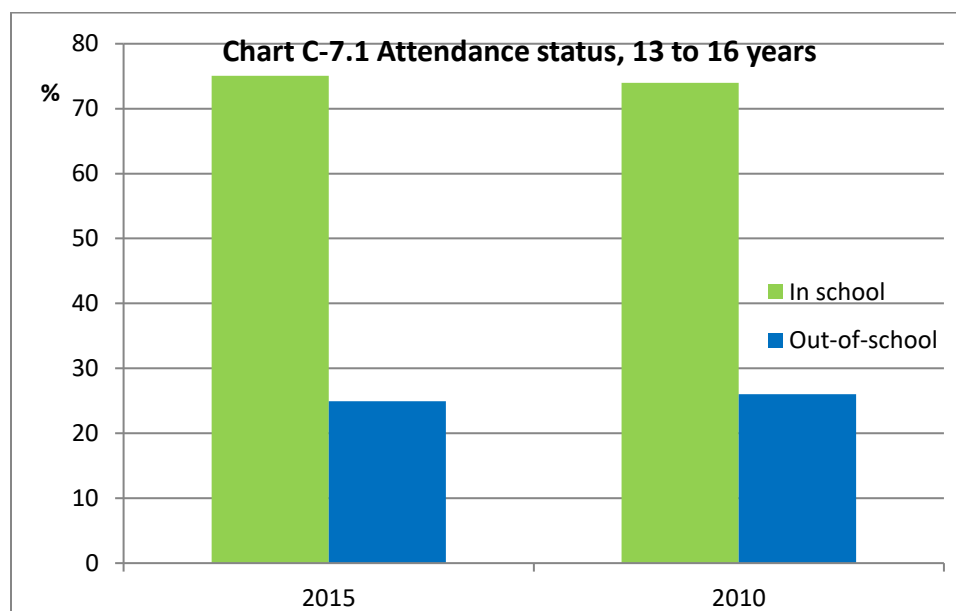
Secondary Education

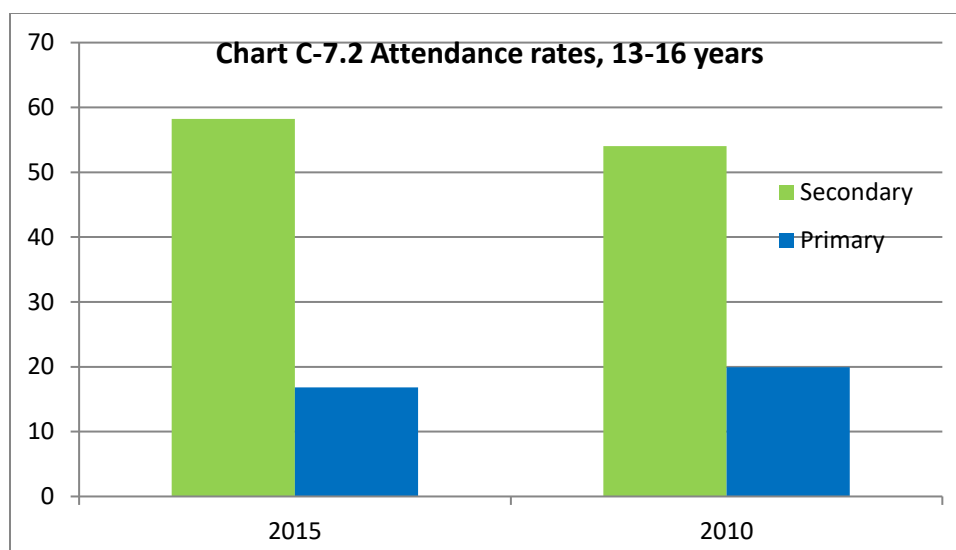
In the national education system, Secondary education consists of the next 4 grades of education after primary, form 1 to form 4. The official school age corresponding to secondary is 13 to 16 years. It is important to note that children in this age group attending technical and vocational education are not included in the analysis of secondary education. In the MICS5 data, technical and vocational education was categorized as 'Other' education along with home schooling, special education, and other non-formal education and training, and was not possible to separate out from the 'Other' category.

TABLE C-7. SECONDARY INDICATORS, NATIONAL (2015,2016)							
Indicator	Total		Male		Female		Comments
	2015	2010	2015	2010	2015	2010	
Secondary Net Attendance Rate (NAR)	57.27	52.85	53.73	46.62	60.82	58.68	The percent of children 13 to 16 years attending Secondary
Secondary Adjusted Net Attendance Rate (ANAR)	58.24	54.04	54.94	47.86	61.55	59.83	The percent of children 13 to 16 years attending Secondary and Post-Secondary
Attendance rate in Primary	16.84	19.94	20.84	24.36	12.82	15.80	The percent of children 13 to 16 years attending Primary
Out-of-school rate for children of Secondary school age	24.92	26.02	24.22	27.78	25.63	24.36	The percent of children 13 to 16 years out of school (100 – ANAR- Attendance rate in Primary)

Number of out-of-school children of Secondary school age	9224	7514	4476	4011	4748	3519	The number of children 13 to 16 years not attending school
Population of children 13 to 16 years	37,009	28,882	18,538	14,439	18,471	14,443	Sources: 2010 Belize Population and Housing Census & September 2015 Belize Labour Force Survey (SIB)

The net attendance rate for children 13 to 16 years in secondary was over 57% in 2015. The net attendance rate in secondary was over 7% higher for girls than for boys. The percent of children of secondary school age attending post-secondary was about 1% in 2015, while the percent of children of secondary school age attending primary was significant at over 16% in 2015. The latter indicates age-grade lag or overage for a significant percentage of children of lower secondary school age attending primary. The attendance rate in primary for boys of secondary school age was about 8% higher than the rate for girls. The out of school rate for children 13 to 16 years was nearly 25% in 2015, a marginal decline of 1% since 2010. Compared with the low out of school rate for children of primary school (3.69%), exclusion at the lower secondary school age is much more significant. Despite the small drop in the out of school rate in 2015, the number of out of school children of secondary school age increased to over 9200 in 2015. This is as a result of the sizable growth (28%) of the population 13 to 16 years between 2010 and 2015.





CHILDREN AT RISK OF EXCLUSION

The following analysis is based on the National Education system which differs from the UNESCO International Classification of education.

Primary Education: Children who are in Primary School but At Risk of Dropping Out

TABLE D-8. SELECTED PRIMARY INDICATORS, NATIONAL (2015, 2010)							
Indicator	Total		Male		Female		Comments
	2015	2010	2015	2010	2015	2010	
Survival rate to the last grade (8) of primary	84.37	83.79	80.38	82.11	88.69	85.57	Source: EMIS data, Policy and Planning Unit, Ministry of Education
Percent of children in primary who drop out before reaching the last grade (8)	12.10	12.70	14.74	14.28	9.24	11.04	Source: EMIS data, Policy and Planning Unit, Ministry of Education
Percent of new entrants to grade 1 of primary without early childhood education	23.90	20.27	24.39	19.95	23.38	20.54	
Percent of new entrants to grade 1 of primary older than 5 years	14.78	20.30	14.63	24.03	14.94	17.14	Children entering grade 1 of primary who are 1 or more years overage as a percent of new entrants

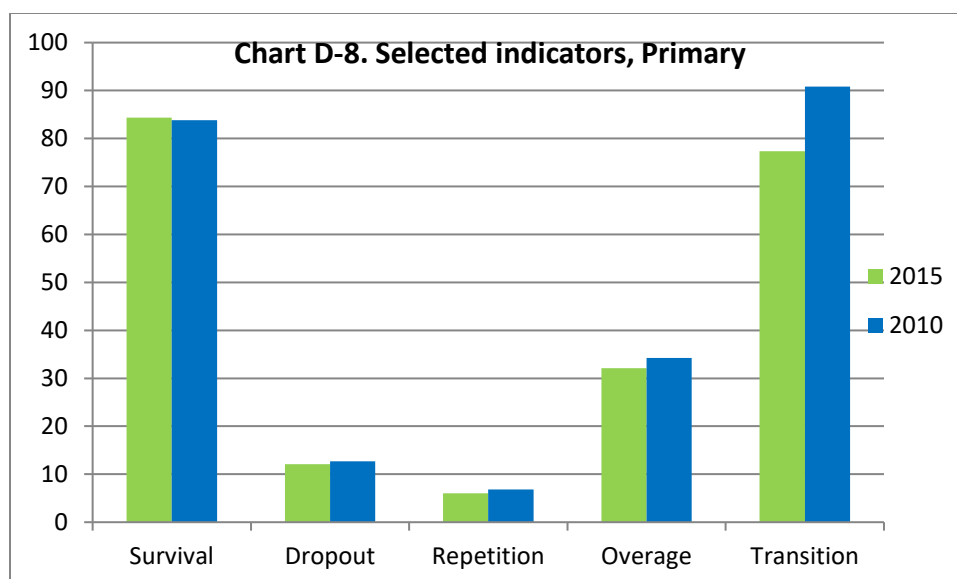
Repetition rate in primary	6.03	6.80	7.23	7.95	4.74	5.60	Source: EMIS data, Policy and Planning Unit, Ministry of Education [2016.2011]
Transition rate to Secondary ¹⁵	77.37	90.85	76.62	89.15	78.21	92.69	Transition rate from grade 8 (standard 6) to grade 9 (form 1)
The percent of children in primary who are at risk of drop out	32.08	34.25	35.92	38.50	27.82	29.89	Risk of drop out is measured by 1 or more years overage for the grade attended
Number of children in primary who are at risk of drop out	21,743	22,816	12,606	13,102	9091	9738	

The survival rate to the last grade of primary was over 84% in 2015. Notably the survival rate for girls was more than 8% above the rate for boys in 2015. In 2015, over 12% of children in primary were expected to drop out before reaching the last grade of primary. The percent of children in primary who drop out before the last grade was over 5% higher for boys than for girls in 2015. In 2015, nearly 24% of children entering grade 1 of primary did not participate in early childhood education. This indicates a significant percentage of children entering primary may not be well prepared for primary. In 2015, over 14% of children entering grade 1 of primary were older than 5 years. This contributes to the overage situation for a significant percent of children entering primary. The repetition rate for children in primary was 6% in 2015. The transition rate to secondary was over 77% in 2015. This represents a significant drop from over 90% in 2010 and should be further investigated and confirmed. Similar levels were reported by UNICEF (77.6%) in the MICS5 final report¹⁶. By comparison, the Ministry of Education reported transition rates of 90.2% and 82.5% in 2010 and 2014 respectively¹⁷. In 2015, 32% of children in primary were 1 or more years overage for the grade attended, equivalent to over 21,700 children in primary. Notably the percent of overage children in primary were over 8% higher for boys than girls. In the OOSCI methodology, the percent of children 1 or more years overage for grade is used as a proxy measure for the risk of drop out.

¹⁵ Our analysis of the MICS data indicates a marked decrease in the transition rate in 2015. Similar levels were reported by UNICEF in the MICS5 final report.

¹⁶ See Table ED.7A: Primary school completion and transition to secondary school (National), page 148

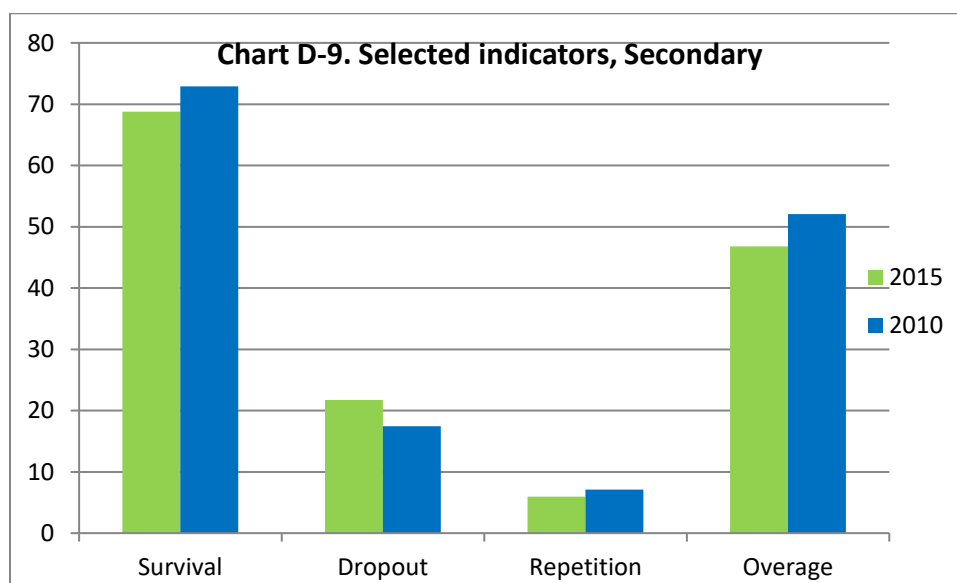
¹⁷ Abstract of Education Statistics 2014-15, Ministry of Education



Secondary Education: Children who are in Secondary School but At Risk of Dropping Out

TABLE D-9. SELECTED SECONDARY INDICATORS, NATIONAL (2015,2010)							
Indicator	Total		Male		Female		Comments
	2015	2010	2015	2010	2015	2010	
Survival rate to the last grade (12) of secondary	68.75	72.90	63.51	69.44	73.74	76.25	Source: EMIS data, Policy and Planning Unit, Ministry of Education [2016.2011]
Percent of children who drop out before reaching the last grade (12) of secondary	21.75	17.46	24.98	19.77	18.77	15.28	Source: EMIS data, Policy and Planning Unit, Ministry of Education [2016.2011]
Repetition rate in Secondary	5.95	7.10	7.44	8.75	4.60	5.62	Source: EMIS data, Policy and Planning Unit, Ministry of Education [2016.2011]
The percent of children attending secondary who are at risk of drop out	46.80	52.06	52.68	56.13	41.44	48.84	Risk of drop out is measured by 1 or more years overage for the grade attended
The number of children attending secondary who are at risk of drop out	10,343	9787	5548	4993	4794	4836	

The survival rate to the last grade of secondary was over 68% in 2015. Notably, the survival rate in secondary was 10% higher for girls than boys. In 2015, over 21% of children in secondary are expected to drop out before reaching the last grade of secondary. Notably, the dropout rate was over 6% higher for boys than girls in 2015. The repetition rate in secondary was nearly 6% in 2015, with the rate for boys about 3% above the rate for girls. In 2015, over 46% of children attending secondary were 1 or more years overage for the grade attended, equivalent to more than 10,300 children in primary. Despite the decrease in the overage rate in 2015 over 2010, the number of overage children in primary increased from around 9,800 in 2010. This is as a result of the sizable growth (28%) of the population 13 to 16 years between 2010 and 2015.



CHAPTER 3: BARRIERS AND POLICIES

3.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes data from qualitative interviews on barriers to school entry, attendance and completion.

3.2 Further Categories/Profiles Based on Qualitative Data

The above profiles were mapped against subgroups of children and adolescents at risk or who had dropped out of school, as identified through interviews. The profiles and corresponding subgroups are presented below.

Figure 23 Profile of children and adolescents out of school and at risk of dropping out of school

Profiles	Groups This May Include
Poor, Rural children 4 years old not attending early childhood education	• Invisible children: children with disabilities, not enrolled • Invisible children: immigrants not enrolled, not attending regularly • Rural children • Children living in poverty
Poor, Rural children 5 to 10 years old who have never attended school.	• Invisible children: children with disabilities, not enrolled • Invisible children: immigrants not enrolled, not attending regularly • Rural children • Children living in poverty
OOSC 11 to 14 years who completed grade 8 of lower secondary.	• Rural adolescents • Adolescents living in poverty • Adolescents without basic academic foundations • Adolescents with ongoing academic challenges • Boys in gangs • Adolescents with family stressors/challenges • Adolescents with psychological/behavioural coping challenges • Adolescents with family responsibilities/income earners • Adolescents who may prefer technical or other training
Children who repeated any grade of primary education.	• Rural children and adolescents • Children and adolescents living in poverty • Children and adolescents without basic academic foundations • Children and adolescents with ongoing academic challenges • Boys in gangs • Children and adolescents with family stressors/challenges

	• Children and adolescents with psychological/behavioural coping challenges • Children and adolescents with family responsibilities/income earners • Children and adolescents who may prefer or be better accommodated in technical or other training
Adolescents in grades 8 or 9 of lower secondary who are 2 or more years overage for the grade attended	• Adolescents living in poverty • Adolescents without basic academic foundations • Adolescents with ongoing academic challenges • Pregnant girls/young mothers • Boys in gangs • Adolescents with family stressors/challenges • Adolescents with psychological/behavioural coping challenges • Adolescents with family responsibilities/income earners • Adolescents not accommodated in regular school system • Adolescents that don't make the transition to secondary school • Adolescents over 14 • Adolescents who want to return but can't/aren't sure how

3.3 Overview of Barriers

The barriers identified through the qualitative data collection and analyses are presented in Figure 27 below, using the OOSCI framework that classifies barriers in terms of specific domains and categories.

Figure 24 Barriers to Being in School

Domain	Category	Critical Barriers
Enabling Environment	Legislation/Policy	• Compulsory school age only 5 to 14 • MOEYSC mandated oversight focused mainly on primary school • MOEYSC financed or subsidized education focused mainly on primary school (and first two forms) • School-level policies and disciplinary measures lead to school absences (e.g., pregnancy)
	Budget/Expenditure	• Education only partially subsidized • Varying levels of school fees (and costs) depending on schools, locations etc. • Need for more school counsellors at primary and secondary levels

	Management/Coordination	- Limited staffing at District level (especially truancy and officers working with children with disabilities) - Schools not reporting truancy data in a timely manner to District offices - Children not tracked through the system - Disciplinary practices at school discretion result in absences and early school leaving
	Social Norms	- Acceptance that education can end at age 14 - Immigrant children not registered in school (or not registered until 8 years of age)
Supply	Availability of Essential Inputs	- Overcrowded classrooms make individualized instruction impossible - Preschools are not available in many rural communities - Schools at all levels turn students away based on space, grades and other factors
	Access to Adequate Staffed Services, Facilities and Information	- Insufficient staff and training to work with children with disabilities in schools - Insufficient number of preschools - Insufficient transportation - Some schools in poor condition with limited supplies and equipment - Alternative (trades) education not available in all communities; not provided in some schools - Children with disabilities not accommodated effectively
Demand	Financial Access	- Family need for children to work to contribute income - School costs (fees and other) at all levels of educational system (pre-school, primary school, secondary school) exceed family capacity
	Social and Cultural Practices and Beliefs	- Compulsory school age ends at 14 and some families consider this the appropriate age to withdraw - Taking time out of classes to earn income for the family is considered appropriate - Gangs make children fearful of walking to school - Drugs, gangs, are considered alternative paths

	Timing and Continuity of Use	• Compulsory school age ends at 14 • Fees higher in secondary school; makes transition more difficult • Not having access to/not attending preschool • Leaving early but wanting to return at a later age • MOEYSC/Schools do not have system in place to track (and facilitate) transition from Standard 6 to First Form • Adult education options not adequately matched with students
Quality	Quality	• Students enter primary and secondary school not adequately prepared academically • Students face language barriers that are not addressed in the school setting • Students are promoted to higher grades even when they do not have the basic academic knowledge to be successful in subsequent grades • Teachers not always equipped to deal with challenging students (e.g., preferential treatment and stigma) • Schools don't cater to a variety of interests and learning styles

The above list of barriers was further reduced and clustered, and applied to the profiles identified in Chapter 2. The final list of barriers are as follows:

Figure 25: Final list of Barriers

Barrier	Dimensions Affected
Barrier 1: Restricted Age Range for Compulsory Education	1, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 2: Affordability of Education	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 3: Insufficient MOEYSC and School Staff (Truancy, Children with Disabilities, School Counsellors)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 4: Need for Increased MOEYSC Oversight (Tracking, Monitoring, Disciplinary Practices)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 5: Low Learning Outcomes and Limited Access to Remedial and Alternative Options	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 6: Insufficient Supply (Preschools, Primary and Secondary Classrooms)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 7: Parental/Social Norms and Values Not Supportive of Education	2, 3, 4, 5
Barrier 8: Insufficient Tracking of and Intervention for Students Who Drop Out	2, 3

3.4 Barrier 1: Restricted Age Range for Compulsory Education

3.4.1 Introduction, Description of Barrier, and Impacts

In Belize, compulsory education starts at 5 years of age and ends at 14 years of age.

School Before Primary

Not all communities have pre-schools available for children 3 and 4 years old, and even in those that do, there are fees that parents must pay. Partly for these reasons, the percentage of students attending pre-school is low relative to the percentage attending primary school. As will be discussed in a subsequent section, one of the consequences is that children arrive at primary school without adequate preparation.

School After Age 14

For a number of reasons, many students drop out of school in Belize once they reach the age of 14. Most students who are 14 will not have completed secondary school by that age and some may not have completed primary school.

Compulsory school age is not a factor that is independent of other factors that affect school leaving. Other related factors include: financing that differs between primary school and secondary school, the legal age for light/part-time work, and availability of secondary school (i.e., distance from community). Furthermore, students who are performing well academically may be more interested in proceeding on to secondary school and past age 14, may have more support from their parents, and may be more eligible for the scholarships that are based on academic performance.

Primary school is subsidized by the government more than is secondary school. Parents can sometimes afford to send their children to primary school because of this, but they might not be able to afford to send their children to secondary school.

As one school administrator explained: *“Age: here in our community, they are well aware that once the child is 14 years of age they can stop attending school if they do not want to continue or if they are not performing well academically. They are well aware of the age range to be at school.”*

In a Cayo district school community, interviewees pointed out that in this community, families and students are just waiting until the child is 14 and then they can be taken out of school and kept at home to help with babysitting, collecting firewood and other chores: *“100% would finish Standard 6 but only 10% go to first form. This year only 6 out of 19 will go to high school.”* None of the children in this community attend a preschool, and there is no preschool in the village.

3.4.2 Profiles

Children affected by the compulsory age starting only at age 5 years are children in Dimension 1 (children of pre-primary school age who are not in pre-primary or primary school.)

Children affected by the compulsory age ending at 14 (or completion of primary school, whichever is sooner) include children in Dimension 3 (Children of lower secondary school age who are not in primary or secondary school), Dimension 4 (Children who are in primary school but at risk of dropping out) and Dimension 5 (Children who are in lower secondary school but at risk of dropping out). Children in rural areas with less access to secondary schools in close proximity, and children from poor families, are particularly affected. Children who are performing poorly academically will be less inclined to go on, and their parents will be less inclined to support them to go on. Even in cases where children want to go on to school, there is the expectation within some families that they can withdraw because they have achieved what the government has designated to be the legitimate age for withdrawal.

3.4.3 Existing Policies and Programs

Education and Training Act, 2010

59. Every person having control of a child, who is five years old by the first day of September and who has not exceeded the age of fourteen, shall cause the child to regularly and annually attend some public or non-public school for the entire term during which the public school in the district in which the person resides, or the school to which the child is assigned to attend, is in session, until the child reaches the age of fourteen years, unless the child has graduated or is excused as provided in sections 60 (2) (a) and 61 (2) (a), (b) and (c).

