

Social Assessment: Reform of Secondary Education in Jamaica

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Social and economic situation

Jamaica is one of the poorest countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region. Only 7 of the 32 countries in the region are poorer—Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua. Jamaica is currently undergoing a recession and its GNP annual growth rate throughout the nineties was the second lowest in the region with only Haiti doing worse (comparable estimates are not available for Cuba)².

Yet it has pre-primary and primary enrollment ratios that come close to matching the best countries in the region. Furthermore it has a household income distribution that is by far the most equitable of any country in the region³. In facing the challenge to find ways to expand access to upper secondary education while improving the equity and quality of secondary education with particular reference to the poorest populations, these two positive characteristics of the country might serve as strategic starting points.

There is a very positive attitude to schooling by households-families and government. Enrollment rates are very high in primary education (97%) and still comparatively high in the years immediately prior to upper secondary education (78%). No country in the region with a population of over one million spends more than Jamaica on education from public sources as a percentage of total government expenditure⁴. No country at all in the region spends more overall on education as a percentage of GDP than Jamaica⁵. Only Brazil, Costa Rica and Cuba in the region are spending more than Jamaica from government funds per secondary pupil as a percentage of GNP per capita. No country in the region is spending more than Jamaica from government funds per tertiary student as a percentage of GNP per capita⁶. In Jamaica, education is seen as a public good to be sought and supported to the extent possible.

On the equity and distributional aspect, Jamaica's comparatively equitable income distribution is an anomaly in a region that has the most inequitable income distribution in the world. Jamaica's income distribution is much closer to that of the United Kingdom than to that of any country in the Latin American and Caribbean region⁷. Also, Jamaica has no major ethnic, language or religious divisions like Trinidad, nor has it sustained the historical divide between the descendents of the colonizers and the descendents of the colonized like Mexico.

Jamaica has a heavily male-dominated social value structure with extensive domestic violence and child abuse that present a clear antithesis to the values inherent in a project to extend

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² World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2001

³ World Bank, op. cit.

⁴ UNESCO, World Education Report, 2000,

⁵ World Bank, op.cit.

⁶ UNESCO, op. cit.

⁷ World Bank, op. cit.

and improve secondary education. It has a high rate of juvenile crime, particularly in inner city and low income areas, considerable unplanned teenage fertility, child-shifting (nearly 20%), particularly in rural areas, and a very destabilizing pattern of single female parent families which is very disadvantageous especially for providing the necessary support to and supervision of children as they grow up and try to become educated. Many children have one or both of their parents working permanently abroad, providing financial but not nurturing or educational support.

Jamaica shares with almost all countries in the region a major socioeconomic division between the rural and the urban population. This is very important for education reform because the 44% of the population that live in rural areas in Jamaica account for nearly 80% of its total poor. In fact, the geographical distribution of poverty is even more concentrated with the four parishes of St. Andrew, St. Mary, Westmoreland and St. Ann accounting for half of Jamaica's poor.

Education situation

The educational structure is historically highly stratified and remains so in spite of policy interventions in the 1990s to reduce stratification. At the end of primary education (grade 6) students are tracked into different types of secondary schools of clearly different levels of quality. Children of poor