Section 60 (2) (a) provides that no school attendance order shall be served on the parent where there is no school within walking distance of the child's residence and no suitable arrangements exist for the transport of the child to and from the child's residence and a school. Sections 61 (2) (a), (b) and (c) provide that a child will not be considered to have failed to attend school regularly when he/she is prevented to attend by reason of sickness, bad weather, other unavoidable causes, religious observance, or transportation issues as in 60 (2).

As noted above, not all communities within Belize have preschools. The BESS (2011-2016) identified a number of strategies to increase access to preschool by first determining the supply and demand through mapping of preschools, and increase number of preschools in the neediest locations. One strategy that has been implemented to increase access is to attached preschools to primary schools. The BESS also aimed to expand access and enrollment at secondary level, by determining supply and demand through mapping, and increasing the number of spaces and secondary schools in the most underserved areas. This process is currently underway. According to the Senior Project Officer in the MOEYSC, the Ministry is currently spending \$71 million Belize Dollars to build 22 pre-primary, 5 primary and 8 secondary schools throughout the country under the Education Sector Reform Program Phase 2.

The MOEYSC is also currently considering expanding the compulsory age, to include preschool age and secondary school age within the compulsory age range.

Truancy officers only follow-up on children 14 years of age and under.

Some Best Practice Examples

As the government considers strategies to increase availability and access to preschool education, it may consider following some examples that appear to be effective. Locating preschools within existing primary schools may increase attendance. Until all communities have access to preschool, informal support in the form of literacy and reading programs should be introduced in communities without preschool or with limited enrollment due to cost, transportation or other barriers.

3.44 Recommended Policies

Expand the age range for education in Belize, to begin with pre-school age (3 years of age) and to extend to the age of 18 or completion of secondary school, whichever is sooner.

In order to achieve this, the MOEYSC will need to ensure that all students within this age range have access to schools, either in their communities or via subsidized transportation where necessary. It will also need to ensure that the costs of education are subsidized where necessary at all three levels (pre-primary, primary and secondary).

3.5 Barrier 2: Affordability of Education

3.5.1 Introduction, Description of Barrier, and Impacts

Lack of finances was one of the primary reasons cited by interviewees at all levels for early school leaving in Belize. Education in Belize is partially financed by the government, partially by school management, and partially by families. School fees for families at the secondary school level are generally higher than they are at the primary school level, and they are subsidized more for some grades (First and Second Form) and in some Districts (Stann Creek and Toledo). Even if families can afford fees, there are additional costs for transportation in some cases, school books and supplies, meals, project costs and others that make it difficult for some families to be able to afford secondary school for one or more of their children. If fees aren't paid, students can get demerits or can be told to remain home until they are paid. Similarly, report cards may be withheld until fees are paid. Furthermore, as discussed below, some families depend on their teenaged children to help bring in income for the family, and they see school as interfering with this.

School Fees

The government provides a subsidy for education, but even with this the costs of education exceed the capacity of some families. Interviewees in all districts and at all levels discussed the challenges that families have covering school fees. In one school, it was mentioned that the fees were \$1,000.00 and some families could not make up the \$700.00 difference after the \$300.00 subsidy. Another school had fees of \$597.00, and even with the subsidy the costs in addition to school fees, particularly with several children in school, exceeded some families' capacity.

In some cases, students have performed very well in primary school but without financing for secondary school they drop out after completing primary. As one Principal stated: *“Funding does have a lot to do with preventing students from dropping out of school. There are children who have the capacity of excelling but due to financial issues they only get to complete their primary education.”*

Interviewees also mentioned that there is sometimes an imbalance in terms of quality of education that is associated with school fees and parents’ ability to pay. Schools with high achievement scores can charge higher parent fees, which creates a potentially two-tiered or multi-tiered educational system at the secondary level, with the higher quality schools only accepting and only being accessible to students who are able to pay the higher fees.

Even if most of the school costs could be covered, the child may not have money to cover costs for school materials or project work or may not have access to computer or internet to do homework. Some may be unable to afford the cost of transportation or food. Because of these limitations the child may not achieve the same high grades as other students with these resources.

Additionally, interviewees noted that students who cannot afford fees, uniforms, school materials or food may be embarrassed as a result of this and may avoid having to admit it.

A number of single mothers reported that their child’s/children’s father did not pay child support and that this made covering school fees difficult. This may be something that the government could help to enforce.

Several interviewees talked about how having others in the family pursuing their education as well may put extra strain on the family, and one child may drop out to let the others continue.

Academic challenges and financial limitations sometimes worked together to result in leaving school early. If the child is not performing well academically in some cases parents will threaten (and follow-through) with taking the child out of school because they do not believe it is worth spending money for his/her education.

Transportation

Children in Belize do not have equal access to all levels of education (pre-primary, primary, secondary, tertiary) in part because of location and transportation. In some cases, students, even those of pre-primary age, must travel considerable distances to reach the nearest school, and parents may not always be able to afford or provide transportation. A secondary school principal in the Cayo district stated: *“What I would like is for our school to get help with is the transportation so that our students will not be late all the time.”* The PTA in this school also identified this as a barrier: *“One of the problem that children have is that it is too far for them to travel to school. Also, the lack of finance -- the parent does not have the income to send their children to school.”*

Some students are unable to attend school because free transportation is not available to all communities. Even with the relatively low cost of public transportation some students cannot afford to go at least part of the time. Public transportation bus schedules are not always compatible with school schedules, and

students may arrive late and receive penalties, only because they have no alternative. Students (and teachers) who must rely on buses (public or otherwise) to take them after school to their home communities cannot benefit from (or provide) after-school homework or tutoring sessions.

A secondary school teacher in the Toledo district stated: *“A barrier they face, a lot of students right now, they come from a different village and they have to travel down to school, wake up really early, and when they go in the evening they are really late. They just feel overwhelmed. Some of them don’t have access to several things they need like, for example, some of them don’t have access to resources that they need and not even here at the school we don’t have internet access and they don’t have internet access in their village. Some find it is too much for them and they may say they can’t do it.”*

One secondary school student who recently dropped out of school reported that she received penalties at school for arriving late in the mornings. She and her parents said that the school was a distance from their village and the student had to take two buses. While she would be out waiting for the first bus it would not stop for her and then she would have to take another bus that made her reach late to school every time. She explained the situation to school administration but she was told it is her business to make sure she arrives on time for school daily. The student felt it was unfair because they could see when the bus would drop her in front of the school. The disciplinary actions imposed upset the student and she began to miss classes and to not perform as well academically, and she eventually dropped out. She is currently at home doing nothing; she hopes to return somehow in the future and complete her education.

Transportation is sometimes a challenge for making after-school classes work. As noted by one Principal, *“even if we implement extra classes in the afternoon some students come from other districts and they have to travel so they need to catch the public bus at a certain time to be at home.”* This school also offered extra classes on Sundays. In some rural schools, the teachers live in other communities and they need to leave right after school in order to catch transportation home to their villages. In another community, the principal reported that: *“When road conditions are good we take about 45 minutes to arrive. And when road conditions are deplorable we take almost one hour and a half each way. Most of our staff are from other rural villages and they need to take other buses to their particular places of residence.”*

Textbooks

The cost of textbooks is also sometimes a challenge for families. The government has a textbook program, and some schools have changed to renting out their textbooks to students who can’t afford to buy them. Some interviewees suggested the government should provide scholarships that include the cost of textbooks for those in financial need.

School Supplies

School supplies, including pens, notebooks and materials for school projects, also add to the costs of education for families. Students who cannot afford project materials may be graded lower than children who can.

Uniforms

All schools in Belize require students to wear the school uniform. Uniform regulations specific to each school include not only the shirt and pants or skirt, but also shoe type and colour, and sock colour. Failure to follow uniform regulations can result in children incurring demerits or being sent home.

Family finances can result in periodic absences, if they can't afford the uniform by the time school starts or they can't afford transportation on a particular day. The more absences, the less students will be able to stay abreast of the material that they need to learn. One at-risk primary school student in the Orange Walk district recalled, for example: *"It has been a problem sometimes because when school started my parents did not send me to school for a week because they did not had money to buy my school supplies and uniforms."*

Food and Feeding Programs

Children in Belize generally come to school with some money to buy food from local vendors or at the school cafeteria; they do not generally bring lunches from home. More than half of schools from pre-primary to secondary have a feeding program.

Feeding programs help where children come to school without breakfast or without money for lunch. A teacher in a Toledo secondary school stated: *"Sometime students that their family are so poor they can't afford it. Many of the students come to school with no food, they come with their stomach empty. That is one of the reasons they get discouraged because you know when they have to work and study with no food in the stomach it is so hard."*

Some schools offer feeding programs but others said they wanted them but did not have the space nor the funding. On the other hand, some students are too embarrassed to use the food vouchers; as one member of a Secondary School PTA stated: *"They feel embarrassed to go and take the food that we offer for the feeding program, even though it is the same food that is sold to other students."*

Disciplinary Response to Unpaid School Fees

Schools respond in different ways to the family's inability to pay school fees. Unpaid fees can result in a child being refused attendance. Some schools allow students to attend and accumulate unpaid fees. In some schools, they will try to help students and families cover their fees by doing work for the school. Schools also tried to help out where they could with school materials in some individual cases.

Student Comments Regarding Scholarships

Students were able to articulate how school fees were barriers to students completing secondary school. In one focus group, students had the following suggestions for government that would help students stay in and complete secondary school: *"To assists the students to pay their school fees. Provide assistance to those who really need it instead of just providing them to those because of politics. Especially scholarships to those who are able to pay but because of politics they select them."* In another

school, students suggested: *“Provide scholarships with all paid, including uniform and extra money for passage and food. And to give those who really have low resources.”* Another secondary school student focus group had the following suggestions: *“Maybe the government could give scholarship but not to the students that get the highest for PSE because they are the ones that their parent has money and could afford to send them. We want for those who can’t afford it.”* These comments came from students in several different districts.

3.5.2 Profiles

Children most affected by the affordability of education include the rural poor, and children at secondary school age. It will affect children in all five dimensions.

Students who face the greatest challenges with transportation are those who live in rural areas and whose schools are not in their local community, and children and adolescents making the transition to secondary or in secondary school.

3.5.3 Existing Policies and Programs

The BESS (2011-2016) outlined strategies to address financial barriers at the primary and secondary level. At the primary level, strategies were aimed at addressing financial barriers through subsidies or financing for fees, textbooks and feeding programs. At the secondary level, strategies were aimed at addressing financial barriers by reducing fees and reviewing textbook loan schemes.

The government of Belize through the MOEYSC and Ministry of Human Services offers several different support programs to assist families with the financing of their children’s’ education.

School Fees

Primary schools charge student fees including security, cleaning, photocopying, registration, and the government subsidizes fees for First and Second Forms in Secondary schools. Pre-primary schools charge fees including registration and a monthly fee which ranges between \$10 and \$20.

The government provides a \$300 subsidy given to first and second form high school students. To receive this assistance, students have to apply and demonstrate need except for those living in Stann Creek and Toledo who get it automatically. Financial assistance is also given to students on a case by case basis made to the Minister of Education.

Scholarships

Tuition is free at the primary and secondary levels so there are no scholarships to attend school at these levels. However, because schools at these levels charge fees, students who live in poverty seek financial assistance from the MOEYSC through their Area Representative. The MOEYSC subjectively award limited financial assistance to primary and secondary students.

Transportation

Transportation is provided free-of-charge for some students and communities. Designated school buses are provided for some communities. Others who want to attend schools outside their designated location need to pay for public transit. The MOEYSC spends a large sum of money on transportation of students. For example, the budget for Belize District for 2017/2018 school year was \$40,566 per week or \$1.6m for the year. For the same year it was \$7.2 for the country for primary and secondary schools.

Textbooks

The government has a textbook program which provides textbooks in math, language, science, social studies, and Spanish to all primary schools. At the secondary level, the government sells secondary school books at its bookstore outlets in Belize City, Orange Walk and Toledo at costs less than private sources.

School Supplies

School supplies are not provided by the educational system.

Uniforms

Uniforms are not provided by the educational system. Some schools ask graduating students who do not have younger siblings coming through to donate their uniforms to the school. The school can then rent these or provide them free for children who cannot afford uniforms. Some school purchase uniform for few students in poverty.

Food and Feeding Programs

Some schools offer feeding programs. These programs are funded through various mechanisms and may be set up and paid for by the school itself (staff and parents). In Belize and Stann Creek districts the government pays for some of the feeding programs in selected schools located in communities with high levels of poverty. For example, in Belize District the government funded feeding programs are located on Southside Belize City.

Other Programs

The Secondary School Financing Program awards a subsidy to school for each student enrolled. Schools get a larger subsidy for a student with greater needs (e.g., performed poorly of the PSE, have a learning disability) than a student with lesser needs (e.g., performed well on the PSE, does not have a learning disability). This system is to facilitate schools to do more for students who are most likely to fail, to have disciplinary problems, and to drop out of school.

Some Best Practice Approaches

Schools respond in different ways to the family's inability to pay school fees. Some schools allow students to attend and accumulate unpaid fees. In some schools, they will try to help students and families cover

their fees by doing work for the school. Schools also tried to help out where they could with school materials in some individual cases.

District offices and schools have been trying to provide solutions for individual children or families where possible. One District officer spoke about bringing in a few school supplies (pens, notebooks) to schools whenever she could, to donate to students who didn't have their own. Some teachers help students by giving them food money or project supplies. Some schools collect students' donated uniforms that are then provided to students who can't afford new uniforms, and some schools rent textbooks instead of requiring students to pay the full price to purchase them.

In one Orange Walk school, for example, the principal recalled: *"We had these couple of students that were always absent so we visited the parents and found out they were the ones that live at the very entrance of the village so we made the necessary arrangement to get them bicycles. Also, some cases have been that the children do not have uniforms or shoes due to the financial situation of the parents so we go the extra mile and get facilitate these children with uniforms and shoes."*

In some cases, the teachers and administration provide funding for students (for example, a feeding program for a secondary school in Cayo is financed by the teachers and parents). They also help to find sponsors and scholarships, and sometimes set up working scholarships.

3.54 Recommended Policies

Belize will need to cover the costs of education at the pre-primary, primary and secondary school levels, for families that need these costs covered, in order to increase school access, attendance and completion at all levels.

The costs covered should include, where needed: school fees, textbooks, supplies, uniforms, transportation and food.

School disciplinary practices should not include penalties for children whose families cannot afford school fees and other costs. Assigned projects should not result in discrimination against the poorer students who cannot afford project materials.

Approaches to assist families in paying for their fees, such as offering parents work for them to complete at the school, should also be encouraged.

Students should be entitled to school enrolment space within their local community school regardless of grades or ability to pay.

Transportation should be provided free-of-charge for students who cannot afford public transit and where school buses are not available. Cases where students are travelling to other communities because they cannot attend school in their own communities need to be examined and solutions applied. Transportation will be less of a challenge for some students if acceptance is based on catchment area. Alternatives need to be put in place for students who take public transit that does not arrive in time for the start of school. Demerits should not be imposed on students who arrive late because of public bus

schedules that are not coordinated with school schedules. The MOEYSC should work with bus companies to find ways to accommodate students and school schedules wherever possible.

Where secondary schools are in limited supply and students must travel long distances to attend, alternatives such as on-line and distance education options, even if blended, may help to keep students in school longer.

The BESS strategies to provide additional secondary schools may also help if they can be located outside of urban areas.

3.6 Barrier 3: Insufficient MOEYSC and School Staff (Truancy, Children with Disabilities and School Counsellors)

3.6.1 Introduction, Description of Barrier, and Impacts

District Staff: School Community Liaison Officers

The MOEYSC has district offices in each of the six districts. In some district offices, there are only 1 or 2 truancy officers, or as they are called, School Community Liaison Officers (SCLO's). SCLO's have all of the schools in their districts to monitor and intervene in. Some schools, even those with high dropout rates, may rarely or never see the SCLO's. The SCLO model is more of a policing than support model, but even if families are taken to court they will likely not be convicted and fined. SCLO's partly depend on school principals reporting incidents of truancy to them, but this is not consistent nor always done in a timely manner.

The SCLO's are in such short supply that schools rarely seem to be able to draw upon them to make a difference. In one high dropout school, when asked in what way the MOEYSC District office is involved when the school has identified a student at risk of dropping out, one primary school teacher stated: *"None, MOE or no other Government officials have given or provided any assistance. The so-called truancy officer doesn't even visit the school."*

Since the compulsory age of education is only 14, the SCLO's don't have jurisdiction over most of the students in secondary school. One District Office interviewee stated that in secondary schools the SCLO can only go in if requested to do so by the principal.

Absences are a sign that students may be considering or may eventually drop out. Contact with parents to determine the reason for a child's absence is very important. Absences may be due to family finances (e.g., not having money for transportation that day), demerits and suspensions, health issues, working to earn money for the family, skipping school (e.g., when parents work and don't monitor their child's behaviour) or other reasons. The more days that are missed, the more likely the child will get further and further behind academically and the less motivated he/she will be to continue his/her education.

Schools had different approaches to notify and work with parents in cases of absenteeism. Several schools said that after 2 or 3 days they contact the parents. One Standard 6 teacher said that as part of a school policy the students should bring a note if absent (as is the case in some schools); if no note is presented, then that would be a red flag for the school. One school explained that if the child is frequently absent they call the parents and invite them to a conference. The principal also does home visits with a police officer. Some contact parents using texting. It was also suggested that the government should provide support to the school to go out and look for those parents whose child is at risk, and try to work with them. Interviewees also reported that parents are not always cooperative with schools, and that school personnel do not necessarily have the training and skills to work with parents.

A standardized process across all schools (i.e., requiring doctor's notes for absences, contacting parents directly when a child is absent, calling a parent conference after a set number of absences etc.) should be implemented and monitored. Enforcing penalties other than suspensions and expulsions for unapproved absences, would also likely be helpful. Some interviewees suggested that the penalties for truancy should be more consistently and strictly enforced, including charging fines for parents.

SCLOs need to be more professionally trained and given continuous in-service training to be able to effectively work with teachers, principals, parents, police and social workers on interventions to keep children in school.

District Staff: Staff for Children with Disabilities (National Resource Centre for Inclusive Education)

There are two District staff assigned to work with children with disabilities in each of the six districts. The National Resource Centre for Inclusive Education (NaRCIE) officers go to the schools to do an assessment of the children with disabilities, and help the teacher to plan how to address the child's needs in the classroom.

Children with disabilities may experience different kinds of physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, which may result in different needs in terms of assistance, aids, devices, support services and facilities.

Interviewees reported that children with disabilities who attend school need more support than they are currently getting. Schools complained that they needed more training for teachers in how to work with children with different kinds of disabilities, and that classes are sometimes too large to be able to provide the attention that these children need. They also stated that they needed more support from NaRCIE. One Belize district primary school teacher described the following challenges: *"Working with physical disabilities is difficult because the training for teachers is lacking. We had a child referred to NaRCIE but visits were just once per year. For a visually impaired student support is given to the teacher by B.C.V.I. (Belize Council for the Visually Impaired). They visit once per month and help the teacher with using Braille. For the hearing-impaired student, the parent assisted but the teacher had difficulty because she didn't know sign language. For slow learners, getting support for teachers is difficult since NaRCIE has a lack of transportation. Some parents do not accept that the child is a slow learner. If the parent does not consent we can't do anything."* A secondary teacher in the Cayo district reported that: *"There are no special*

services or approaches for children with disabilities. It's up to the teacher to find a way to work with the student in class."

Some interviewees suggested that parents of children with disabilities may keep them at home because they are embarrassed or because they are afraid they may be bullied or treated badly by the other children. It was also noted that students may have illnesses that cause the parent or guardian to keep them at home and out of school.

There is no way to identify these children other than if the family has approached other agencies for help, or when one of the school staff observes the child out of school. It does appear that children with disabilities may have insufficient access to education. A comparison needs to be made of the population statistics for various disabilities and the numbers reported in the school system. In most of the school interviews conducted for the OOSCI study there were only a small number of children with disabilities attending the schools.

School Staff: School Counsellors

Secondary School Student at Risk of Dropping Out

A secondary student in the Cayo district who had performed exceptionally well academically is at-risk of dropping out at Third Form. His step-father was the one who supported the family financially but he passed away and now the mother is ill having suffered a heart attack. The family includes a sister with three children of her own, and the two older boys in secondary school help support the family. He has a working scholarship and other support in school but is finding the workload overwhelming. He has been working for 7 years at the market selling, fixing the stall, cleaning vegetables and carrying heavy loads. His grades have been exceptional (PSE 98%) and he wants to complete school and become a doctor. He works from Monday to Friday after classes from 5 pm – 7pm and on Saturdays all day.

Students may have personal, interpersonal or peer-related, and family-related stressors and traumas that affect their ability or decisions to leave school. Interviewees identified a number of examples and cases where stressors such as death or illness in the family, single-parent families without child support, drugs and alcohol in the family, gang members in the family, spousal and child abuse, and other kinds of stressors were associated with children dropping out. Student pregnancy was also identified as a factor in early school leaving.

Several of the children and adolescents interviewed through the service agencies identified stress at home (such as physical abuse, gang activity, drugs, parent emotional and financial issues) as being associated with their decision to act out at school, run away from home or drop out of school. They felt that if there had been counsellors at school that they could have talked to, and that their parents could have talked to, then things may not have spiraled to the point that they had. They also felt that teachers should be more sensitive to the emotional issues of students and try to get to know them and what they are going through, rather than treating them as indifferently as they seemed to at the time.

Bullying was raised as an issue by a number of interviewees. Bullying ranged from verbal assaults and social media attacks to physical assaults. Bullying can be particularly cruel in cases where students have something different about their appearance or perceived disabilities. According to school and agency interviews, low self-esteem is also often associated with dropping out. Several school personnel in the Stann Creek district spoke of peer pressure as being an important factor in school dropout. Some of the children and adolescents that we spoke with also mentioned being encouraged to drop out by friends that were out of school themselves.

Behavioural challenges are often associated with poor school performance, and can sometimes result in students being suspended or expelled from school. This includes aggressive behavior toward students and/or teachers that cannot be contained or effectively curtailed and that places the school community at-risk. Some of the children interviewed for this study had left school early because they had been engaged in aggressive or violent behavior at school and were told that they could not return. In some cases, they wanted to return to complete their education but the school would not allow them back in. Alternative educational options such as online programs may be appropriate in some of these cases.

Student who Dropped Out

Adolescent aged 14: got into fights at school, record followed him from school to school, began to face stigma. He said the teacher would call him out in front of the class and tell him to go home, which was embarrassing, and he wished that the school could find a different means of dealing with issues with students rather than sending them home. When he was sent home, he got behind in his work.

Each school seems to have its own disciplinary practices and penalty system. If a student moves from one school to another he/she may not fully understand the rules and disciplinary system of the school. Some interviewees talked about how schools sometimes use demerits in what they believed to be an overly punitive way. If a school expels a student for behavioural issues that record will follow the student, so that he or she may not be able to re-enter in another school at a later point in time.

Alternatives to sending a child home or expulsion may be after-school detentions, or after-school work projects. Some schools have made a shift to using more merits than demerits, rewarding students for responsible and appropriate behavior and actions, which has reportedly been successful. As one school counsellor noted: *"We need to re-examine rules and regulations of the schools. Working with young people a better mechanism should be put in place. e.g. lateness – student getting a suspension because of being late (after warnings and demerits). The demerit system is abused. We need to look at cases individually. Grey areas need to be addressed. In the transition, First Formers rack up a high percentage of accumulation of demerits. We engage the staff to take down the percentage of demerits and so decrease suspensions. We share alternative ways to discipline."*

Not all schools have a school counsellor and those that do only have one. School counsellors may not always have the training and capacity to deal with the challenges that students face. As one agency

representative noted, school counsellors should have the ability to identify when students (and families) need further psychological or psychiatric support and make the referrals for these services. Again though, the country is limited in terms of having skilled psychologists and psychiatrists to accept referrals. One secondary school principal in the Orange Walk District, for instance, said that the school counsellor (a registered nurse) and the MOEYSC helps to place referrals to a psychiatric nurse working out of the Northern Regional Hospital.

It was suggested by many school interviewees that there should be a counsellor in every school. It was also suggested that social workers should be more proactive (one interviewee suggested that they do follow-ups). One interviewee suggested that the MOEYSC should provide workshops in counselling for teachers in both primary and secondary schools. Suggestions included counselling training to help teachers identify risk factors (including sexual abuse), and training in how to understand and reach the students and help them.

One First Form English teacher said that she has her students use journal writing, and from there she could see if there were any family problem, financial issues, or academic problems. In one secondary school, peer helpers are trained to listen and see when a child is withdrawn and refer them to the school counsellor. In another secondary school, students are trained who have leadership skills in counselling, who watch out for students. There are peer helpers to help in the classroom and peer-tutoring volunteers to help with academics and in the study hall after school. First Form students are attached to peers to help with the transition.

3.6.2 Profiles

Limited SCLO's, NaRCIE officers and school counsellors will be barriers to the school entry and completion of children with disabilities, children at-risk of dropping out, and children experiencing personal, social and family-related stressors and challenges that affect their school attendance and performance. This affects all 5 dimensions of exclusion.

3.6.3 Existing Policies and Programs

District Staff: School Community Liaison Officers

Education and Training Act, 2010

61. (1) If a child of compulsory school age who is a registered pupil at a school fails to attend regularly thereat, the Principal of the school shall inform the parent and the School Community Liaison Officer of the irregular attendance.

The Act lays out conditions under which a child can be absent and not be considered truant (e.g., sickness)

The Act specifies that if a parent does not comply, they are liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding one hundred dollars.

64. It shall be the duty of each School Community Liaison Officer

(a) to ascertain and report to the District Education Manager every parent of every child resident within the area who has failed or is omitting to cause his child to receive suitable education; (b) to enforce the provisions of this Act and to prosecute those not complying therewith; and (c) to follow the directions, if any, laid down by the Chief Education Officer.

In 2015, a process evaluation was carried out on the Belize School Community Liaison and Security Program, which includes truancy officers as well as school wardens¹⁸. At that time, there were 17 School Community Liaison Officers across the six districts of Belize. In four of the six districts, there were only 1 SCLO (Corozal) or 2 SCLOs (Orange Walk, Cayo and Toledo) with the total number of primary schools in these districts ranging from 39 (Corozal) to 66 (Cayo). Stann Creek district had 4 SCLOs for 29 schools, and Belize district had 6 SCLO's for 58 schools.

The evaluation noted that caseloads were higher in some districts than others, and that there needed to be an increase in number of officers in some districts as well as a rebalancing so that caseloads would be comparable across districts. Both the OOSCI study and this evaluation found that it was often impossible for SCLOs to get to all schools and address all truancy issues. Furthermore, principals have not always sent absenteeism data to the district offices on a timely basis.

The report noted that there were two generalized practice models in place relating to case response and management of 'truancy/absenteeism'. The most common practice was what was described as "finding a needle in a hay stack", whereby the SCLO would visit with each primary school to manually comb through attendance registers and identify retrospective cases of 'truant/absentee' children for investigation and follow-up. The less common but more strategic practice relied on leadership at the school level. In these cases, principals/teachers would have already identified and mounted a first-level response to emerging issues of 'truancy/absenteeism' and where necessary would inform and invite the intervention of the SCLO as prescribed in the Education and Training Act (2010).

Among the key elements of good practice identified in the evaluation were early efforts and case management, family support versus punitive response to case response, and caring and compassionate SCLOs. The report suggested that SCLOs at a minimum should possess an Associate degree in social work, sociology, psychology, or related social science discipline. The report offered a number of important recommendations regarding process, planning, management and resources to improve the effectiveness of the program. It also recommended that matters related to truancy be heard before the Belize Family Court as opposed to the magistrate courts for greater sensitivity, and that the existing legislation should

¹⁸ Flowers, J. (2015) Process Evaluation FINAL Report. School Community Liaison & Security Programme. Prepared for: The School Community Liaison & Security Programme, Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports with Support from: The NCFC and UNICEF

be revised to offer options beyond a fine of BZ\$100 (e.g., court order re: parenting programme; counselling; school participation/PTA).

An Early Warning System¹⁹ was developed in 2015, to identify and address the needs of at-risk primary school students in Belize. The plan was to be implemented in pilot schools in 2016 and 2017, and evaluated for eventual roll out across the system. The plan established criteria and instruments to determine which students were at risk for falling off the academic track or beginning to display signs of disengagement. Thresholds to be used as preliminary indicators of risk factors included: less than 80% attendance, unsatisfactory behavior (aggressiveness – bullying, fighting, disrespecting the teacher), and failing mathematics and reading/language arts. The plan would then be to examine the individual profiles of students identified as ‘at-risk’ to determine individual needs, and to chart out an intervention plan for each individual based on needs. The system included additional resources (e.g., EWS Coordinator), training, evaluation guidelines and other components to ensure effective implementation. The program is currently being implemented in five schools on North Side of Belize City and participants are showing gains in reading and comprehension and less behavioral problems.

The Ministry has also been working with Districts and schools to implement an OpenEMIS system, whereby more timely data on student absenteeism and other factors would be gathered at the school level, and then entered into a database that could be monitored for more timely and proactive intervention by the SCLOs. The OpenEMIS initiative “aims to deploy a high-quality Education Management Information System (EMIS) designed to collect and report data on schools, students, teachers and staff. The system was conceived by UNESCO to be a royalty-free system that can be easily customized to meet the specific needs of member countries.”²⁰ OpenEMIS was implemented in Belize in 2015, but it has not been fully adopted yet across the system.

The MOEYSC early-warning and OpenEMIS systems, once fully implemented, will help the MOEYSC to track truancy and intervene in a timelier manner. If schools enter absenteeism data on a regular basis then truancy officers can get out to visit students, schools, and families, and to provide support where they can to try and get the child back to school. Once these data become available it will likely be necessary to increase the number of truancy officers who can go out to support schools. Schools should also have a consistent process in place for dealing with absenteeism and they should document this process. Training to improve school personnel’s capabilities in working with parents will also be important, as efforts to enlist support from parents to keep the child attending school should be the first strategy, before calling in the SCLOs.

District Staff: Staff for Children with Disabilities (National Resource Centre for Inclusive Education)

Section 49 (1). Education and Training Act (2010)

¹⁹ Bradley (R.) Early Warning System for At-Risk Primary School Children: Pilot Phase Implementation Plan. Restore Belize. February, 2015. MOEYSC.

²⁰ <https://www.openemis.org/about#w1>

The Ministry shall ensure equitable access for both sexes to education at all levels, and that provision of education is sensitive to the particular needs of both males and females, and caters to the special needs of challenged pupils.

Belize. Education Act. Chapter 36. Revised Edition 2003 (October 31, 2003)

110. (1) No citizen or resident of Belize shall be refused admission to any school on account of race, ethnicity, language, political affiliation, region of the country of origin, special needs or because of perceived social and economic status.

Officers assigned to work with children with disabilities are also in short supply in the districts. The NaRCIE officer may only be able to visit the school infrequently, and not often enough to be able to carefully monitor the teacher's approach with the child and the child's progress.

The BESS has a number of strategies to address the issue of inclusive education, including:

- Improve enrollment of students with disabilities (collaborate with government and agencies to identify, register and refer children with disabilities; provide training and assistance to teachers and inclusive education specialists; sensitize schools and communities to inclusive education and reduce stigma; place children with disabilities in most appropriate schools; provide transportation support)
- Improve education services for children with disabilities (undertake national study, provide training and resources for principals and teachers, develop standards, monitor services, examine supply and demand, develop links with NGO's, seek corporate sponsorships)
- Improve teacher education (...prepare teachers to support children with disabilities)

School Staff: School Counsellors

Most secondary schools seem to have a counselor on staff, but the primary schools generally do not. Primary schools should have school counsellors, and large secondary schools may need to have more than one counsellor.

Some Best Practice Approaches

Schools that have a standardized approach to verify absences with parents, including requiring a note from the parents, and conducting follow-up contacts with parents by phone or in person, will be better equipped to catch students at-risk of dropping out.

Peer helpers who can be trained to help support other students with school challenges, and who can identify students at risk and make referrals to school counsellors, are a low-cost option to increase counselling support within schools. This option would not only benefit the targeted students but also would provide important skills and experience for the peer helpers.

Schools that use a merit-based system in conjunction with or instead of the demerit system may have important lessons for other schools that rely heavily on demerit-based systems for discipline. Alternatives used by some schools to sending a child home or expulsion should be considered, particularly alternatives that keep the child in school and limit the number of hours and/or days absent that will result in him/her falling behind. Examples may be after-school detentions, or after-school work projects. In one school, a merit-based system was used to help students financially, awarding merit dollars to buy school supplies, meals, and other personal items.

Parents can be important supports for the education of their children with disabilities. Parents of children with hearing disabilities may learn sign language to support their children at school and at home. Parents can be enlisted to provide additional one-on-one support that teachers are unable to provide in the classroom.

3.6.4 Recommended Policies

Truancy

Many of the recommendations of the evaluation of the school community liaison program²¹ are relevant to the OOSCI findings and recommendations. The MOEYSC needs to ensure that there are sufficient SCLOs to serve the schools in their districts. If the compulsory age of education is extended from pre-school age to 18, this will require additional SCLO staffing in all districts. With OpenEMIS the process of identifying at-risk students should be improved and should become more proactive rather than reactive. Additionally, SCLOs should be educated and trained in working in a support rather than policing role with parents, students and schools.

A standardized process for dealing with absences (i.e., requiring doctor's notes for absences, contacting parents directly when a child is absent, calling a parent conference after a set number of absences etc.) should be implemented and monitored. Enforcing penalties other than suspensions and expulsions for unapproved absences, would also be useful, so that students didn't miss more school. Penalties for truancy should be more consistently and strictly enforced, including charging fines for parents.

Children with Disabilities

More training is needed for teachers in inclusive education and working with children with disabilities, and more inclusive education experts need to be visiting schools on a more regular basis to ensure that students are being effectively included. NaRCIE officers should be used as a resource and should not be the only ones trained to work with children with disabilities. There may need to be one-to-one support provided at the school for some children, and parents should be enlisted where possible to provide additional support for their child's educational needs at school and at home. Without this kind of intervention, children with disabilities will not be able to reach their maximum potential. Additionally, the MOEYSC needs to implement awareness raising activities for teachers, schools' directors, students with

²¹ Flowers, J. (2015) Process Evaluation FINAL Report. School Community Liaison & Security Programme. Prepared for: The School Community Liaison & Security Programme, Ministry of Education, Youth & Sports with Support from: The NCFC and UNICEF

and without disabilities and parents of both children with and without disabilities., and it needs to track children with disabilities born in Belize to ensure that they are in school.

All schools should be evaluated in term of their physical access for children with disabilities. A plan needs to be put in place to ensure that all schools have accessible entrances, classrooms and washroom facilities for children with disabilities.

School Counsellors

Primary schools need school counsellors, and large secondary schools need more than one school counsellor, to help students who are struggling with family and personal challenges. Having school counsellors who could help talk with children and adolescents to try to understand what may be behind the anger and aggressive behavior, or who could try to help with family-related stressors through parent or family counselling, are also important.

School administrators and teachers need to be trained and supported in how to deal with behavioural challenges at the school, with suspensions or expulsions being the last resort. Anti-bullying campaigns need to be put in place. School counsellors could take on some of the work of the District truancy officers since they will be working with families. School counsellors should have the capacity to work with challenges faced by parents as well as with students.

Schools should introduce peer counselling programs and training should be provided to both peer-counsellors and teachers in identifying students at risk and in providing needed supports.

More parent education is needed to address issues like abuse, behavior management, support for education, and other issues.

Policies regarding the suspension of pregnant students need to be re-examined.

3.7 Barrier 4: Need for Additional MOEYSC Oversight (Tracking, Monitoring, Disciplinary Practices)

3.7.1 Introduction, Description of Barrier, and Impacts

Interviewees at all levels spoke about the ways in which insufficient oversight resulted in some children failing to enter the school system, having intermittent attendance, or dropping out of school. Barriers included insufficient tracking of children and adolescents in the system, the limited role that the MOEYSC plays in secondary schools relative to primary schools, inadequate identification and intervention for students at-risk, and discretionary school policies that result in students being absent from school and/or experiencing disincentives to return.

Insufficient Tracking of Children and Adolescents in System

School interviewees often had a difficult time providing information on “invisible children”. Partly because of the ways schools are operated in Belize – without a “catchment area” requirement – school staff know about who is attending their school but not about who may be in the community and not attending. Secondary schools draw from many different primary schools (e.g., one reported drawing from 30 different primary schools in the District). School-aged children in the community could be attending any number of schools locally or outside of the community. The most commonly mentioned groups of “invisible children” were children with disabilities, and immigrant children.

As discussed above, children with disabilities represent a group of “invisible children.” Parents may be reluctant to take their children to school for various reasons, including the following:

- 1) insufficient support services,
- 2) limited physical accessibility of schools,
- 3) concern about the reactions of others,
- 4) parents of children without disabilities don’t want their children to share classroom with students with disabilities, as they think it may affect the quality of the education provided,
- 5) teachers may be reluctant to accept children with disabilities because they feel not sufficiently trained to do so,
- 6) other students may bully or harass children with disabilities, and
- 7) lack of accessible learning material.

Immigrant children are also reportedly out of school in some cases, and are hard to identify. Parents may be reluctant or unable to register their children for school because they don’t have the required documentation, language barriers, the transient nature of their parents’ work, the family’s preference for the children to earn income for the family, or other reasons.

Many students are lost in the transition between primary school and secondary school. There appears to be many reasons for this as well: secondary school costs, compulsory education is age 14, low PSE scores and not getting accepted, transportation challenges, and the opportunity for part-time work at 14. Primary schools do not always know if their Standard 6 students have moved on to First Form. Once the students have left primary school, they may have a choice of secondary schools so there is no way of knowing for certain if they have been accepted. The Ministry now allocates each student a number once they have entered the school system so it will be possible to determine if they are enrolled in a secondary school after primary. There is no standardized process in place to reach out to students who have not made the transition to becoming enrolled in secondary school after they have completed primary school.

A teacher in a secondary school in the Stann Creek district offered the following suggestions: *“I have done some research I found out that the transition from primary school to high school is very difficult and we lose a lot of children during this time. I would like to see more orientation or some programs to help with the transition.”*

Oversight Primarily for Primary Schools/Insufficient Presence

The MOEYSC is responsible for developing curriculum for primary school, but the secondary curriculum is mainly dictated by the standardized exams. Some parts of the curriculum are adjusted depending upon the denomination of the school management. Schools have considerable discretion in terms of how they provide education at the secondary level. There is no standardized disciplinary practice at the secondary level. Schools need help with addressing disciplinary issues in an effective manner and in a way that allows the child to remain in school and complete his/her education.

Several interviewees at all levels and from all districts voiced the opinion that MOEYSC staff should be more visible and involved with the schools. They called for more regular visits to schools by MOEYSC staff, including SCLOs, and not just when a problem arises. They also called for more communication between MOEYSC and schools (teachers, PTA and parents). Where the MOEYSC had increased presence, as in one Stann Creek secondary school where the MOEYSC put in a support unit for the school, providing regular visits and assistance in teacher training and support services, these services were very well received.

Insufficient Monitoring of/Response to Students At-Risk

As discussed above, with few truancy officers in the district offices, it has been difficult for schools to respond in a timely way to absenteeism, when it reaches the point that they need a truancy officer to help. The MOEYSC has also been working with districts and schools to implement an OpenEMIS system, whereby more timely data on student absenteeism and other factors would be gathered at the school level, and then entered into a database that could be monitored for more timely and proactive intervention. With OpenEMIS and more timely reporting of absenteeism statistics to the district, the district will be better able to monitor and respond, assuming sufficient staff are in place to respond. Additionally, if the compulsory age is raised, SCLOs can address truancy in children over 14. As a primary school principal in the Belize district stated, the truancy officer is called by the school if other school-based interventions are unsuccessful, but acknowledged that *“When the child is 14, truancy can’t do anything.”*

A secondary school principal in the Belize district described the following pattern: *“One of the first (signs) is a change in behaviour and a decline in academic performance and an increase in absenteeism. Red flag showing a problem on the horizon.”* Many of the other interviewees described a similar pattern.

As discussed above, schools differed in how they monitored and responded to risk factors such as absenteeism and poor grades. One school reported using a student absenteeism logging system with a team coach for each form level who monitors absenteeism and triggers home visits. This school and others had the Principal or the Department heads monitor grade books every two weeks and identify students with failing grades to be provided with more support from the teacher, remedial courses, etc.

Schools sometimes know if their students have gone on to secondary school, particularly if it is a small community, but the tracking and intervention system could be improved. There may be some children who do not go on to secondary school but who could with additional support from the MOEYSC. Since primary school graduates may go to more than one secondary school, and secondary schools are generally fed by many primary schools, there is no institution other than MOEYSC that would assume responsibility for this.

School Acceptance, Disciplinary and Exclusion Policies are Discretionary

School policies can serve as barriers for school completion. These include policies on acceptance criteria, disciplinary and suspension/exclusion. These kinds of policies should be standardized, and not left to the school's discretion, with the objective of facilitating increased school attendance and school completion. Secondary schools have considerable latitude in terms of what students they will accept. In some cases, schools vary in terms of the quality of education that they are considered to provide, and higher fees and higher grades are required for attendance at the "higher quality" schools. Some schools, such as a secondary school in the Cayo district, selects students by: *"The grades and the behaviour of the students. We also look at the parental involvement, recommendations and PSE"*. This school reportedly had a long waiting list. By comparison, schools without these admissions criteria face more challenges, and the children who attend face the stigma of being in what are considered lower quality schools. As one principal reported *"We are labelled as the school that takes all the repeaters, transfers and trouble makers."*

Schools that accept all students regardless of background may need more assistance with government funding (if parents are unable to pay the school fees), remedial programs (if students are performing poorly academically), teaching skill and counselling. Without these, they may experience higher dropout rates. Further, students who are turned away from a local community school because they don't have high enough grades may be less motivated to travel long distances to attend a school in another community. Also, there will be a stigma associated with attendance at schools with less stringent acceptance criteria, exacerbating what may already be low self-esteem associated with a history of poor academic performance.

There are a number of examples that interviewees cited regarding discretionary disciplinary practices and their impacts on student attendance. Interviewees gave examples of cases where students who received demerits for various reasons, at times outside of the students' control, were unable to remain in school. For instance, demerits were applied for the child not wearing the correct foot ware, being late in paying fees, arriving late because of bus schedules, and other reasons. If the child is sent home for these reasons and has to miss school until they have the funds to deal with it, they may get too far behind in their classes to be able to catch up.

Some schools reportedly require that pregnant students stop attending school once the pregnancy is apparent and not return until after their baby is born. When these students miss school, they have to make the decision about whether or not to return months later and be placed a grade down from their peers. Pregnancy was raised by a number of interviewees as a reason for early school leaving and a barrier to school completion. Missing so much school along with the challenge of trying to raise a child while attending school can make it extremely difficult for some students to get back in and complete their education. There is also stigma, added financial stress, emotional issues and other challenges. One secondary school principal in the Belize district said that the school had three students out because of pregnancy in this school year: *"There is a 50/50 chance the student in that position would want to make the effort to return."*

Out-of-School-Student: Female

This student had been doing well academically and had never failed or repeated a grade. She was involved in school activities and got along with students and teachers. She dropped out of school in Second Form a number of years ago after becoming pregnant.

"I was always motivated by my mother and sister to study hard and be the person with a bright future. When I gave birth, I had decided not to continue at all with my studies but because my sister was still motivating me I decided to return and complete my education since I want to be an Immigration Officer."

"My biggest challenge is that I am missing a lot of classes since I have no one to take care of my son while I am at school and then when I am present for classes I am completely lost since I do not know the work they are covering at the moment. And my grades are going down."

The school has been trying to encourage her to complete her secondary education. She feels if she could complete the school work at home that might help since she needs to be home a lot of the time to take care of her child and her ill mother, and she lives quite a distance from the school. She also can't afford to hire a babysitter while she attends school. She is finding it hard to keep up with her classmates having missed so many classes.

Interviewees reported that schools have broad discretion in terms of how they can use demerits and other disciplinary practices to exclude children from attending school. If the child has been disruptive or aggressive in the classroom and/or school yard, for example, the school may choose to eventually expel the child (after earlier warnings and/or penalties) on the grounds that he/she is a threat to the safety of the staff and/or students. One school reportedly had 15 demerits before suspension, whereas another had 25. As one primary school teacher in the Belize district reported: *"The school management can put aside protocol at times to benefit students. In the case of suspensions every effort is made to keep students. It used to be after 3 infractions but now it's after 5 infractions."*

In one school, students who had been in trouble (for example, drug-related issues), were given a *"long distance program"*, whereby parents would come with the students to pick up work (lessons or assessments) and bring them back. The student does not attend the classes but does his/her work at home. In this way the student is supported to complete his/her education even when his/her behavior precludes attendance in the regular school environment.

Teacher Favoritism and Other Behaviour

Some interviewees complained about the way some of the teachers treated the children. These comments came from the students and parents, school personnel, as well as some agency representatives. One PTA member, when asked about the factors that may be associated with students dropping out, stated: *"The lack of interest from some teachers and the quality of education. Some teachers do not have patience and others are not teaching in English so that is affecting the students in speaking and understanding the language."*

Students who are not performing well academically may face negative reactions from some teachers. As one First Form student stated, *“Teachers have a lot of favoritism especially with the students with money and that are smart.”* A primary school PTA member reported that in this school *“teachers have very little patience especially with students who are slow learners.”* A school counsellor also reflected on incidents of inappropriate behavior by teachers: *“Some children feel shamed by teachers which is pretty prevalent. There is excessive yelling by the teachers and lack of adhering to the rules. Children are bullied by the teachers and eventually drop out.”* Another school counsellor suggested that *“some teachers don’t seem to believe that students have the potential, but all teachers should express their belief that all students have the potential.”*

Schools varied in terms of the extent of training and support that they had for teachers. One school in the Belize District explained that they are constantly doing in house workshops, through a partnership with a Canadian university. The workshops teach strategies to teachers, with local coaches who come in once per month. The coaches come in to supervise as well and give a report to ensure that teachers are putting in place strategies that were taught. Another school in the Belize district reported bringing university students in to do workshops and share teaching strategies. Primary and secondary schools in the Stann Creek district benefited from an European Union program in the Banana Belt area that provided upgrading training for teachers. A secondary school in the Stann Creek district reported that their teachers will be receiving training in ICT from the Commonwealth of Learning *“so the teachers will be more equipped to teach our children”*.

Some schools appear to have rigorous classroom monitoring systems in place. This may include in-class observations and appraisals carried out on two or more occasions each year as well as spot checks by the school administration.

A secondary school in the Stann Creek district described the following classroom monitoring process that they had in place: *“Heads of Department have 3 weeks cycle where they go in to each teacher for 45 minutes to observe, evaluate and supervise them. Each week the Head of Department has to report to administration on this so that administration can monitor and make sure the Heads are doing their observation and the teachers their responsibilities. We have 7 departments so to further the monitoring we divide the departments into 3: the vice principal has 2 each and the principal where we go and check grade books and evaluate, observe and assess the teacher. In addition, we meet every month with Heads of Department and in turn they meet with teachers on the first and third week and then Principal meets in the second and fourth week with all teachers so that every week there is some monitoring going on.”*

A secondary school focus group in a school with hallway cameras to monitor students had the following suggestion: *“There should be cameras in classrooms to monitor teachers and to check on teachers’ attitude and behaviour.”* Students in a school in the Orange Walk district also suggested that cases of school discipline should be investigated more.

These kinds of cases of teacher favoritism and abuse should be addressed through teacher training, supervision, classroom monitoring, and disciplinary practices.

School Facilities, Equipment and Programs

Schools reported that they needed additional funds to be able to provide programs such as literacy programs, equipment and resources for courses, and feeding programs. Schools depend on student fees for part of their financing but if they have to function without some fees being paid in order to keep children in school, then their overall program has to operate with a deficit. It was also noted that some children come to school without food and that more financial support for school feeding programs is needed. Schools and districts will sometimes provide money to students for food and school materials. Some schools have a program to rent textbooks so students don't have to purchase them. Some community members provide scholarships for students.

Schools are funded through varying mechanisms and they don't always have the funding, space or other resources to accommodate all the students who want to attend. One interviewee reported that at one school she was familiar with, students had to buy and bring in their own desk and chair to the school. If they couldn't afford this, they couldn't attend school.

Schools reported needing more equipment including computer labs and equipment for extracurricular activities including arts, music and drama. Some schools with higher income-earning parents and apparently other sources of funding have better facilities (such as air-conditioning, computer labs) than schools that reach out to more at-risk students. One of the latter schools had classrooms with leaky roofs. Some schools have to fund their own feeding programs and with the high-need population this can be costly. There are challenges faced by schools with the higher proportion of at-risk students.

Many interviewees talked about how useful the feeding program was or about how they needed a MOEYSC-funded feeding program. There were also comments, however, about the stigma associated with getting vouchers for the feeding program.

3.7.2 Profiles

Children who are affected by these barriers are "invisible" children who are not enrolled in the school system, most notably immigrants and children with disabilities. Poor rural students whose schools do not have a lot of additional funding from parents will have fewer amenities at the school.

Students in all dimensions will be affected by school acceptance and disciplinary practices.

3.7.3 Existing Policies and Programs

The BESS outlines a number of strategies to improve management effectiveness of MOEYSC and District Education Centres. The legislation was revised in 2012²² to outline responsibilities of the MOEYSC CEO, District Education Centres, Managing Authorities, Principals and Teachers that were in line with the BESS strategies. Additionally, the amendments provide for greater specification of the composition, roles and responsibilities of District Education Councils to provide oversight on quality, standards etc. Strategies have been developed to increase enrolment and improve student tracking, quality, and MOEYSC

²² Education (Amendment) Rules 2012.

oversight, including expanding access and enrollment at the secondary level, improving monitoring, improving school reporting and accountability, improving school leadership and teacher training, and supporting teachers in tracking student progress and introducing appropriate supports.

Tracking of Children and Adolescents in System

The MOEYSC currently assigns each student a number when they enter the educational system. While this will allow tracking of children who are registered at one point in time, it will not allow tracking of students who have not yet entered the school system. Additionally, there has not been a formal mechanism in place to monitor the transition of students from primary school to secondary school. This will need to be done at the MOEYSC level rather than the school level, since primary students can go on to attend more than one secondary school. This monitoring will be particularly important if the compulsory school age is increased to 18.

Oversight Primarily for Primary Schools/Insufficient Presence

The MOEYSC is not required to have a regular presence in primary schools, other than the meetings with SCLO's in cases of truancy, and NaRCIE officers in cases of children with disabilities. With the compulsory age of education at 14, MOEYSC is not required to and is rarely present in secondary schools. Schools send in two appraisals of teachers for the school year to their management which are then sent on to the Teaching Service Commission. These reports are reviewed by the Commission and appropriate actions are taken. PSE and other scores go in to MOEYSC. The Planning Unit of the MOEYSC has a set of quantitative criteria based on these scores to determine poor performing schools. Schools that fall below the minimum standards are recommended for interventions.

Monitoring of/Response to Students At-Risk

As discussed above, the MOEYSC and Restore Belize commissioned the development of an Early Warning System (EWS) for at-risk primary school children, which was drafted in 2015²³. Risk factors were categorized into three main categories, following the ABC of early warning model²⁴ which include: absenteeism and/or tardiness, behaviour, and course work (academic performance). Belize primary schools would collect and report the data from students' attendance registers, discipline records and grade books, as well as other instruments designed for the EWS. OpenEMIS will also help in monitoring students at risk by providing a central database of student absences, grades and other indicators. This system is however not yet functional. It is still in its developmental stage in which it is being populated with students' information that will need to be verified. According to Mr. Pech, Researcher/Planner in the MOEYSC, it is expected to be up and running by the end of 2017 school year. As discussed above, schools differ in terms of the extent to which they have regular and timely processes in place for

²³ Bradley, R. (2015). Early Warning System for At-Risk Primary School Children: Pilot Phase Implementation Plan. MOEYS and Restore Belize.

²⁴ Hammond, C., Linton, D., Smink, J. & Drew, S. (2007) Dropout risk factors and exemplary programs: A technical report, National Dropout Prevention Center, Clemson, SC, 2007.

monitoring of grades and absenteeism and for responding to these with parent visits, remedial courses, and other interventions.

School Acceptance, Disciplinary and Exclusion Policies

While the MOEYSC provides overall guidelines to schools, schools have considerable discretion in establishing their policies regarding admissions, penalties, expulsions and other issues. As can be seen in the Education and Training Act (2010) provisions below, school Managing Authorities are responsible for developing policies on disciplinary manners at their schools. Schools are expected to produce written statements regarding their policies, and to provide these to parents and students. In some cases, schools produce these in the form of Handbooks which they distribute and post online.

Education and Training Act (2010)

40. (1) Managing Authorities of government, government-aided and community schools shall be responsible for

...

(b) the formulation of policies and internal regulations for the efficient and effective conduct of schooling, student discipline and behaviour, and student attire in accordance with Rules made under this Act, and

...

(2) Managing Authorities of private schools shall be responsible to ensure compliance with requirements of this Act and Rules made under this Act in respect of

....

(d) formulation and adoption of non-discriminatory policies and practices for

(i) proper and efficient organization and management;

(ii) efficient and effective conduct of schooling;

(iii) regulation of student discipline and behaviour; and

...

51. (1) Managing Authorities shall be responsible to ensure that policies designed to promote good behaviour and discipline on the part of students are pursued at their schools. In formulating such policies, due regard shall be given to any guidance on disciplinary matters provided from time to time by the Ministry.

(2) Every Managing Authority shall consult with principals, members of school staff, parents of students registered at their schools, and students registered at their schools and make a written statement of general principles and measures for promoting good behaviour and discipline for schools under its management.

(3) Principals of schools must refer to the written statement of general principles and measures provided by their respective managing authorities in determining acceptable standards of behaviour and measures for regulating the conduct of students as stipulated in Rules made under this Act.

(4) In accordance with subsection (2) of this section, nothing in the statement of general principles and measures or measures for regulating the conduct of students shall authorise anything to be done in relation to a student which constitutes harassment, intimidation, the administering of corporal punishment or any other actions harmful to a student.

52. The use of reasonable force shall not be deemed corporal punishment for reasons that include averting

(a) an immediate danger of personal injury to, or an immediate danger to the property of any person, including the student himself;

(b) the disruption of good order and discipline at the school or among any students receiving education at the school, whether during a teaching session or otherwise;

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Use of reasonable force not corporal punishment.

(c) the commission of any offence (or, for a student under the age of criminal responsibility, what would be an offence for an older student)

66. (1) In case of gross and repeated misbehaviour or infractions of the school policies and rules for behaviour which interfere with the general running or undermines the discipline of a school, the Managing Authority may expel a registered pupil from the school.

(2) The withdrawal or expulsion of a registered pupil from a government or government-aided school shall be carried out in conformity with Rules made under this Act.

With denominational school management in some cases, school policies may be developed in accordance with religious principles. Pregnancy is an example of a case where denominational beliefs can influence policy. In one school system, for example, a pregnant student will be immediately withdrawn from the school with no refund of fees. Other examples of school policies on pregnancy appear below.

*Any student who becomes pregnant or is responsible for a pregnancy while registered as a student will be asked to withdraw. Release from MCHS will be applied only after the case has been properly investigated and proven. The consideration to readmit a student after the birth of a child from a pregnancy while he/she was a student will rest at the discretion of the Board of Management.*²⁵

Secondary schools can set policy regarding admissions criteria, including grades in primary school and on the national exams (PSE and BJAT). Schools can reject applicants or fail to readmit students on the basis of their disciplinary records. Late fees may be charged if fees are not paid by a specified deadline and documents such as report cards and transcripts can be withheld until all fees are paid.

The demerit system is used for various offenses. In one school system, teachers can apply up to two demerits for a single offense, and five demerits result in a detention. Five detentions result in a working suspension, and two suspensions result in expulsion. In another school, students can earn both merits and demerits, and five merits can remove one demerit. Five demerits result in a detention, and twenty demerits or four detentions will result in a one-week working suspension.

Dealing with Teacher Favouritism and Other Behaviour

The BESS identified a number of strategies to improve teacher effectiveness, including training, recruitment, selection, performance monitoring and supervision. The amendments to the Education Act

²⁵ Our Lady of Mount Carmel High School. Student's Handbook. 2016-2017. (p.46). downloaded from <http://mchs.edu.bz/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/HandBook-2016-2017-to-be-printed-for-students.pdf>.

(2012) have several sections on monitoring of teacher performance and penalties for non-compliance and poor performance.

Section 50 (2) of the Education and Training Act (2010) protects students from corporal punishment and abuse, as follows:

School authorities shall ensure that pupils are free at school from physical, sexual or other forms of harassment, from intimidation and corporal punishment, and from exposure to drugs, pornography and other forms of morally, mentally or physically harmful activities.

Section 51 (4) also references corporal punishment, as follows:

In accordance with subsection (2) of this section, nothing in the statement of general principles and measures or measures for regulating the conduct of students shall authorize anything to be done in relation to a student which constitutes harassment, intimidation, the administering of corporal punishment or any other actions harmful to a student.

However, Section 52 provides that “The use of reasonable force shall not be deemed corporal punishment for reasons that include averting ...(b) the disruption of good order and discipline at the school or among any students receiving education at the school, whether during a teaching session or otherwise”. This clause appears to enable corporal punishment to be used at the teacher’s discretion if the child is disrupting the class in some way. In the Education (Amendment) Rules (2012), a new Section 92 (A) identifies the use of corporal punishment by a teacher as a “major offence” under the category of “criminal conduct or conduct which is physically or morally harmful to students or other members of staff”. Included along with sexual abuse, child molestation and other behaviours under this section are:

(v) corporal punishment and other forms of physical punishment;

(vi) verbal abuse, use of threatening words, intimidation, and harassment of students, colleagues or administrators;

Disciplinary measures to be taken by the Managing Authority against teachers carrying out the above offenses are outlined in subsequent sections of the Education (Amendment) Rules (2012).

Some Best Practice Approaches

The MOEYSC is implementing a tracking system so that once students have entered school they will be tracked across the system.

Some schools have developed useful processes for tracking risk factors such as absenteeism and poor grades. One school uses a student absenteeism logging system with a team coach for each form level who monitors absenteeism and triggers home visits. The principal or department heads monitor grade books every two weeks and identify students with failing grades to be provided with more support from the teacher, remedial courses, etc.

Merit systems have been implemented in some schools, in conjunction with or as a replacement for the demerit system. One school offers a “merit shop”, to help students financially based on their behaviour. Students earn merit dollars and can buy school supplies and personal items cheaply. Other school competitions in academic areas can earn students money or a number of free meals. One school has eliminated the demerit system entirely in First Form.

In one school, students who had been in trouble (for example, drug-related issues), were given a “*long distance program*”, whereby parents would come with the students to pick up work (lessons or assessments) and bring them back. The student does not attend the classes but does his/her work at home. In this way, the student is supported to complete his/her education even when his/her behavior precludes attendance in the regular school environment.

Schools have also implemented approaches to increase monitoring, supervision and training for teachers. Increasing school partnerships with local and international universities to provide more training and support for teachers, through workshops, coaching and other approaches.

Schools varied in terms of the extent of training and support that they had for teachers. One school in the Belize District explained that they are constantly doing in house workshops, through a partnership with a Canadian university. The workshops teach strategies to teachers, with local coaches who come in once per month. The coaches come in to supervise as well and give a report to ensure that teachers are putting in place strategies that were taught. Another school in the Belize district reported bringing university students in to do workshops and share teaching strategies. Others have implemented more intensive classroom monitoring and teacher supervision. In one school, heads of department have a three-week cycle where they go in to each classroom for 45 minutes to observe, evaluate and supervise teachers, and then report back to the administration.

3.7.4 Recommended Policies

Tracking

The Ministry now allocates each student a number once they have entered the school system. A tracking system that allocates every child born in Belize a number that can be followed from birth, and that registers (whenever possible) children as they immigrate to the country, would help in ensuring that the “invisible children” are served by the Belize school system.

Students should also be tracked in the transition from primary school to secondary school. The tracking number would help primary schools determine whether or not their graduating students have gone on to secondary schools, and MOEYSC to determine which students have not made the transition to secondary school and who may need support to return. Whenever a child is not registered in a school after having been registered in the preceding year, his/her family should be contacted and should be provided with whatever interventions and supports are needed to get the child back in school. Closer tracking of grades, disciplinary events and absenteeism throughout the year would also help to ensure that intervention can be provided in a timely manner.

SCLOs should patrol streets and farms during the day where OOSC might be. OOSC are less visible in communities where there are many primary schools and they could be attending any one of them.

The MOEYSC should collect data on children with disabilities based on the UNICEF/Washington group questions. Data collection should focus both on disability incidence (through censuses or household surveys) and on school participation (through EMIS). Belize should continue to strive toward an inclusive education system building on the work already done by NaRCIE, and through the implementation of the relevant BESS strategies.

Oversight Primarily for Primary Schools

With the extension of age of compulsory education to between 3 and 18, MOEYSC will need to provide oversight at all three levels of the educational system, which will require increased staffing to do this as well as training to address the unique challenges of each level.

Monitoring of/Response to Students At-Risk

The MOEYSC should continue to implement the Early Warning system and the OpenEMIS system which should help to track and respond to students at risk.

Policies on Acceptance and Disciplinary Procedures

School policies on acceptance criteria need to be reviewed, standardized and enforced. Children living in the catchment area of the school should be given priority for acceptance to that school, regardless of grades and other criteria. Students should not be required to travel long distances because their grades are low or their parents can't afford the fees of the local school.

There should be a standardized disciplinary regime implemented across schools. Suspensions and expulsions should be the last resort; alternatives like after-school working detentions would be preferable since they do not result in absences. Additionally, schools should be encouraged to implement merit-based systems that reward students for positive and responsible actions and behaviours. Penalties should not be imposed on the child for his/her parent's inability to pay school fees, arriving late because of bus schedules or other issues beyond the child's control.

Suspending pregnant students may be seen as a discriminatory practice and, hence, should be prohibited. There should be a standardized policy across the school system that pregnant students can remain in school. If the student is unable to attend school after the birth of the child, because of child care responsibilities, the government may be able to help with child care support, financial subsidies, or in offering on-line and/or flexible education options to complete secondary school. Where possible, secondary schools could establish day care centres on site for the children of adolescent parents to attend while the parents are completing their education²⁶.

²⁶ UNICEF Argentina is supporting the establishment of these kinds of day care centres.

Teacher Favouritism and Other Behaviour

There should be a standardized teacher training and professional development program, monitoring, supervision, and disciplinary process across the educational system that ensures teachers are dealing fairly with students with varying needs and capabilities in their classrooms.

Schools should have zero tolerance for any physical control of children as described in the interviews, and students, parents and staff need to understand the limits and the consequences. Students should be supported and protected in reporting any incidents of abuse. Teachers who are abusive should be disciplined and required to undergo counselling.

Teachers need additional training to deal with student behavioural issues in an effective manner.

School Facilities, Equipment and Programs

The MOEYSC needs to set a minimum standard for schools in terms of accessibility of facilities, equipment and programs and then ensure that all schools have the required resources to maintain this minimal standard. Expansion of and more financial support for school feeding programs also are needed.

3.8 Barrier 5: Low Learning Outcomes and Limited Access to Remedial and Alternative Options

3.8.1 Introduction, Description of Barrier, and Impacts

Secondary School Principal, Belize District: Inadequate Preparation and Multiple Challenges

“One of the barriers is getting them to succeed in 1st Form. Students come with handicaps and short comings. Many are not able to read. That is a struggle for them. Bullying tends to put the weaker students at risk. Lack of finances on the part of the family to equip students to start school. They need support from home. The curriculum sometimes does not hold their interest.”

The highest percentage of dropouts in this school occurs in First Form.

Students Inadequately Prepared from Start

Several interviewees across all districts talked about how oftentimes students are moved through the system without the basic foundations in reading. Since reading is needed for all subjects, they are then bound to do poorly in all subjects. Failure, grade repetition and the associated negative experiences in school then set the child up to want to withdraw at the earliest possible moment. The trajectory may be quite different if more time is devoted to ensuring that the child can read in Infant 1 and 2, so that he/she can then start to apply this toward other academic areas. It was also pointed out that some students do not have the foundations in math.

There is great variability in terms of the preparedness of students in Infant 1. Only about half of children of preschool age attend preschool. According to the MICS 2015-2015, 63.3% of children in first grade of school attended pre-school during the previous school year. Preschools are not available in all communities, so this is part of the problem, and the fact that there is a fee for preschool likely represents a barrier for some families. Efforts to encourage and support families in enrolling their children in preschool are important.

A primary school principal in the Toledo district reported a number of challenges that the school faced with respect to literacy and school preparedness. While the school does have a preschool, many children do not attend. Some of the transient children do not start school until 8 years old and they can't read, write nor speak English. The school has started reading classes for 30 minutes before the start of the regular school day.

In many communities, the first language at home is not English but when children start school they are expected to learn in English. Infant 1 has a full curriculum – but many students at this age are unable to read. Since reading and understanding the language are necessary to understand all the other courses they are being taught, without these basic skills they start off at a disadvantage which then follows them throughout their school experience, unless there is some intervention (e.g., tutoring, reading programs etc.).

Some schools are reportedly teaching in languages other than English, particularly Spanish and particularly in rural areas. If children transfer from these schools to urban schools where more of the teaching is in English, they have a hard time adjusting and may fall back academically.

At-Risk 14-year Old Student -- Language Barriers in Later Primary School, in Combination with Financial and Other Barriers

A 14-year old boy attending Standard 6 in the Cayo district, at risk of dropping out, said: *"Is difficult to understand the teacher because he teaches in English and I do not understand the language well."* This boy will be the first in his family to graduate primary school. He and his brother are both completing Standard 6 this year. He failed Standard 5 due to an accident and associated operation and time off but had been doing reasonably well academically up until then. He has no behavioural issues. He wants to go on to secondary school but family finances are a barrier. When asked what MOEYSC can do to help, he said: *"Assist in paying for secondary school"*. The family has not received financial assistance to send the children to secondary school. This family would also need help with transportation and other costs. The other child identified at-risk in this community also cited finances as the reason she will not be attending secondary school.

Promotion to Higher Grades without Basic Foundations

At Risk 13-year Old Primary School Student at Risk of Dropping Out -- Inability to Read

One 13-year old Belize district primary school student at-risk of dropping out reported: *“My overall grade is 70%. I pass Maths. I don’t know my other grades because nobody picks up my report cards. I pass other classes but with language arts it’s difficult to get good grades because I have difficulty with reading. I don’t do well in my other classes because in all the other subjects I have to read. This started from Standard 2. I stay at home many days because I feel depressed because I can’t read and keep failing language arts. I have repeated Standard 4 and Standard 5.”* This student also said that she needed to see a doctor to get eye glasses because she can’t see the board. (Note: A secondary school in the Stann Creek district offers free dental and vision care for students).

If children are promoted through the system even though they have not learned to read or have not acquired the basic foundations, they will ultimately fail, and their educational experience will be a negative one. As one school counsellor in the Toledo district explained: *“The school doesn’t have the type of structure to deal with this kind of thing. You put a child in First Form that doesn’t know how to read. What are the teachers supposed to do, teach reading at an Infant 2 level in First Form? That is can a bit difficult for the teacher, but they try to help, but they can only do so much. That child is at risk of failure.”* Similarly, a secondary school principal explained, academics is a primary reason for school dropout early into secondary school: *“they do not meet the academic requirement from when they enter secondary school.”* He/she noted that students enter school with difficulty in Math and English.

As discussed above, some schools use grades and behavioural reports to screen students. Schools that accept all students have more difficulty with poor academic performance and dropout related to this. The principal of a secondary school in the Stann Creek district reported that there is a higher dropout rate at this school than at other schools because this school takes in students that score low on PSE and are at risk of dropping out.

It was interesting to find that many of the students who had dropped out or who were at risk of dropping out said that they thought education was really important. In some cases, their ideal careers would require substantial education (e.g., university professor, teacher) and they did not know what education was needed for these professions. School programs that present career options, types of potential employers, average salaries and training needed might help motivate students to stay in secondary school.

It is important for schools to closely monitor students’ academic performance so that they can bring in remedial help as soon as they recognize a problem. Some schools in the Corozal and the Stann Creek district talked about having the ABACUS system and how this helps students and staff to have timely and accurate information about their grades and attendance.

Students with Special Interests/Different Learning Styles Not Adequately Served

Some students are not as motivated by the standard academic curriculum, but not all schools offer alternative programs such as trades. Similarly, students learn at different paces and in different ways, so teaching approaches need to be flexible and adaptive to the needs of learners.

Some schools have implemented new courses such as cosmetology and carpentry, which may appeal to students who may be drawn more toward these skill areas more than the standard academic classes.

ITVET programs are available in all districts, although they may be some distance away from some communities. Schools offered a variety of programs and activities to involve students and help motivate them to stay in school and do well, including sports, career days, student government, agricultural experiments, arts and musical activities, and school clubs.

Some interviewees talked about making classes more interesting by using “less chalk and talk” and more interactive and hands-on activities, having students teach lessons, experiments, team/group exercises, using games, music, arts, sports, technology, motivating and encouraging students, using audio/visual aids. A secondary school teacher advised that schools should have *“more recreational games such as chess, checkers; have educational programs to be shown at the auditorium on a screen during break or lunch time, to motivate students; have drawing classes or painting so students can express themselves.”* Some students recalled enjoying hands-on work that they get to do when learning about agriculture.

It may be helpful to offer classes in primary school that are alternative programs like trades or agriculture. Particularly in rural farming communities, students seem drawn to leave school early to work in the fields. Further, if students are not skilled in the academic areas in primary school but can find some enjoyment and success in alternative types of courses they may be motivated to stay in school longer. As one primary school teacher in the Orange Walk district recalled: *“One of the things is that they have that believe that once they reach that certain age (13/14) they are just waiting to complete to leave school. Another thing is that they prefer to do field work. For example, when asking for volunteers at the garden these are the first students to make themselves available to work outside. They prefer outdoor activities rather than in-class activities always looking to that agricultural side.”* Similarly, a primary school principal in the Belize district stated: *“In primary school the focus is on academics. They should have something in place for students who have other skills and other strengths.”*

PTA members of a secondary school in the Cayo district stated: *“We would like the government to implement a training school after regular classes where children could learn skills and trade to help them self.”* One PTA member noted that in their school they have visits to other schools like ITVET to motivate them towards the career of choice, and they also have activities in businesses.

Relevance of the Curriculum to Subsequent Employment

Related to the above issue is the relevance of the curriculum to the needs of the community, and the usefulness of the training for subsequent employment.

As noted above, most of the children and adolescents that we interviewed believed in the importance of education to prepare them for a better life. Some had career objectives but did not know what education would be required. Sadly, there was also some discouraging observations, as in the comment from a secondary school student in the Belize district who planned on completing secondary school: *“Even with the highest degrees there are no jobs for people.”*

PTA members in a Toledo secondary school offered the following observations: *“I would think there would be the need to evaluate the curriculum of this institution in terms of what it provides to the needs of the community. Because we could be teaching all what we want and the student practice, but if the students*

are not coming out with the skills, attitudes, and abilities that the community requires then really what sense does it make? It is a really urgent need to evaluate whether the school is providing the needs of the community via the curriculum."

In another Stann Creek school, PTA members offered the following: *"When the students graduate it is difficult to get a job. At the same time, the ones that have good grades are the ones that get the scholarship and make something of themselves but the others will be struggling to become somebody. I would like for them to have an entrepreneurship program where students could learn a trade and become maybe their bosses."*

Access to Remedial Courses

As discussed above, one of the major barriers faced by students is that those who have not performed well academically are promoted to the next grade level, and the lack of knowledge and understanding that they have continues to plague them in subsequent years. Very often there are insufficient programs or support for students who are performing poorly. Many of the causal factors interact. For instance, students who are performing poorly and who have financial challenges may miss school because their families may not have the funds for transportation on some days. Students who are truant and performing poorly and who do not have parental supervision at home may withdraw more and more from school since it is not a positive environment for them.

Some schools have remedial courses that they offer students during lunch, before or after school, and on weekends. One school reported trying to ensure that reading skills are in place at the Infant level, by providing more time on reading in Infant 1 and Infant 2. Primary schools may also offer after-school classes in Math and PSE preparation. One primary school principal stated: *"If they are failing English or Math or both they stay for 1 hour after classes 4 times per week."* Some secondary schools provide remedial courses for students entering First Form with low PSE scores. One secondary school teacher said that they had sent a proposal to do a workshop with STD 4, 5, 6 and 1st and 2nd Form teachers to identify and find solutions to improve the issue of students entering secondary school without knowing how to read or write.

Schools try to assist students struggling academically, such as:

- Providing extra classes (at lunch time, after school, at home, evenings, weekends, summer courses in Math and English)
- Providing tutoring
- Providing literacy courses
- Providing alternative (vocational) courses
- Having peer mentors/helpers
- Providing counselling and teaching life skills
- Working with Human Development, DYS, NARCIE, NDACC, BCVI, Police and other agencies that assist with specific types of challenges

One secondary school teacher implemented the following process: *“I created a buddy system in class; if a student is absent his assigned buddy will pass on his homework, or any other assessment given on that day. And through that means I also get to make my parents get to make friend with their child buddies’ parent as well and our communication within my parents is important to know what is happening with them at all times.”* This same teacher also created a group chat with her students’ parents through *WhatsApp* to maintain contact with them about their children.

Teacher Training and Management

While some of the problems with educational quality that are manifested in low grades and early dropout can be traced back to the curriculum, policies about grade promotion and retention, and access to remedial courses, there are also issues about teaching quality and capacity. Some of these issues have already been addressed in the section on MOEYSC oversight above.

A primary teacher in a school with a significant dropout problem had the following observations: *“Teachers stay in their ‘comfort zone’ especially if they have many years in the same school. There is not enough supervision of teachers and they do not better their teaching techniques. There is not enough supervision to see if teachers are following their schemes. Also lack of management on behalf of the principal. And the teaching principal has never even been supervised. Our management should be totally responsible for the schools and this requires immediate attention. Management should appoint (trained and effective) teachers. More monitoring from both school management and MOEYSC on the supervision of teachers and effective management of the schools is needed.”*

Teachers and principals also talked, however, about the pressures of large class sizes, insufficient support staff (including counsellors, teachers trained to work with children with disabilities, and floating principals), and demands placed upon them to teach the curriculum.

Some Best Practice Examples

Some schools are providing English and reading in the preschool curriculum, and providing reading classes for primary school students before and/or after school. One school reported placing greater emphasis on English and reading in the first grades of primary school, after-school math classes for later-grade students, and PSE preparatory courses for Standard 6 students. Schools are implementing lunchtime, before- and after-school, or weekend, remedial classes and tutoring for students in English, reading and other academic courses that they may be struggling with. One secondary school has implemented a program to help students with low PSE scores when they first enter, by identifying those with PSE scores below 40 and providing them with special assistance specifically in Math and English.

Schools are also trying to introduce alternative courses in trades, agriculture and other areas, to motivate students who are not as interested in the standard curriculum. They are also trying different teaching techniques to appeal to students with different learning styles.

Schools have introduced peer or buddy systems to offer various forms of assistance, from academic assistance to identification of counselling needs. In one school's buddy system, if a student is absent his assigned buddy will pass on his homework, or any other assessment given on that day.

3.8.2 Profiles

Students in all 5 dimensions will be affected by these barriers. The inability to read will affect all ages, genders, regions and income levels.

3.8.3 Existing Policies and Programs

Students Inadequately Prepared from Start

As discussed above, preschools are not available in all communities and only about half of the children in Belize attend preschool. The MOEYSC does not set the curriculum for preschool. Preschools charge fees which may make them inaccessible to children from the poorest families. The curriculum for Infant 1 and Infant 2 includes 8 academic course areas. Children are not required to attend preschool and some enter early primary grades without being able to read.

Promotion to Higher Grades without Basic Foundations

Primary schools are permitted to hold a child back if he/she has not achieved at an adequate level to be promoted to the next grade. At the same time, students can be promoted even if they do not have the basic foundations. There are no MOEYSC policy re how many times a child may be held back/permitted to repeat a grade. As will be discussed below, schools are not required to provide remedial courses for students who are not performing at the level required for their grade but some schools do develop and offer these courses to students.

Secondary schools provide tutorial/remedial classes for lagging students because if these students fall out of school, the school gets less funding from the government. There is no MOEYSC policy on how many times a student can repeat a high school class but if a student repeats a class twice, the school only get 65% of the funding for that student.

Students with Special Interests/Different Learning Styles Not Adequately Served

The curriculum for primary school does not include alternative courses in trades, agriculture or other areas.

The BESS includes strategies aimed at introducing practical experiences and early technical and vocational opportunities into the primary curriculum and train leaders to support and monitor, to standardize secondary curriculum to include technical and vocational options, and to improve alignment between secondary and ITVET. It aims to apply new technologies to increase access and achievement, including the use of ICT, open-learning and on-line learning options. It also aims to increase enrollment in technical and vocational programmes, increase collaboration between secondary schools and ITVETs, provide ITVET

courses to secondary school students, and strengthen the relevance of ITVET programs by linking with local economic and employment opportunities, and increasing evening and summer options.

Access to Remedial Courses

There are some remedial courses in place in some schools, although schools are not required to provide these courses. The BESS includes several strategies aimed at improving teacher effectiveness in supporting student achievement at all levels, including developing after-school programs for students in need but there is no official policy on remedial courses.

3.8.4 Recommended Policies

Students Inadequately Prepared from Start

If preschool is made available to all students, it will be important to ensure that all students attend preschool. The preschool program should have a standardized curriculum and should include attention to learning the English language and learning to read. Literacy, reading and remedial programs should also be put in place, for both children and their parents, if interested. Children's ability to read should be carefully tracked by the MOEYSC. The early warning system should monitor grades and provide timely intervention, with remedial assistance provided at the first signs that the child is struggling and not only once he/she has failed a course.

Promotion to Higher Grades without Basic Foundations

Students in early primary should have the basic foundations in English, reading and Math before being promoted to higher grades. This will require that the curriculum, teaching strategies, monitoring and remedial options are all geared toward this important objective.

Students with Special Interests/Different Learning Styles Not Adequately Served

Inclusive education should be promoted in catering to students' individual differences and the curriculum should include trade and practical courses to address different interests. Programs should be in place to connect students with career options and to help them see what different types of education are required for different types of careers.

Relevance of the Curriculum to Subsequent Employment

Studies of the employee skill and capacity needs of employers in various sectors in Belize should be analyzed and compared with the spectrum of educational options available at the primary and secondary level in Belize. In addition to covering the basic academic curriculum, schools should be providing opportunities for career exploration and development, including connecting students with employment areas of interest and helping students acquire the skills needed.

Access to Remedial Courses

Remedial lunchtime, before- and after-school, and weekend remedial courses should be made available to all students who are struggling with a particular course or courses. Buddy systems should be put in place to help students with coursework.

Teaching Quality and Management

Recommendations related to teacher training and MOEYSC oversight discussed in the previous section are relevant here as well.

3.9 Barrier 6: Insufficient Supply (Preschools, and Primary and Secondary Classrooms)

3.9.1 Introduction, Description of Barrier, and Impacts

Pre-Primary

As discussed above, not all communities have access to preschool. Some communities do not have a local preschool and it is difficult or impossible to transport their young child to another community. Preschools also charge fees which pose a barrier to poor families. Additionally, some children are reportedly turned away from preschool if they are not yet toilet-trained. A primary school principal in the Cayo district reported that only 10% of his/her students have attended preschool, explaining that: *“Parents have the mentality that preschool is just where students would just go and play.”* There was also insufficient space in the preschools available.

In a primary school in the Stann Creek district, which had a preschool attached to the school, we were told that almost all of the primary students attended the preschool and that together with this and the reading program in Infant 1, students were well prepared for primary school.

Primary

Primary schools are available for most students but in some cases, they are overcrowded and have had to turn students away. They may try to accommodate a few extras but that means their class sizes exceed 35 which has its own negative repercussions. One primary school in the Belize district reported that they have had to turn away about 15 applicants for Infant 1 each year for the past 3 years. In another Belize district primary school, it was reported that: *“Our strategy to help facilitate the attendance of these children in school is that we keep a list with contact numbers for those not accepted and as soon as we have space available we would call.”* Another reported: *“We always have to turn away students. For Infant 1 we turn away about 5 and Infant 2 about 10. We operate on a first come first served basis based on the availability of space. We do give some focus on students from the school neighborhood.”* One primary school reported having two Infant 2 classes with 51 and 53 students each, and a Standard 2 class

of 40 students. If students do not have access to the local primary school they may or may not have other choices. Parents may not want to bus their young children to another location. Further, when children miss school waiting for a space they will lag behind the others academically once they finally find a space.

It was mentioned that classes of 35 plus students do not allow for individualized attention for those students who need extra help. One principal suggested that a ratio of 25 students per teacher would be ideal since the teachers can then monitor the students better.

Secondary

Secondary schools have also turned students away because of insufficient space. A secondary school in the Belize district reportedly receives 800 applicants a year, and they can only take 160. They report that the criteria that they use for selection are grades, PSE scores, teacher recommendation and information that they get from the previous school. In this district, there are more secondary schools to choose from and applications are likely higher where schools are considered of better quality. In another secondary school in the same district, which accepts students with low PSE scores, they have space for 250 students but fewer than 100 enrolled. In remote locations, there may be fewer options. A primary school in a remote location in the Belize district also reported that the only available secondary school for their students does not always have space. There are 18 secondary schools in the Belize district, compared with 6 in Corozal and 7 in Orange Walk. In one secondary school in the Orange Walk district, 11 students applying to First Form last year were turned down because of insufficient space. A secondary school in the Stann Creek district reported that they have to turn away some students because every year they have 350 applicants and they can only take 260 of them (they have 7 First Form classrooms). They look at both Standard 6 grades and PSE as criteria for acceptance.

Considering that student numbers are highest in First Form, and lowest by Fourth Form, unless the schools have more Form 1 classrooms and teachers, then First Form applicants may exceed capacity. In these cases, if the students were already considering dropping out or if they had to travel significant distances as a result on not getting into their community school (and if family finances made paying for daily transportation a challenge) this rejection may result in the decision to drop out. We did not uncover clear examples of this (although some were suggestive of this) but these kinds of data should be monitored by MOEYSC. Particularly in districts where there are few secondary schools available this may be a cause for a portion of dropouts.

If secondary schools use past behavior, primary school recommendations, PSE scores and other criteria for acceptance, the students that may be turned away due to lack of space may already be facing challenges. Adding the struggle of trying to find a school that will accept them, along with major changes in their peer community, travel time and costs, and other challenges, these students may simply decide it is not worth the effort.

Some Best Practice Examples

Attaching a preschool to the existing primary school may be a way to attract and accommodate more preschool students. In a primary school in the Stann Creek district, which had a preschool attached to the school, we were told that almost all of the primary students attended.

3.9.2 Profiles

Students most affected by these barriers are pre-primary aged children and primary aged children. Children in rural communities will have less access to preschool than will urban communities. Children from poor families are less able to pay the preschool fees.

3.9.3 Existing Policies and Programs

Pre-Primary

Preschools are not available in all communities, and they charge fees that are not affordable by all families. The curriculum is not set by MOEYSC and preschool is not compulsory. The BESS included strategies to expand access to preschool education, by first determining supply and demand through mapping of preschools, and then increasing the number of preschools in the neediest locations. Since 2011, there have been 22 new preschools opened across the country and the government of Belize is in the process of building 22 new preschools in mainly rural areas within the next twelve months.

Primary

Most communities have a primary school within the community or within a reasonable distance. Primary schools are expected to keep class sizes within an acceptable range but some continue to be overcrowded, and in some cases students are not attending primary school for part of the time because there is insufficient space. Primary school is compulsory until age 14 and most children in Belize attend primary school. Student teacher ratio is determined by the Education Rules and class size is determined by school management and administration and is on average 25 at the primary level.

Secondary

Secondary school is not compulsory for children over 14 years of age, and as discussed above, schools have discretion in terms of their acceptance criteria. The BESS had strategies to expand access and enrollment at secondary level, by determining supply and demand through mapping, increasing the number of spaces and secondary schools in most underserved areas, and continuing efforts to address financial barriers. At the secondary level, there is no official student teacher ratio but the average class size is between 25 and 30. With the new system of secondary school financing, Formula Funding, some high schools are now increasing their class size to 30 plus students.

3.9.4 Recommended Policies

School

The BESS strategy of determining supply and demand through mapping of schools, and increasing the number of schools in most needy locations, seems appropriate in view of the findings. There should be an analysis and reporting on how the decisions are being made to provide new or expanded schools based on the mapping and population statistics (and projections). School and classroom capacity, classroom size, and numbers of children accepted and turned away, should be reported by schools to the district MOEYSC offices annually. A system of referral to an alternate school with space should be put in place so that students are not on their own trying to find a location when turned down at their school of choice.

Catchment areas should be defined, and a process should be implemented whereby schools are required to accept children from their local catchment area before they screen applicants on the basis of other criteria. If school becomes compulsory for ages 3 to 18, the MOEYSC should consider how to ensure that public schools accept students strictly according to catchment area, and that school fees are comparable across the system, to address the two-tiered system of secondary education and its resulting impacts on school acceptance and completion.

Standardized acceptance criteria should be established for schools at all three levels, including preschool, primary and secondary school.

Preschool

In order to increase preschool attendance more preschools will need to be built and the costs of preschool will probably have to be subsidized by the government for some families. It will also be helpful to ensure that preschools are helping with literacy and reading so that students are better prepared in Infant 1. Attaching preschools to existing primary schools may be less costly than creating separate stand-alone schools. A public education campaign should be put in place, and schools should work with parents to promote the importance of preschool education. This will become clearer as the MOEYSC is able to standardize the preschool curriculum and subsequently show the impacts of attending preschool on school readiness and performance in primary school.

Primary and Secondary School

The MOEYSC needs to intervene immediately to support students who may be turned away from primary and secondary school because of insufficient space. Schools should report on existing and anticipated enrollment for each grade and classroom at the start and end of the school year, so that the MOEYSC can identify where there may be problems in the upcoming school year, and develop strategies to address these. Parents should be asked to register their children as early as possible so that schools will have accurate information on anticipated enrollment.

On a longer-term basis, the MOEYSC should analyze and produce enrollment projections for schools and classrooms so as to identify human resource and infrastructure needs in advance. In all cases, the MOEYSC

needs to intervene immediately to support students who may be turned away at the start of the school year because of insufficient space. The MOEYSC should ensure that the child is accommodated in another school until adjustments are made to accommodate him/her more permanently in his/her community school. Allowances may be made for class sizes to exceed the maximum temporarily until a longer-term solution is made, so that no child will have to miss school at the start of the school year.

If schools are required to accept children from the local catchment area first, before (or in place of) other criteria such as grades and ability to pay, it should be easier to predict annual enrollment expectations.

3.10 Barrier 7: Parental/Social Norms and Values Not Supportive of Education

3.10.1 Introduction, Description of Barrier, and Impacts

Parental Values and Working with Schools

Many school personnel reported that students who had parents who did not support them in their pursuit of education, or who did not see the importance of education, were more likely to leave school early. Lack of parental support and influence with respect to education cited by interviewees ranged from parents simply not being at home during the day (for instance, parents who work) and so they do not know if their child is attending school, expressing attitudes that school is not important, failing to respond to requests for meetings with the school or justifications for absence, lack of assistance with school work, enlisting the child to bring home income for the family or to help with home chores during the day, negative role modelling (e.g., family members in gangs), to even resistance or hostility to the school's efforts to intervene.

Some school policies may prohibit parents from going into school to discuss their child. In one Orange Walk district secondary school, for instance, the student said her parent is unable to go into the school to pick up his/her report card because his/her school fees have not been paid. The family is having some recent financial challenges and the school helped to arrange for a subsidy but the fees were still unpaid. The student does very well academically and has had no disciplinary issues. She wants to continue and complete Fourth Form but the family needs financial help.

It appeared that in most cases parents are expected to go to the school to meet with school personnel and that visits to the home (from truancy officers, counsellors or school personnel) were rare. Without opportunities for communication, the school cannot hope to enlist parents in the support of their child's education. One Second Form teacher who observed the barrier of poor parental support had the following suggestions: *"Have more communication with parents' -- direct communication with teachers and administration. Allow home visits to be part of education policy especially with parents who do not come when called to come to school. Provide more educational programs through the media. Educate parents to be more aware of their children. Provide seminars to parents by MOE to educate them."*

Some schools have implemented home visits with parents and some schedule several meetings a year with parents (start of term, mid-term etc.). Among the strategies schools were using to enlist the support of parents were:

- having each teacher visit every student's parents/guardians in their home at the end of each term;
- using texting to contact parents (and maintaining ongoing communication about day-to-day issues);
- developing a "Parent Out-Reach Program," to help parents "better understand the importance of education and the benefits it brings to the household and the community";
- offering a parenting program annually for a period of seven weeks; or,
- sending advisory notes to parents requesting a forum with the parent to talk about their child's level of academic progress and how the parent can support, and encouraging parents to come and sit for a day or two to see what's going on in the class.

Some felt that there should be more penalties placed on parents for their children's absences: *"A good suggestion that would be help like in the case of absenteeism is develop a policy that the parent is taken to court and pay a fine, but then that is when the political will try to get involve. Then is when MOE should take action and develop firm policies to teach these parents to be responsible."*

Some parents have little to no education themselves, and can't help their children with their work, but some schools have remedial courses and programs in place.

Often the parents themselves have not completed primary or secondary education, particularly in the rural communities, so this may affect the value that they place on education. In the Toledo district, a primary principal reported that: *"I find in this area some of our parents cannot read and write so we encourage them to get other people in the community to assist the student and their children at home with their assignment and school work because they cannot do it because they cannot read or write."*

Secondary school principal, Belize district

"First of all, we have excellent communication with parents. Beginning at registration – parents have to be present. Then there is a meeting with parents and students outlining school requirements. A handbook is given as a guide for students to obtain success – orientation. The school is divided equally into 36 weeks in the school year. 3 terms divided equally into 12 weeks. Report period every mid-term after 6 weeks. Parents must come in. Parents of children who are passing and parents of children who are failing must meet teachers of each subjects."

In the above case, the school selected students on the basis of grades and recommendations from their previous schools, so there may be an initial level of parent involvement that is less apparent in other schools.

As discussed above, parents of children with disabilities may fail to enroll their children in school because they think there are insufficient services, they are embarrassed, or they are afraid of how others will behave toward their children. Additional information for parents of children with disabilities about what services are in place at school and how important education is for these children may help.

PTA interviewees tended to report that the main functions of their PTA's were to organize sports and other activities for the school, build new structures, renovate and these kinds of things. For the most part, they do not appear to serve as mechanisms to help improve education and school completion. When asked "What does the PTA do to help prevent dropout" PTA respondents stated: "*As PTA we do not get involved in those issues.*" Others mentioned that communication between the administration and PTA was not always good and that usually the administration has already made decisions and just contacts the PTA for support. One PTA in Orange Walk district that was involved in some of the standard PTA activities also reported that they had worked with the school on the rights of children to be at school, and on policies regarding music and arts.

The PTA's did, however, see a role for more parental involvement overall. They suggested, for instance, that:

- All stakeholders (parents/teachers/students/administration/MOEYSC) should help in assisting all meetings carried out by the school.
- Concerning behavioural problems, provide sessions to all students and parents especially given by motivational speakers.
- Have meetings for students and parents from different departments for instance Human Development or NDACC.

PTA members also clearly had made observations regarding teaching quality, school management, communication and other issues, and would likely have useful information and the capability to collaborate with school personnel in improving the school experience and reducing dropout.

PTAs tended to meet fairly infrequently; in order to be more involved in school operations they would likely need to hold meetings more often (for example, monthly). In general, they had high attendance from parents to the meetings that they did hold.

One secondary school in the Cayo district had a PTA that addressed more than infrastructure, as described by the principal: "*We have a functional PTA that is divided in to 4 clusters: discipline, academics, fund raising and look at the school improvement plan.*" Unfortunately, according to the PTA, they were not meeting regularly at the time of the interviews.

Rural Farming and Fishing Communities

As discussed in other sections, there may be an expectation in some communities that the child needs to skip school either temporarily or permanently to help the family earn income. One example of a challenge faced in some of the northern communities in Corozal is that children may be taken out of school for a few weeks during planting and/or harvesting season. One example described by Corozal and Orange Walk

interviewees was of a local rural farming community that recruited children for several weeks during the January to June school period, because being shorter in stature they are better at picking low crops like beans. Because the pay is high (\$200 to \$300 per week) for a short period of work, families start to depend on this as an important source of family income. The parents send in notes saying the children are sick but they are actually in the fields. The school district personnel went and spoke with the employers and explained that this was against the law, and they have since noticed a marked decrease in absences. Similarly, children of transient farm labourers in the southern districts are reportedly absent from school a lot because they are out working on the banana farms.

In general, rural communities face different challenges than urban communities when it comes to education. Rural villages may not have preschools and transportation to secondary schools is time consuming and costly. One teacher in a rural community in Cayo district said: *"It is good that they are doing this survey because we are in the rural area and focus is not given to rural areas. We don't have a police and there are not truancy officers either."* This teacher was concerned that some parents were keeping their children at home and out of school. He/she also observed that only about 60% of students from this school go on to secondary school, and only about a third of these complete secondary school. Students at this school stated: *"We need the government to send money to buy chairs, tables, books and computers for our school."* In another rural Cayo primary school, the Principal estimated that only 10% of children go on from primary to secondary school.

It was noted that in some coastal communities where the parents' livelihoods are traditionally fishing, once the students are 14 years old, or once they completed primary school, they would drop out to take on the same trade as their fathers.

Cultural notions regarding gender roles may also impact children's' decisions about whether or not to stay in school. One school administrator reflected on cultural issues that can impact school completion rates in some communities: *"especially with males they would be put to work since a man is the one to sustain the family, whereas with females they are to stay at home and do house chores. These issues are called "Machismo" in Spanish and it is still alive in many communities."*

Drugs and Alcohol, Crime and Gangs

Interviewees in Belize City commented that gangs whose territory is between the child's home and school can be a barrier to students attending school. If they are fearful for their safety, they may be reluctant to travel through the community to school. While we were conducting interviews at one school, it was explained to us that a young girl who was seated during the school prayer had received gunshot wounds in both of her legs during a shootout in her community. Some children who drop out of school join the gangs.

Interviewees also commented on the use of alcohol and drugs in some communities, including contraband beer up north, and that students are sometimes drawn into this. One Orange Walk district PTA member stated: *"The risk that the students go through in regards to the community is that they are exposed to the use of drugs and alcohol. The community also influences because they do not value education and that can cause a negative impact on students."*

One of the young men we spoke to who reported that others had always wanted to fight with him both at school and on the way to school, suggested that the MOEYSC put programs in place to stop bullying. Programs to improve the safety of students on the way to school and in the school yard would also be helpful, including secure fencing and guarding of the schoolyard, community policing in place along the route to school, and bus transportation.

Some Best Practice Examples

Schools are trying various strategies to reach out to and collaborate more with parents, including conducting home visits, maintaining regular electronic communications (e.g., texting), offering parenting courses, inviting parents to sit in on classes, and other strategies.

In some cases, PTA's have become more active in issues of academics, discipline, teaching quality, school management, communication and other issues.

Where the MOEYSC has gone into communities to talk with residents about the law regarding hiring school-age children for employment, there has been a reduction in the temporary absences of children due to employment in the fields.

3.10.2 Profiles

Students affected by these barriers, in rural communities, will be poor and will likely have parents with limited education themselves. Children in traditionally farming and fishing communities will be more at-risk.

Children in urban environments, and particularly Belize City, will be at risk in terms of drugs and gangs. These students may show signs of withdrawal and disruptive behavior in school.

Children affected by these barriers are in dimensions 2, 3, 4 and 5.

3.10.3 Existing Policies

Schools appear to differ in terms of when and how they work with parents. Some schools conduct home visits and maintain regular communication. PTA's are in place but they generally seem to serve as supports to the school in fundraising and infrastructure improvements, rather than in working with the school to improve the educational experience of students.

The BESS address some of the above concerns through the following strategies: increase accountabilities of schools to parents and local communities for school performance (clarify regulatory framework for establishment and roles of community/parent school bodies and promote optimal approach; establish District and National Associations of school community/parent bodies; strengthen participation of parents and school communities in school life; provide guidelines, support and training to improve community involvement, teacher-parent consultation, collection and analysis of school performance data, reporting

on school performance, and school improvement planning). It also aims to work with communities and families to promote awareness and sensitization to importance of education.

The MOEYSC has reportedly visited communities where children under 14 are out of school because they are working on the farms. By informing the employers that this is illegal, they have been successful in getting children back into school in these cases.

3.10.4 Recommended Policies

Schools need to work more closely with parents to enlist their support with their childrens' education. This may mean more home visits, timelier follow-up when student is absent, parenting programs after-school "homework clubs" and other academic support. The MOEYSC could support schools in offering these programs. A public education campaign to stress the importance of education would also be helpful.

The MOEYSC will need to continue to monitor absences associated with certain times of the year and that may be due to children being called out to work in the farms. Penalties should be imposed on employers who hire school-aged children to work during school hours.

School counsellors will need to be sufficiently available to work with or refer children and adolescents for drug and alcohol rehabilitation. Continued work by agencies with children and adolescents who have joined or who are at-risk of joining gangs is important. Programs to improve the safety of students on the way to school and in the school yard would also be helpful.

The MOEYSC should track transportation issues for all students in the system and provide funding support for families with students who must travel long distances to complete their education.

3.11 Barrier 8: Insufficient Tracking of and Intervention for Students Who Drop Out

3.11.1 Introduction, Description of Barrier, and Impacts

School leaders do not always know, if a child that was attending the previous year but who is not attending in the current year, where that child is. There is not overall monitoring process in place to track students through the system, so that if they drop out between grades there is no process to try to locate them and get them back into school. The only way they are currently tracked is when they are in school, during the school year. Furthermore, since students do not always attend schools in their local communities, and since some schools do not accept students who do not meet their specific standards (academically and financially, for example) the student body may change considerably from year to year. In this sense then schools are not responsible for tracking the whereabouts of the students who attended in the previous school year.

There are services in place to help students who have dropped out to return to school, and these appear to be having a great deal of success. Some of these are profiled below. Not all students who have dropped

out are connected with these services, however, and agencies often lose up to half of their referrals over the course of the program.

20-year-old girl, Cayo District, 4H Graduate

Six years ago, she finished Standard 6 but didn't pass the PSE. She became a trainee at the National 4H Youth Development Center, with the aim to re-sit the PSE. The training year went from 2009 to 2010.

"During my time at 4H I ended up doing agriculture which had included food processing, gardening, slaughtering etc. Coming to 4H was one of the greatest opportunities. During that one year I learn so many things. There is even the entrepreneurship program that inspire you if you would like to start your own small business such as a barbershop, fast-food on any other small business."

She was able to re-sit the PSE and this time she passed. After she graduated 4H she was also granted a scholarship organized through 4H for high school, which she attended for 4 years and then graduated with an arts diploma.

She is now employed in the office at the 4H centre.

There are several agencies that help children and adolescents who have dropped out of school to return and obtain their education. Not all of the agencies are set up with this as their primary mission, but their client population often includes out-of-school children, and they have taken on the task of trying to support these children in returning to school.

Several of the out-of-school children whom we interviewed talked about how, once they made the decision to drop out, they found they were sitting at home all day with nothing to do. Some had tried to find jobs but were unsuccessful. Often, they regretted their decision to have stopped attending school, but they did not know what to do at this stage. Those who became linked up with programs like 4H, CYDP, Skills Training Centre and Youth Cadet Corp were the fortunate ones, but it is clear that there are more who could be reached.

Children and adolescents who are out of school often are suffering from a multitude of challenges. They may have been performing poorly academically, have low self-esteem, may have had disciplinary issues that have led to expulsion, may have financial barriers, and may have substance abuse issues. All of these issues may have to be addressed in a remedial program.

Girl, 15, left school in Second Form, Orange Walk District

One young girl in the Orange Walk district who left school during Second Form recalls having left because the other girls at school had been bullying her in person and on social media. She had also lost time at school for health reasons and begun performing poorly academically, although she had done reasonably well in previous years. At the same time the family was dealing with the father's sudden illness and lack of income, which made paying for the children's education difficult (they had received

a \$300 government subsidy but they had two children in secondary school). The parents, school counsellor and school staff did try to encourage her to remain in school. During the OOSCI interview the girl said that it was a bad decision she made but it is too late to return to school. She said she would be unable to catch up with the work as the rest of the class and she is afraid of having to repeat a grade because she does not want her classmates to see this. Now she finds herself at home “doing nothing”.

In the above case, it might be possible to help this child complete her education if she could be either placed in a different secondary school, entered into Adult Education classes in the evening, or provided with an on-line program with home support. The family would also need more financial support to pay for her education. She attributed her frequent illnesses and absences to stomach problems caused by the food at school; having a medical assessment would also be important for this child.

Secondary schools with adult education courses in the evening, like Gwen Lizzaraga in Belize City and Independence in the Stann Creek district, offer options for students who have dropped out for a few years and may feel too old to go back into the regular secondary school system.

A teacher in a secondary school in the Stann Creek district advised: *“I think that the government needs to identify the dropouts -- get their names and find out the reason why they had discontinued coming to school. Because the teacher might see it differently. It might help them to find out what they want to do because some of them are in the wrong institution.”*

A secondary teacher in the Toledo district recommended that: *“As an institution we need to come up with a team to try to find out why these students dropout, because I think that nobody went out and tried to figure out or find out why these students are dropping out. Because I don’t think they follow up either. I think we need a little group where somebody would just go out find out about these children.”*

Students in a primary school focus group in Toledo district suggested: *“I would suggest that the government form a group and they come in each village to search for kids that don’t go to First Form and try to help them. Try to help them learn more and teach them how to and if they want something to do in the future they would teach them...help train them to be what they want to be in the future so they have experience so when they go look for job they know already what to do. I would suggest that the government would send a set of group people to help and encourage them to go back to school in case they have dropped out. They would tell them how to be interested in school and how to learn and not to give up.”*

3.11.2 Profiles

The children most affected are the ones who have dropped out of school. They are most likely 14 years of age or older. These are children who may face one or more barriers to returning to school, including academic challenges, financial barriers, behavioural challenges, lack of family support, young/single parenthood, drugs/alcohol abuse, and other challenges. The children in this group are in Dimensions 2 and 3.

3.11.3 Existing Policies and Programs

Currently students living in Belize City can attend Gwen Lizzaraga to complete their secondary school education in the evenings. Students in other districts also have access to adult education or alternative ways of completing secondary school education when they have dropped out or are excluded from attending schools in their neighbourhoods.

The MOEYSC is developing a strategy to implement on-line courses.

Programs like the 4H and CYDP are critically important in helping children and adolescents to return to the school system or to take on alternative education programs. Staff provide counselling to help explore some of the challenges that children and adolescents are facing and also help to facilitate their re-entry into the school system.

Programs for Children and Adolescents at Risk

There are several programs in place to help children and adolescents at-risk of dropping out of school or who have dropped out of school. These include 4-H, CYDP, Restore Belize, POWA, Youth Cadet Corp, Skills Training Program, Youth Hostel, and GREAT Program. The MHDSTPA offers four programs, the Conscious Youth Development Programme (CYDP), the Youth Cadet Corp, 4-H, and the Youth Hostel. The CYDP is a program that assists adolescents 13 to 19 years old who have dropped out of school or are at risk of dropping out of school due to gang affiliation. More specifically the program is to help establish gang truce, help develop entrepreneurial skills, and find employment for adolescents. It currently serves 800 plus adolescents, 70% males and 30% females, in Belize City and adjacent communities and has been able to get 30 to 100 back to school. It serves as a drop in center for high school students to do assignment and for students to serve their high school suspension. It experiences more difficulty getting primary school students back to school than high school students.

The Skills Training Center offers skills training for adolescents between the ages of 12 and 17 who want to learn a trade in cosmetology and barbering. The Center has an average enrolment of 30 boys and girls, with mostly girls, but has a capacity for 50. Some of these adolescents re-enter high school after completing the training.

According to the Ministry of Human service “The Youth Hostel is the only certified institution providing rehabilitation and development services for high-risk children in conflict with the law in Belize, in order to enhance their knowledge and skills, and empower them to become more productive members of the community.” This facility which is located in rural Belize District accommodates on average 60 boys and girls between the ages of 12 and 17 inclusive, sent there by the court. These boys and girls are given opportunities to continue their education while in the hostel.

The Youth Cadet Corp is a semi paramilitary organization for adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 with disciplinary problem and in many cases from challenging communities. According to the program coordinator, approximately 90% of graduates go back to school. The program can accommodate 40 adolescents.

Adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 can enroll in the one-year training program at the 4-H Training Center. The program exposes trainees to agriculture practices and helps them to be responsible and disciplined. It also provides opportunities for students who have not sat the PSE to receive classes to prepare them to do so. In some cases, students who have dropped out of high school are tutored at the Center and returned to school and complete their schooling.

Productive Organization for Women Affairs (POWA) is an empowering organization founded in 2003 and located in Dangriga, Stann Creek District. According to its website POWA works “in unity to educate and advocate for women’s personal and economic empowerment and gender equity.” Members work to eliminate all forms of violence and promote the well-being and upliftment of their communities.

The Gang Resistance Education and Training (GREAT) program is to provide an alternative to home and to support youths getting an education. It targets youths who are exposed to gangs and is facilitated by the police department. Its activities are concentrated in Belize City.

Gateway Youth Center provides opportunities for youths to complete or further their education and develop their skills. The center is located in Belize City and was opened in 2016.

The Youth Apprentice Program provides training since 2011 for youths between the ages of 16 and 29 who have dropped out of school. These youths who are mainly boys typically have behavioral problem and some are referred by the magistrate court. The youths participate in a six-month training program with an attachment to a business during which time they are given a weekly stipend of \$100. Some youths go back to schools including ITVET, Gwen Liz High School Evening Division and Wesley Junior College, and some are hired by the business they were attached to.

The Youth Enhancement Services (YES) provides training and education to help students who have dropped out of high school to re-enter school. Its curriculum includes mathematics, English, cooking, and counselling. Some of the youths who attend YES have been sexually and or sexually abused, have disciplinary problem, trafficked, and are pregnant. The organization recruits high school drop outs but is typically only able to attract less than ten students. Some of these students successfully return to school with a partial scholarship from the institution.

Figure 26: Programmes to help students who have dropped out of school or at risk of dropping out of school.

Programme Service	Objective	Target	Age	Capacity	Location	Host
GREAT (Gang Resistance Education and Training)	To provide an alternative to home and to support youths getting an education	Youths who are exposed to gang	9-17	Unlimited	Countrywide	Police Department
Restore Belize	To help prevent and reduce violence by coordinating organizations and mobilizing resources	Males and females who are at risk of dropping out of school because of behavioral problem and youths who have dropped out of school	5-18	Unlimited	Belize City	Prime Minister Office
Youth Hostel	To help curb behavior of youths	Youths with behavioural problem who are sent to the institution by the family court	12-18	60	Belize District	Ministry of Human Services
Skill Training Center	To get youths back in school and for them to develop a skill	Males and females who have dropped out of high school	12-17	50	Belize City	Ministry of Education
Youth Cadet Corp	To modify behaviour of youths and to help them go back to high school	Children who have dropped out of school because of disciplinary problem and who live in vulnerable conditions (e.g., deceased parents, exposed to gang and violence, live with extended family)	13-17	40	Belize District	Ministry of Human Services
4-H	To expose youths to agriculture practices and to prepare some to sit PSE	Youth who have dropped out of school and others who want to be expose to agricultural practices	9-17	50	Belmopan	Ministry of Human Services

3.11.4 Recommended Policies

By improving the tracking system for out-of-school children and adolescents, it should be possible to identify those who have dropped out when they drop out, and then to provide timely intervention to try to support them to return to school. If all intervention has failed to keep the child in school, the MOEYSC should conduct an assessment to determine what options the child and family might need or be interested in to complete his/her education. The programs and services discussed above would be options to explore. Agencies could also conduct outreach with students identified by the school system to be potential clients.

The MOEYSC is considering how to increase online options for school completion, and this is an area that should continue to be developed. Students who are not allowed back into the school environment because of disciplinary problems, for example, could have the opportunity to complete their education online. Students who have dropped out for a few years and may feel too old to go back into the regular secondary school system might also prefer this option. Some schools and community centres in rural areas have computer labs that could be made available in the evenings for students who are taking online courses. Students who do not live in communities with ready access to secondary or tertiary education could similarly use the online option. Costs may also be lower to complete online education, so that families with more limited financial resources could access online options. It will be important to ensure that online options are of high quality. Also, not all students will have the self-discipline or capacity to learn as effectively online as they would in a classroom setting, and some may not have access to the technological resources in their home or community to utilize the online option.

Secondary schools with adult education courses in the evening that can be accessed for school completion should also be continued and expanded.

Distance and on-line learning options may help for those students who cannot attend the normal school classroom for various reasons. One interviewee suggested: *“Provide a virtual library especially for those with intellectual challenges or the high risks students. Such as providing with internet and band with access with the computers.”*

4.0 Recommendations

Recommendations to reduce barriers to school completion address funding, policy, training, tracking and monitoring, and program development. They will include steps to address the issue of insufficient preparation before primary school and grade repetition in early primary years, and strategies to reduce dropout in primary and secondary school. Some recommendations apply to all five of the dimensions of exclusions, whereas others are specific to only one of the dimensions. The discussion will start with assets and best practices within the education system in Belize.

Assets and Best Practices

The BESS (2011-2016) has identified a number of important strategies to address the effectiveness of education in Belize. These strategies aim to increase access by increasing spaces for children in schools, improving the quality and relevance of education, and improving management and accountability. These strategies are being put in place and are well aligned with the findings of this study. Additionally, schools have been successful in implementing numerous programs and activities that students are finding interesting and motivating, and in many setting students report that the school staff strive to support them in completing their education successfully. The government has established a number of programs to help reduce the financial barriers to educational completion. It has also implemented a tracking system that will identify early warning signs and will enable more timely intervention. Additionally, there are a number of youth programs in place that help to find youth who have dropped out and to provide them with the necessary supports to return and complete their education.

Several examples of effective and innovative strategies at the District or school level were also identified. These include:

- Locating preschools within existing primary schools.
- Providing informal support in the form of literacy and reading programs.
- Providing work options for students and families to cover school fees.
- Having extra school supplies at schools so that children without these can access them.
- Collecting uniforms from graduating students to rent or provide free of charge to students who can't afford them.
- Renting textbooks at a low cost for students who can't afford to buy them.
- Being attentive to transportation challenges and supporting children who are having difficulty attending because of these (e.g., purchase bicycles for students who have too far to walk)
- Working with parents and the community to provide feeding programs.
- Having a standardized approach to verify absences with parents, including requiring a note from the parents, and conducting follow-up contacts with parents by phone or in person.
- Using alternatives to sending a child home or expulsion, including after-school detentions, or after-school work projects.
- Using more merits than demerits, rewarding students for responsible and appropriate behavior and actions, and using merits as to help students financially (e.g., awarding merit dollars to buy school supplies, meals, and other personal items).
- Implementing a code of conduct whereby management cannot take out a child out of school without conducting an extensive investigation of the incident in advance.
- Using a student absenteeism logging system with a team coach for each form level who monitors absenteeism and triggers home visits. Having the Principal or the Department heads monitor grade books every two weeks and identify students with failing grades to be provided with more support from the teacher, remedial courses, etc.
- Training peer helpers in leadership and counselling skills, to identify children in need of support and refer them to the school counsellor. Using peer helpers to help in the classroom and peer-tutoring volunteers to help with academics after school. Attaching peer helpers with First Form students to help with the transition.
- Enlisting parents to provide additional one-on-one support for children with disabilities that teachers are unable to provide in the classroom.

- Increasing presence of MOEYSC in secondary schools. In one Stann Creek secondary school the MOEYSC put in a support unit for the school, providing regular visits and assistance in teacher training and support services.
- Implementing a “long distance program”, whereby parents would come with the students suspended for serious infractions (e.g., drug abuse) to pick up work (lessons or assessments) and bring them back. The student does not attend the classes but does his/her work at home. In this way the student is supported to complete his/her education even when his/her behavior precludes attendance in the regular school environment.
- Increasing school partnerships with local and international universities to provide more training and support for teachers, through workshops, coaching and other approaches.
- Conducting regular classroom monitoring and teacher supervision. In one school, heads of department have a three-week cycle where they go in to each classroom for 45 minutes to observe, evaluate and supervise teachers, and then report back to the administration.
- Providing English and reading in the preschool curriculum, and reading classes for primary school students before and/or after school.
- Implementing before- and after-school remedial classes and tutoring for students in English, reading and other academic courses that they may be struggling with.
- Introducing alternative teaching strategies and courses in trades, agriculture and other areas in primary and secondary school.
- Using buddy systems to offer various forms of assistance, from academic assistance to identification of counselling needs. In one school’s buddy system, if a student is absent his assigned buddy will pass on his homework, or any other assessment given on that day.
- Having strategies to involve parents, including conducting home visits, maintaining electronic communications, offering parenting courses, inviting parents to sit in on classes, and other strategies.
- Having an active PTA that addresses issues of academics, discipline, teaching quality, school management, communication and other issues.
- Linking students who have dropped out with agencies that help with emotional, behavioural and academic challenges and support them in completing their education.

Public

Parents and communities need to understand the importance of education but they need to see how careers and income are tied to education. Families do not always see that increased education for their children will result in a better life for them. Additionally, a campaign needs to be initiated to increase awareness of children with disabilities, the causal and preventative factors (where known) and the importance of education and remedial programs for these children.

1. Implement a study of career paths in Belize associated with different educational levels, including how training in secondary, ITVET and tertiary education prepares students for national and international careers.
2. Implement a public relations campaign to promote the importance of education.
3. Conduct awareness raising activities with parents to help increase their understanding of the importance of education.
4. Support community-based libraries, reading and literacy programs particularly in rural communities.

5. Strengthen public awareness campaigns regarding maternal and prenatal health and children with disabilities, as well as the ways in which schools can support children with disabilities to achieve their potential.

Recommendations that Address All Dimensions:

Financial barriers, including the costs for school fees as well as indirect costs (for uniforms etc.) represent barriers for children to attend school in Belize. There is currently no program in place to track children from birth and/or immigration into Belize to determine if children are enrolled in school, including whether or not they have made the transition from primary school to secondary school. School is only compulsory for children aged 5 to 14 (or younger, if the child graduates from primary school before 14). Children with disabilities are likely under-represented in schools for various reasons, including limited staff training and programs available, parental attitudes, and inaccessible school facilities. Transportation to school also represents a barrier at all levels and for various reasons including distance to travel, schedules and costs.

1. Track students from birth/entry into Belize and monitor for school attendance and dropout, and intervene in a timely manner.
2. Increase the compulsory age of education to start to age 3 and to cover up to age 18 and/or completion of secondary school, whichever is sooner.
3. Provide subsidies to cover all school fees and indirect costs of education based on assessment of family income and financial need. Ensure that families receive sufficient subsidies to cover all direct and indirect educational costs for all children in the family.
4. Reduce and/or eliminate suspensions and expulsions as disciplinary practices and replace with work programs, after-school detentions, merit-based approaches and other strategies that do not result in the child missing school. If the child does have to miss school, provide school work and support for home completion.
5. Standardize school responses to absences. Require a note from parents in all cases of absenteeism, and implement a process whereby the school follows up with parents to verify reasons for absenteeism.
6. Continue to improve training for administrators and teachers so that students achieve at the appropriate grade levels. Provide remedial intervention at all levels to ensure success and reduce repetition or promotion without sufficient preparation and capacity.
7. Continue to improve training for administrators and teachers in working with children with disabilities. Build on partnerships with agencies and families to identify children with disabilities and to provide support to keep them in school.
8. Continue to provide training for administrators and teachers to provide support for children with behavioural and emotional challenges. Counselling training should include helping teachers to identify risk factors (including sexual abuse), and training in how to understand and reach the students and help them.
9. Train teachers and principals to work with parents to enlist support for their children's education, and to connect families with counselling services when needed. parenting lessons as well as courses to teach parents to read so that they can help their children with school work.
10. Ensure that districts have sufficient truancy officers and NaRCIE officers to adequately meet the needs of schools and students. Costs will be reduced if the OpenEMIS is used to identify truant students in

specific schools in a timely manner rather than requiring officers to visit all schools to review absenteeism data.

11. Ensure that all schools (preschool, primary school, secondary school) are accessible for children with disabilities.
12. Increase funding and support for school feeding programs and meal subsidies.
13. Review transportation policies and challenges and increase options, including free transportation, at all educational levels.
14. Increase MOEYSC presence in rural communities to assist with unique challenges in these communities, including providing outreach to families, providing resources for schools, improving the quality of teachers (education), addressing children with learning disabilities, and monitoring and enforcing legislation against child labour.

Recommendations for Dimension 1: Children of pre-primary school age who are not in pre-primary or primary school.

Children aged 3 and 4 can attend two years of pre-primary school before starting primary school at age 5.

There are insufficient spaces for children in preschool and parents must pay fees. If there are no preschools in the community parents must transport their children to another community. Some students enter primary school not speaking English. If students are unable to read in primary school they carry these deficits through to later years and struggle with poor academic performance in all areas. Children with disabilities are also significantly represented in the group of children out of school in preschool and early primary years. Rural and poor families have less access to preschool.

Recommendations:

1. Implement ESL and reading classes in rural communities where the language spoken is not English.
2. Increase spaces in preschools and put more preschools in communities, focusing specifically on rural communities.
3. Establish a standardized preschool curriculum.
4. Ensure that preschool aims to help children learn English, the alphabet, and some reading skills, so that they are better prepared when entering primary school.
5. Work with parents to emphasize the importance of preschool for getting better prepared for primary school.
6. Conduct outreach to ensure invisible children are enrolled in preschool. This should include partnering with village councils, Ministry of Health and other relevant agencies to identify children with disabilities, children of migrant workers, and other invisible children.

Recommendations for Dimension 2: Children of primary school age who are not in primary or secondary school.

Primary school age using the ISCED category covers 6 grades, from age 5 to 10 years of age; in Belize, primary school covers 8 grades, from Infant 1 to Standard 6. Students who start primary school at age 5 and do not repeat a grade can complete primary school by the age of 12 or 13.

Most children in Belize attend primary school but some start primary school late (age 8). There are not always spaces in local primary schools for applicants so they are behind when they finally get accepted. Some children start early into primary school (age 4) possibly in part because of limited access to preschools²⁷. Many of the school fees are covered by the government for primary school, but extra costs for uniforms, meals, school supplies and other costs are not covered. Once a child reaches age 14, or completes primary school (whichever comes first) they are not required to continue attending school. Children can be sent home from primary school for various reasons, such as late payment of fees or an incomplete uniform, and disciplinary practices differ across the country.

Recommendations:

1. Increase spaces in primary schools.
2. Implement standardized acceptance and disciplinary practices across primary schools.
3. Organize primary schools so that they accept children from their catchment area before accepting students from outside the catchment area.
4. Have a process in place to identify when students are not accepted to their community primary school because of space limitations and provide immediate assistance to ensure that the child begins their primary education on time.
5. Ensure that students are not excluded from attendance on the basis of demerits imposed for not paying fees, inability to purchase school uniform, etc.
6. Provide feeding programs and meal subsidies for students who need these.

Recommendations for Dimension 3: Children of lower secondary school age who are not in primary or secondary school.

ISCED defines lower secondary school as covering four years from grade 7 to grade 10, and ages 11 to 14. School is compulsory in Belize only until age 14. Some children between the ages of 12 and 14 may not be attending primary or secondary school, if they have graduated from primary school already. Secondary school fees exceed the capacity of some families. Children at age 14 are eligible for part-time work and may be needed to contribute to family income. Discretionary acceptance policies of some secondary schools (e.g., based on PSE scores and ability to pay higher fees), and travel required, may limit accessibility for some students.

Recommendations:

1. Increase spaces in secondary schools.
2. Implement standardized acceptance and disciplinary practices across secondary schools.
3. Organize secondary schools so that they accept children from their catchment area before accepting students from outside the catchment area.
4. Have a process in place to identify when students are not accepted to their community school because of space or other limitations and provide immediate assistance to ensure that the child begins their secondary education on time.

²⁷ Children who are 5 years of age by January 31 of the following year are eligible to start primary school at age 4.

5. Ensure that students are not excluded from attendance on the basis of demerits imposed for not paying fees, inability to purchase school uniform, etc.

Recommendations for Dimension 4: Children who are in primary school but at risk of dropping out.

Most children in Belize attend primary school but many are not academically prepared when they start and have to repeat grades. Students get promoted without adequate academic preparation. School, personal and family stressors that can be barriers to school attendance are not adequately addressed. Schools struggle with parents who are not involved and not supportive of their children's education. Indirect costs of education sometimes exceed the family's capability to pay. Students are sometimes absent because their parents take them out of school to earn income for the family. Some students who do not do well with the standard curricula are more motivated by trades, agriculture, and other kinds of courses.

Recommendations:

1. Increase spaces in primary schools.
2. Standardize acceptance/admissions and disciplinary policies across primary schools with the aim of reducing absenteeism, suspensions and expulsions, and increasing attendance for students within a specified catchment area.
3. Ensure that primary school helps children learn English, the alphabet, and reading skills. For students who have not acquired proficient reading skills in the Infant 1 and 2 grades, provide an intensive and targeted intervention to ensure that these skills have been acquired before being promoted to Standard 1.
4. Conduct outreach to ensure invisible children are enrolled in primary school.
5. Integrate alternative courses such as trades and agriculture into primary school curriculum.
6. Establish school counsellors in every primary school trained to work with children and adolescents with emotional and behavioural issues as well as with parents and families.
7. Ensure that districts have sufficient truancy officers and officers able to work with children with disabilities to adequately meet the needs of schools and students.
8. Implement buddy systems for supporting students with difficulties at school.
9. Monitor students by tracking number to ensure that they successfully made the transition from primary school; if they are not recorded in the system after primary school, conduct visits with the family to facilitate their transition to secondary school.

Dimension 5: Children who are in lower secondary school but at risk of dropping out.

Students and parents see the compulsory age of 14 as the time when it is acceptable to remove students from school. Students are not tracked through the system so that it is not clear which students have moved on, and so timely intervention is not in place. Secondary school acceptance criteria are discretionary so applicants may have to travel distances to attend school. Secondary school costs, direct and indirect, are higher than primary school costs and sometimes exceed a family's ability to pay. School, family and personal stressors that can serve as barriers are not adequately addressed. Schools have discretionary policies about discipline and expulsion which can increase absenteeism and result in poor

academic performance. Pregnant students are required to be absent from school in some cases and there are few supports in place to assist young mothers to return and complete school. Gangs provide young boys with an alternative when school is not a positive experience.

Recommendations:

1. Increase spaces in secondary schools and locate schools within reasonable distance from rural communities.
2. Standardize acceptance/admissions and disciplinary policies across secondary schools with the aim of reducing absenteeism, suspensions and expulsions, and increasing attendance for students within a specified catchment area.
3. After a summative evaluation of the Early Warning System after three years, incrementally extend it to other schools.
4. Integrate alternative courses such as trades and agriculture into all secondary school curriculum.
5. Provide training for secondary school administrators and teachers in working with parents, identifying students at risk, addressing behavioural challenges, working with children with disabilities and working with children with different learning needs and interests.
6. Implement remedial programs in communities (literacy, reading, homework clubs, tutoring).
7. Increase the number of school counsellors in every secondary school trained to work with adolescents with emotional and behavioural issues as well as with parents and families.
8. Implement buddy systems for supporting students with difficulties at school.
9. Increase anti-bullying programs and programs to address gangs, drugs and alcohol.
10. Review disciplinary policies for pregnant students with the objective of keeping pregnant students in school; consider providing daycare at schools to provide care for children while their parents complete their education.
11. Track students out of school and match them with appropriate programs.
12. Increase on-line learning options.
13. Increase education completion options for students who have dropped out but would like to return to complete their education.
14. Review the primary and secondary curriculum, and implement a process to determine the extent to which students are receiving training needed to attain employment following completion of secondary school.

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List of Completed Stakeholder Interviews

Name	Position and Organization
NATIONAL MINISTRY OF EDUCATION	
Mr. Bernaldino Pech	Researcher/Planner, Planning Unit
Dr. Neullin Villanueva	Deputy Chief Education Officer
Mr. Louis Carballo	Director of School Resourcing Services
Dr. Candy Armstrong	Director of Support Services
Ms. Nadera Ross	Early Childhood Officer, Early Childhood Education & Development Center
Dr. Carol Babb	Chief Education Officer
COROZAL DISTRICT EDUCATION CENTRE	
Ms. Velma Godoy	Corozal District Education Manager
Ms. Zaire Clarke	Corozal District NaRCIE Officer
Ms. Jacquiline Rancharan	Corozal District NaRCIE Officer
Mr. Pablo Gonzales	Corozal District Truancy Officer
ORANGE WALK DISTRICT EDUCATION CENTRE	
Ms. Carla Alvarez	Orange Walk District Education Manager
Ms. Janet Escalante	Orange Walk District Truancy Officer
Ms. Dorita Esculiana	Orange Walk District Truancy Officer
BELIZE DISTRICT EDUCATION CENTRE	
Dr. Yvonne Davis	Belize District Education Manager
Ms. Nelma Jones	Education Officer, San Pedro and Caye Caulker
TOLEDO DISTRICT EDUCATION CENTRE	
Dr. Carmen Lopez	Toledo District Education Manager
Fedelis Vairez	Toledo District Truancy Officer
Sherlet Hill	Toledo District Truancy Officer
MINISTRY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT	
Ms. Marnette Westby	Director, Conscious Youth Development Program Ministry of Human Development
Mr. Paul Casanova	Program Officer, Conscious Youth Development Program Ministry of Human Development
NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN	

Name	Position and Organization
Mr. Dylan Williams	Monitoring and Evaluation Programme Officer National Committee for Families and Children
NATIONAL YOUTH PROGRAMS	
Ms. Dianne Finnegan	Coordinator Belize National Youth Apprenticeship Program
Mr.	Assistant Coordinator Belize National Youth Apprenticeship Program
PRINCIPAL ASSOCIATIONS	
Mr. Felix Sutherland	Belize District Association of Primary Principals (Representative) Principal, St. John's Vianney RC
SCHOOLS	
Ms. Cruzita Castillo	Principal, Maud Williams HS
COROZAL DISTRICT YOUTH PROGRAMS	
Ms. Zune Canche	Accountant/Focal Point Child Protection, and Coordinator, Youth Inclusive Community Based Monitoring and Remediation System (YICBMR) Belize Sugar Cane Famers Association
Mr. Emmanuel Hall	Youth Monitor, Youth Inclusive Community Based Monitoring and Remediation System (YICBMR) Belize Sugar Cane Famers Association
ORANGE WALK DISTRICT YOUTH PROGRAMS	
(See Ms. Zune Canche above)	
BELIZE DISTRICT YOUTH PROGRAMS	
Ms. Stephanie Reine	Coordinator, Training Centre Youth Enhancement Services

ANNEX A: TABLES EXTRACTED FROM LITERATURE

Table 2: *Common Predictors of Early School Leaving (Taken from DeWitt, 2013)*

Dropout Factors	Observed Effect	Interaction Effect
STUDENT FACTORS		
Psychological and behaviour factors – Academic ability/achievement – Grade retention/repetition – Educational and occupational aspirations – Engagement (often made operational by absenteeism and discipline problems) – High school employment – Teenage pregnancy & marriage	– If higher, lower dropout risk – If the case, higher dropout risk – If higher, lower dropout risk – If more absenteeism and/or discipline problems, higher dropout risk – If intensive, inadequate, stressful and unstable, higher dropout risk – Mixed findings	E.g., with gender, race/ethnicity, and employment opportunities
Demographic factors – Gender – Race/ethnicity – Immigration status – Language background – Disabilities	– Mixed findings – Mixed findings – Mixed findings – If native speaker, lower risk – If the case, higher risk	E.g., with race/ethnicity E.g., with family background, perceived behaviour control, and expectations from teachers
FAMILY FACTORS		
Structural characteristics – Socioeconomic status (parental, education and employment) – Family structure (single-parent, step- and/or large families)	– If lower, then higher dropout risk – No independent effect	E.g., with parent–child relationship with income (they both matter)
Underlying processes – Social capital (relationships between parents, children, other families and school) – Human/cultural capital (parental education) – Financial capital (income, ownership)	– If more, lower dropout risk – If higher, lower dropout risk, but perhaps no independent effect? – No independent effect	
SCHOOL FACTORS		

– School type (incl. student composition) – School resources (e.g., class-size & teacher–pupil ratio) – Structural characteristics of schools (e.g., school size) – School policies and practice – Social and academic climate (discipline policy considered fair, high attendance rates, and advanced course taking) – Teacher & teaching quality – School social capital (student–teacher relationship)	– If public & a-selective, higher risk – If balanced, lower dropout risk – No independent effect – If smaller, lower dropout risk, but perhaps no independent effect? – If stimulating, lower dropout risk – If higher, lower dropout risk – If better, lower dropout risk	E.g., with teaching quality and practice E.g., with school social climate
COMMUNITY FACTORS		
– Neighbourhood characteristics – High-achieving vs. dropped-out friends	– If detrimental, higher dropout risk – Lower & higher dropout risk, resp.	
– Employment opportunities – Job scarcity & low salaries – Long working hours	– If job scarcity, lower dropout risk – If >20 working hours, higher risk	With gender With student's SES-background
– Social discrimination/injustice	– If the case, higher dropout risk	With race/ethnicity

ANNEX B: MOEYSC DEFINITIONS OF EDUCATIONAL INDICATORS

Definitions of Educational Indicators²⁸

TERM	DEFINITION
Preschool Net Enrolment Rate	Measures the proportion of preschool aged children (3-4 years old) who are actually enrolled in the preschool system. This is calculated by dividing the total number of preschool-aged children enrolled in preschool, by the total population of 3-4 year olds in Belize.
Preschool Gross Enrolment Rate	Measures the number of children enrolled in preschools as a proportion of the population of preschool aged children (3-4 years old). This is calculated by dividing the number of children enrolled in preschool, by the total population of 3-4 year olds.
Primary School Net Enrolment Rate	Measures the proportion of primary school aged children (5-12 years old) who are actually enrolled in the primary school system.
Secondary School Gross Enrolment Rate	Measures the percentage of secondary school aged children (13-16 years old) who are enrolled in the secondary education system.
Primary School Repetition Rate	Measures the proportion of primary school students enrolled in a given year who repeat the same grade in which they were enrolled in the previous school year.
Primary School Dropout Rate	Measures the percentage of primary school students enrolled in a given year who dropped out of school during the year.
Primary School Completion Rate	Estimates the proportion of a cohort of Infant I students who are expected to complete their primary education within the prescribed eight (8) years, also based on repetition and dropout rates. Calculated as the cohort of students entering Infant 1 in a given academic year (2008/2009), divided by the number of students from that cohort who complete primary education 8 years later (within the prescribed 8 years (2015/2016)
Primary School Student-Teacher Ratio	Indicates the number of primary school students who are enrolled per teacher for a given year. Calculated as the total number of students enrolled at the primary level divided by the total number of teachers at the primary level.

²⁸ Definitions provided in Section 15, Educational Indicators, pg.59-83, MOE Abstract of Education Statistics, 2014-2015.

Percentage of Trained Primary School Teachers	Measures the proportion of primary school teachers who have completed professional training in education. Calculated as the number of primary school teachers who have received formal professional training divided by the total number of teachers at the primary school level.
Apparent Intake Rate	Measures the total number of new entrants in Infant 1, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population at the primary school-entrance age.
Net Intake Rate	Measures the total number of new entrants in Infant 1 who are of the official primary school-entrance age, expressed as a percentage of the population of the same age.

Annex C: Data Table Plan Templates

The data tabulation plan provides a format for the presentation of quantitative results to ensure consistency across all national OOSCI studies. Descriptions of the indicators in the following tables are provided in Chapter 4, as well as the documentation which accompanies the UIS calculation spreadsheets (Typology and Dimensions 4 and 5). The tables are organized by Dimension of Exclusion, and are divided into core tables and optional tables:

Core tables are the required tables for the profiles chapter or statistical annex. They display the number and percentage of children in each of the Five Dimensions of Exclusion, as well as their characteristics.

Optional tables are complementary to the core tables, providing supplementary statistical information related to the indicators for the Five Dimensions of Exclusion.

All tables can be customized depending on data availability. **Table-specific comments** are provided below each table to assist the national team. Moreover, the main **research questions** linked to the indicators and data in each table are also provided, to support the analysis in the national OOSCI study chapter on profiles analysis. For some indicators or groups of disaggregation, it is important to note that surveys may not have large enough sample sizes to produce reliable estimates (*see section X*).

Dimension 1: Children of pre-primary age who are not in pre-primary or primary education

Core table 1: Age-specific attendance rates, by level of education and gender

Age	Pre-Primary	Primary	Lower Secondary	Upper Secondary	Post Secondary	Tertiary	Total (*includes Other)
	Male						
4	43.75	35.16	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	79.69
5	3.91	89.84	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	94.14
6	0.40	96.40	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	98.00
7	0.00	97.90	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	99.58
8	0.00	97.75	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	99.10
9	0.00	97.89	0.42	0.00	0.00	0.00	99.58
10	0.00	82.40	14.61	0.00	0.00	0.00	97.75
11	0.00	39.83	57.14	0.00	0.00	0.00	97.84
12	0.00	20.20	76.26	0.00	0.00	0.00	97.47
13	0.00	6.40	81.28	0.00	0.00	0.00	88.67
14	0.00	2.67	66.22	8.89	0.00	0.00	78.22
15	0.00	0.52	40.21	31.44	0.00	0.00	72.68

16	0.00	0.96	22.01	37.32	4.78	0.00	65.07
17	0.00	0.57	5.75	24.14	10.92	0.00	41.38
	Female						
4	42.63	37.85	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	80.48
5	2.79	89.24	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	92.03
6	0.00	96.83	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	97.62
7	0.98	97.07	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	98.54
8	0.00	97.51	0.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
9	0.48	96.63	0.96	0.00	0.00	0.00	99.04
10	0.00	74.32	22.97	0.00	0.00	0.00	99.10
11	0.00	34.63	63.90	0.00	0.00	0.00	99.02
12	0.00	11.26	85.14	0.00	0.00	0.00	97.30
13	0.00	3.47	83.17	1.98	0.00	0.00	88.61
14	0.00	1.87	67.29	12.62	0.00	0.00	81.78
15	0.00	0.00	28.97	35.98	0.00	0.00	65.89
16	0.00	1.02	11.68	46.19	3.05	0.00	62.44
17	0.00	0.50	2.51	22.61	17.09	0.00	42.71
	Total						
4	43.20	36.49	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	80.08
5	3.35	89.55	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	93.10
6	0.20	96.61	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	97.81
7	0.45	97.52	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	99.10
8	0.00	97.64	0.24	0.00	0.00	0.00	99.53
9	0.22	97.30	0.67	0.00	0.00	0.00	99.33
10	0.00	78.73	18.40	0.00	0.00	0.00	98.36
11	0.00	37.39	60.32	0.00	0.00	0.00	98.39
12	0.00	15.48	80.95	0.00	0.00	0.00	97.38
13	0.00	4.94	82.22	0.99	0.00	0.00	88.64

14	0.00	2.28	66.74	10.71	0.00	0.00	79.95
15	0.00	0.25	34.31	33.82	0.00	0.00	69.12
16	0.00	0.99	17.00	41.63	3.94	0.00	63.79
17	0.00	0.54	4.02	23.32	14.21	0.00	42.09

Table comments: The education levels indicated in the first row are based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). They can be modified to the education levels in the national education system. Optionally, a column for non-formal or another type of education can be added where relevant and data are available. The column “Total” therefore represents the total attendance rate in any levels or type of education for each age (row).

Research questions linked to the table: Do children attend education levels at the intended ages? At which ages is overall attendance in education the highest and the lowest? At which age does overall attendance begin to decline? Do any patterns emerge when comparing male and female attendance rates?

Core table 2: Percent of pre-primary age children who are not in pre-primary or primary education by gender and other characteristics (Dimension 1)

	Not attending school	Attending pre-primary school	Attending primary school	Attending either pre-primary or primary school
	Male			
Area				
Urban	21.15	52.68	37.78	46.04
Rural	78.85	47.32	62.22	53.96
District				
Corozal	15.38	18.75	14.44	16.83
Orange Walk	25.00	13.39	13.33	13.37
Belize	13.46	26.79	16.67	22.28
Cayo	21.15	12.50	13.33	12.87
Stann Creek	7.69	15.18	16.67	15.84
Toledo	17.31	13.39	25.56	18.81

Wealth index quintile				
Poorest	44.23	16.96	25.56	20.79
Second	23.08	21.43	17.78	19.80
Middle	15.38	19.64	21.11	20.30
Fourth	13.46	24.11	21.11	22.77
Richest	3.85	17.86	14.44	16.34
Ethnicity				
Asian	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Caucasian	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Creole	9.62	27.68	21.11	24.75
East Indian	0.00	3.57	2.22	2.97
Maya	17.31	8.04	24.44	15.35
Mennonite	17.31	0.89	0.00	0.50
Mestizo/Spanish/Latino	53.85	48.21	46.67	47.52
Garifuna	1.92	8.04	2.22	5.45
Other	0.00	3.57	3.33	3.47
	Female			
Area				
Urban	21.28	55.14	53.68	54.46
Rural	78.72	44.86	46.32	45.54
District				
Corozal	8.51	17.76	17.89	17.82

Orange Walk	27.66	13.08	6.32	9.90
Belize	10.64	37.38	28.42	33.17
Cayo	17.02	14.02	9.47	11.88
Stann Creek	4.26	14.02	13.68	13.86
Toledo	31.91	3.74	24.21	13.37
Wealth index quintile				
Poorest	51.06	14.95	20.00	17.33
Second	12.77	23.36	17.89	20.79
Middle	10.64	17.76	18.95	18.32
Fourth	17.02	18.69	23.16	20.79
Richest	8.51	25.23	20.00	22.77
Ethnicity				
Asian	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Caucasian	2.13	0.00	0.00	0.00
Creole	10.64	22.43	23.16	22.77
East Indian	2.13	3.74	5.26	4.46
Maya	19.15	4.67	22.11	12.87
Mennonite	14.89	1.87	0.00	0.99
Mestizo/Spanish/Latino	46.81	52.34	36.84	45.05
Garifuna	4.26	11.21	9.47	10.40
Other	0.00	3.74	3.16	3.47

	Total			
Area				
Urban	21.21	53.88	45.95	50.25
Rural	78.79	46.12	54.05	49.75
District				
Corozal	12.12	18.26	16.22	17.33
Orange Walk	26.26	13.24	9.73	11.63
Belize	12.12	31.96	22.70	27.72
Cayo	19.19	13.24	11.35	12.38
Stann Creek	6.06	14.61	15.14	14.85
Toledo	24.24	8.68	24.86	16.09
Wealth index quintile				
Poorest	47.47	15.98	22.70	19.06
Second	18.18	22.37	17.84	20.30
Middle	13.13	18.72	20.00	19.31
Fourth	15.15	21.46	22.16	21.78
Richest	6.06	21.46	17.30	19.55
Ethnicity				
Asian	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Caucasian	1.01	0.00	0.00	0.00
Creole	10.10	25.11	22.16	23.76
East Indian	1.01	3.65	3.78	3.71
Maya	18.18	6.39	23.24	14.11
Mennonite	16.16	1.37	0.00	0.74

Mestizo/Spanish/Latino	50.51	50.23	41.62	46.29
Garifuna	3.03	9.59	5.95	7.92
Other	0.00	3.65	3.24	3.47

Table comments: This table shows the share of children in Dimension 1, as well as a breakdown of children who are in school and the level they attend. Pre-primary age is defined as one year before official primary entrance age, according to the Five Dimensions of Exclusion model. Caution should be taken when using data for a single age cohort, to ensure that sample sizes and the quality of age data are sufficient. Characteristics shown in the table depend on data availability.

Research questions linked to table: What percentage of pre-primary age children are excluded from education? Which groups of children at this age are most and least likely to attend school? For those pre-primary age children who are in school, what patterns exist with respect to attendance in pre-primary and primary?

Optional table 1: Percent of pre-primary age children who are not in pre-primary or primary education (Dimension 1), [years with available data]

	Not attending school	Attending pre-primary school	Attending primary school	Attending either pre-primary or primary
2011	27.2	31.1	41.7	72.9
2015	19.68	43.20	36.49	80.32
[YEAR]				
[YEAR]				

Table comments: This table shows the historical trend in the share of children in Dimension 1. Pre-primary age is defined as one year before official primary entrance age, according to the Five Dimensions of Exclusion model. If data for different years are drawn from different data sources (different household surveys, for example), the comparability and quality of the data must be considered. Caution should be used when using data for a single age cohort, to ensure that sample sizes and the quality of age data are sufficient.

Research questions linked to table: How has the share of pre-primary age children excluded from education evolved over time? How has the share of children in pre-primary and primary education evolved over time?

Dimension 2: Children of primary school age who are not in primary or secondary school

Core table 3: Percent of primary school-age children out of school, by age, gender and other characteristics (Dimension 2)

Age	Male %	Female %	Total %
5	55.56	60.00	57.89
6	18.52	20.00	19.30
7	3.70	6.67	5.26
8	7.41	0.00	3.51
9	3.70	6.67	5.26
10	11.11	6.67	8.77
Area			
Urban	18.52	13.33	15.79
Rural	81.48	86.67	84.21
District			
Corozal	29.63	6.67	17.54
Orange Walk	22.22	30.00	26.32
Belize	11.11	6.67	8.77
Cayo	22.22	16.67	19.30
Stann Creek	3.70	6.67	5.26
Toledo	11.11	33.33	22.81
Wealth index quintile			
Poorest	40.74	53.33	47.37
Second	37.04	23.33	29.82
Middle	14.81	6.67	10.53

Fourth	7.41	13.33	10.53
Richest	0.00	3.33	1.75
Ethnicity			
Asian	0.00	0.00	0.00
Caucasian	0.00	3.33	1.75
Creole	3.70	10.00	7.02
East Indian	3.70	3.33	3.51
Maya	11.11	26.67	19.30
Mennonite	40.74	26.67	33.33
Mestizo/Spanish/Latino	37.04	26.67	31.58
Garifuna	3.70	3.33	3.51
Other	0.00	0.00	0.00

Table comments: This table shows the number and percentage of children in Dimension 2, by various socio-demographic characteristics. The ages in this table should reflect the primary education age range. Characteristics shown in the table depend on data availability.

Research questions linked to table: What percentage of primary-age children do not attend primary or secondary education? Which groups of children at this age are most and least likely to attend school?

Optional table 2: Percent of primary-age children who attending educational programmes, by age, gender and other characteristics

	Attending formal education Males	Attending formal education Females	Out of school

	Attending pre- primary school	Attending primary school	Attending secondary education	Attending pre- primary	Attending primary	Attending secondary education	Male	Female
Age								
5	90.91	16.75	0.00	70.00	18.23	0.00	55.56	60.00
6	9.09	17.55	0.00	0.00	19.85	0.00	18.52	20.00
7	0.00	16.97	0.00	20.00	16.19	0.00	3.70	6.67
8	0.00	15.80	0.00	0.00	15.95	1.85	7.41	0.00
9	0.00	16.90	2.50	10.00	16.35	3.70	3.70	6.67
10	0.00	16.02	97.50	0.00	13.43	94.44	11.11	6.67
Area								
Urban	27.27	39.33	45.00	30.00	41.74	31.48	18.52	13.33
Rural	72.73	60.67	55.00	70.00	58.26	68.52	81.48	86.67
District								
Corozal	9.09	15.22	17.50	0.00	13.67	18.52	29.63	6.67
Orange Walk	9.09	13.47	22.50	10.00	13.83	12.96	22.22	30.00
Belize	18.18	22.51	22.50	30.00	24.74	24.07	11.11	6.67
Cayo	9.09	14.86	5.00	40.00	14.48	12.96	22.22	16.67
Stann Creek	27.27	14.20	20.00	20.00	13.59	12.96	3.70	6.67
Toledo	27.27	19.74	12.50	0.00	19.69	18.52	11.11	33.33
Wealth index quintile								
Poorest	27.27	28.19	17.50	0.00	25.47	25.93	40.74	53.33
Second	36.36	20.03	15.00	30.00	20.91	18.52	37.04	23.33
Middle	9.09	19.37	20.00	20.00	20.18	11.11	14.81	6.67
Fourth	18.18	18.57	25.00	20.00	18.14	18.52	7.41	13.33

Richest	9.09	13.84	22.50	30.00	15.30	25.93	0.00	3.33
Ethnicity								
Asian	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.00	0.00	0.00
Caucasian	0.00	0.36	0.00	0.00	0.41	1.85	0.00	3.33
Creole	45.45	20.32	27.50	10.00	22.54	12.96	3.70	10.00
East Indian	0.00	2.84	2.50	0.00	3.74	5.56	3.70	3.33
Maya	9.09	17.41	7.50	10.00	17.33	16.67	11.11	26.67
Mennonite	9.09	1.89	2.50	20.00	2.12	12.96	40.74	26.67
Mestizo/Spanish/Latino	27.27	47.41	50.00	50.00	43.37	38.89	37.04	26.67
Garifuna	9.09	6.99	7.50	10.00	7.40	9.26	3.70	3.33
Other	0.00	2.77	2.50	0.00	3.01	1.85	0.00	0.00

Table comments: This table shows the share of primary-age children who attend different kinds of formal and non-formal educational programmes (*see Chapter 2 on non-formal education*). This table is designed for countries who wish to exclude primary age children in pre-primary and non-formal programmes (considered equivalent to formal schooling) in their out-of-school estimate. It is an alternative presentation of Dimension 2. Where data on non-formal education are not available, the table could be modified to show only children in pre-primary, primary and secondary school as in school. Caution should be used when using data for a single age cohort, to ensure that sample sizes and the quality of age data are sufficient.

Research questions linked to table: What share of the primary school-age population are enrolled in primary and secondary education? What share are enrolled in pre-primary education, or in non-formal programmes? What share of primary age children are considered “out of school” according to the international definition who are in pre-primary education?

Core table 4: Percent and number of primary school-age children out of school (Dimension 2), [years with available data]

	Male %	Female %	Total %

2011	5.62	5.67	5.64
2015	3.68	3.97	3.82
[YEAR]			
[YEAR]			

Table comments: This table shows the historical trend in the share and number of children in Dimension 2. If data for different years are drawn from different data sources (different household surveys, for example), the comparability and quality of the data must be considered. This table can be completed with administrative or household survey data. The population data source used in the calculation of the number of out-of-school children should be indicated in the table's source notes.

Research questions linked to the table: How has the share and number of primary-age out-of-school children evolved over time? Do any patterns emerge when comparing male and female out-of-school rates?

Core table 5: School exposure of primary-age out-of-school children, by gender

	Male	Female	Total
	%	%	%
School exposure			
Left school			30.9
Expected to enter in the future			68.3
Expected to never enter			0.8

Table comments: This table displays the breakdown of the primary-age out-of-school children population into three groups based on past and future school exposure. The data source for this table is household-survey based calculations from the Typology calculation spreadsheet produced by the UIS. It is possible to modify or expand the socio-demographic characteristics depending on the availability of data. More information about these categories of school exposure and the calculation method can be found in section X and annex X.

Research questions linked to table: What is the most common school exposure category for primary-age out-of-school children? Which groups of primary-age out-of-school children are most likely to never enter school?

Dimension 3: Children of lower secondary school age who are not in primary or secondary school

Core table 6: Percent and number of lower secondary school-age children out of school, by age, gender and other characteristics (Dimension 3)

	Male %	Female %	Total %
Age			
11	6.17	2.86	4.64
12	6.17	8.57	7.28
13	28.40	32.86	30.46
14	59.26	55.71	57.62
Area			
Urban	19.75	14.29	17.22
Rural	80.25	85.71	82.78
District			
Corozal	18.52	28.57	23.18
Orange Walk	24.69	27.14	25.83
Belize	12.35	7.14	9.93
Cayo	19.75	17.14	18.54
Stann Creek	7.41	2.86	5.30
Toledo	17.28	17.14	17.22
Wealth index quintile			
Poorest	34.57	47.14	40.40
Second	33.33	25.71	29.80
Middle	19.75	18.57	19.21
Fourth	7.41	7.14	7.28
Richest	4.94	1.43	3.31
Ethnicity			
Asian	0.00	0.00	0.00
Caucasian	0.00	1.43	0.66

Creole	8.64	7.14	7.95
East Indian	2.47	2.86	2.65
Maya	24.69	18.57	21.85
Mennonite	11.11	15.71	13.25
Mestizo/Spanish/Latino	49.38	51.43	50.33
Garifuna	2.47	1.43	1.99
Other	1.23	1.43	1.32

Table comments: This table shows the number and percentage of children in Dimension 3, by various socio-demographic characteristics. The ages in this table should reflect the lower secondary education age range. Characteristics shown in the table depend on data availability.

Research questions linked to table: What percentage of lower secondary-age children do not attend primary or secondary education? Which groups of children at this age are most and least likely to attend school?

Core table 7: Percent and number of lower secondary school-age children out of school (Dimension 3), [years with available data]

	Male %	Female %	Total %
2011	9.23	11.32	10.29
2015	10.28	8.66	9.48
[YEAR]			
[YEAR]			

Table comments: This table shows the historical trend in the share and number of children in Dimension 3. If data for different years are drawn from different data sources (different household surveys, for example), the comparability and quality of the data must be considered. This table can be completed with administrative or household survey data. The population data source used in the calculation of the number of out-of-school children should be indicated in the table's source notes.

Research questions linked to the table: How has the share and number of lower secondary age out-of-school children evolved over time? Do any patterns emerge when comparing male and female out-of-school rates?

Core table 8: School exposure of lower secondary-age out-of-school children, by gender

	Male	Female	Total
	%	%	%
School exposure			
Left school			93.4
Expected to enter in the future			5.3
Expected to never enter			1.3

Table comments: This table displays the breakdown of the lower secondary age out-of-school children population into three groups based on past and future school exposure. The data source for this table is household-survey based calculations from the Typology calculation spreadsheet produced by the UIS. It is possible to modify or add the socio-demographic characteristics depending on the availability of data. More information about these categories of school exposure and the calculation method can be found in section X, and annex X.

Research questions linked to table: What is the most common school exposure category for lower secondary age out-of-school children? Which groups of lower secondary-age out-of-school children are most likely to never enter school? How does the school exposure patterns of lower secondary age out-of-school children compare to those of primary age OOSC?

Dimension 4: Children who are in primary education but at risk of dropping out

Optional table 3: Survival rate to the last grade of primary education

Survival rate to the last grade of primary education (%)	Male	Female	Total	GPI
2011	87.41	88.87	88.12	98.36
2015	84.88	94.19	89.32	90.11

Table comments: This table displays the percentage of a cohort of students enrolled in the first grade of primary education in a given school year who are expected to reach the last grade of primary education, with or without repetition. It can be calculated from administrative or household survey data.

Research questions linked to table: What share of new entrants will eventually reach the last grade of primary education, and what share will drop out before reaching the last grade? Do any patterns emerge when comparing male and female survival rates?

Core table 9: Percent and number of children in primary education expected to drop out before the last grade (Dimension 4), [years with available data]

	Male		Female		Total	
	%	Number expected to drop out	%	Number expected to drop out	%	Number expected to drop out
2011	11.22	2559	9.68	2084	10.48	4643
2015	12.54	2840	5.16	1069	9.01	3909
[YEAR]						
[YEAR]						

Table comments: This table presents the percentage and number of children in Dimension 4. The data source for this table is administrative-based calculations from the Dimension 4 calculation spreadsheet described in Annex X.

Research questions linked to table: What share and how many children in primary education are at risk of dropping out from primary education? How has the share and number of primary students at risk of dropping out evolved over time? Do any patterns emerge when comparing male and female expected dropout rates?

Optional table 4: Percent and number of new entrants to primary education without early childhood education, by gender and other characteristics

	Male		Female		Total	
	%	Number of children	%	Number of children	%	Number of children
Residence						
Urban						
Rural						
Wealth index quintile						
Poorest						
Second						

Middle

Fourth

Richest

Ethnicity/Language/Religion

Group 1

Group 2

Group 3

Child labour status

Child labourer

Not child labourer

Total

Table comments: This table displays the percentage and number of new entrants to primary education (in grade 1) who do not have previous experience in early childhood education. It represents a proxy indicator to measure “school readiness”, a factor linked to increased risk of dropping out. Characteristics shown in the table depend on data availability.

Research questions linked to the table: What share and number of children have an increased risk of dropping out due to lack of experience in early childhood education? Which groups of children are most and least likely to benefit from early childhood education?

Optional table 5: Percent of children in primary education who are underage, at the official age, or overage for their grade, by gender and other characteristics

	Male	Female	Total
	%	%	%
Underage	19.12	23.05	20.96
Official age	48.61	51.40	49.91
Official age + 1 year	21.26	18.70	20.06
Overage (2 or more years)	11.02	6.85	9.07

Table comments: This table displays the share of primary students in relation to their ages and the grades they attend. It identifies the extent of overage attendance, a factor linked to increased risk of dropping out. Note that only children who are 2 or more years overage for the grade they attend are considered

overage. Characteristics shown in the table can be modified or expanded, to compare the age-grade patterns of students by household wealth, location or other characteristics.

Research questions linked to the table: What share and number of children have an increased risk of dropping out due to being 2 or more years overage? Which groups of children in primary education are most and least likely to be overage for their grade?

Dimension 5: Children who are in lower secondary education but at risk of dropping out

Optional table 6: Survival rate to the last grade of lower secondary education

Survival rate to the last grade of lower secondary education (%)	Male	Female	Total	GPI
2011	57.50	67.26	62.26	85.49
2015	55.28	66.61	60.91	82.99

Table comments: This table displays the percentage of a cohort of students enrolled in the first grade of lower secondary education in a given school year who are expected to reach the last grade, with or without repetition. It can be calculated from administrative or household survey data.

Research questions linked to table: What share of new entrants will eventually reach the last grade of lower secondary education, and what share will drop out before reaching the last grade? Do any patterns emerge when comparing male and female survival rates?

Core table 10: Percent and number of children in lower secondary education expected to drop out before the last grade of lower secondary education (Dimension 5), [years with available data]

	Male		Female		Total	
	%	Number expected to drop out	%	Number expected to drop out	%	Number expected to drop out
2011	35.98	3997	27.92	3022	32.00	7019
2015	38.74	4382	27.92	3081	33.40	7463
[YEAR]						
[YEAR]						

Table comments: This table presents the percentage and number of children in Dimension 5. The data source for this table is administrative-based calculations from the Dimension 5 calculation spreadsheet described in Annex X.

Research questions linked to table: What share and how many children in lower secondary education are at risk of dropping out from lower secondary education? How has the share and number of lower secondary students at risk of dropping out evolved over time? Do any patterns emerge when comparing male and female expected dropout rates?

Optional table 7: Percent of children in lower secondary education who are underage, at the official age, or overage for their grade, by gender and other characteristics

	Male	Female	Total
	%	%	%
Underage	16.18	20.60	18.41
Official age	33.63	41.83	37.76
Official age + 1 year	25.10	24.25	24.67
Overage (2 or more years)	25.10	13.32	19.17

Table comments: This table displays the share of lower secondary students in relation to their ages and the grades they attend. It identifies the extent of overage attendance, a factor linked to increased risk of dropping out. Note that only children who are 2 or more years overage for the grade they attend are considered overage. Characteristics shown in the table can be modified or expanded, to compare the age-grade patterns of students by household wealth or location.

Research questions linked to the table: What share and number of children have an increased risk of dropping out due to being 2 or more years overage? Which groups of children in lower secondary education are most and least likely to be overage for their grade?

[Optional tables for child labour \(see Annex 6\)](#)

[Optional tables for upper secondary education](#)

Optional table 8: School attendance of upper secondary age youth, by level of education, gender and other characteristics

	Not attending school	Attending primary school (ISCED 1)	Attending lower secondary (ISCED 2)	Attending upper secondary (ISCED 3)	Attending post-secondary non-tertiary (ISCED 4)	Attending tertiary (ISCED 5,6,7,8)
Male						
Age						
15						
15						
17						

Residence

Urban

Rural

Wealth index quintile

Poorest

Second

Middle

Fourth

Richest

Ethnicity/Language/Religion

Group 1

Group 2

Group 3

Employment status

In employment

Not in employment

Total**Female****Age**

15

15

17

Residence

Urban

Rural

Wealth index quintile

Poorest

Second

Middle

Fourth

Richest

Ethnicity/Language/Religion

Group 1

Group 2

Group 3

Employment status

In employment

Not in employment

Total**Total****Age**

15

15

17

Residence

Urban

Rural

Wealth index quintile

Poorest

Second

Middle

Fourth

Richest
Ethnicity/Language/Religion

Group 1

Group 2

Group 3

Employment status

In employment

Not in employment

Total

Table comments: The education levels indicated in the first row are based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). They can be modified to the education levels in the national education system. Optionally, a column for non-formal or another type of education (for example, distinguishing general from technical and vocational secondary education) can be added where relevant and data are available. The column “Total” therefore represents the total attendance rate in any levels or type of education for each subgroup of upper secondary age youth.

Research questions linked to the table: What share of upper secondary age youth attend school? Which groups of children at this age are most and least likely to attend school? Do any patterns emerge when comparing male and female attendance rates?

Optional table 9: Educational attainment of upper secondary age youth not in school, by level of education, gender and other characteristics

	No formal schooling, or Pre-primary (ISCED 0)	Incomplete primary	Primary (ISCED 1)	Incomplete lower secondary	Lower Secondary (ISCED 2)	Upper secondary (ISCED 3)	Post-secondary non-tertiary (ISCED 4)	Tertiary (ISCED 5,6,7,8)	Unknown
Age									
15									
15									
17									
Residence									
Urban									
Rural									
Wealth index quintile									
Poorest									
Second									
Middle									
Fourth									
Richest									
Ethnicity/ Language/ Religion									
Group 1									
Group 2									
Group 3									

Employment status

In
employment
t
Not in
employment
t

Total

Table comments: This table breaks down the educational attainment of the population which is not currently in school (column “Not attending school” in optional table 8). The education levels indicated in the first row are based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). They can be modified to the education levels in the national education system. Optionally, a column for non-formal or other types of education can be added where relevant and if data are available.

Research questions linked to the table: What is the most common educational attainment of upper secondary age youth not in school? Are there differences between groups (urban, rural, male, female, or richest and poorest)?

Optional table 10: Share and number of upper secondary age youth in education, employment and training, by gender

	Male		Female		Total	
	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number
In education only						
In employment or training only						
In education and employment						
Not in education, employment or training						

Table comments: This table examines the share and number of upper secondary age youth who are enrolled in education, employed, or in training. Depending on the data source the information on the share and number of this age group in training may be available. Those youth who are not in education, employment or training (commonly called NEETs) are listed in the final column.

Research questions linked to the table: What share of upper secondary age youth are in school, what share are in employment, and what share are in both? What share of the upper secondary age population are not in education, employment or training? Are there different patterns between males and females?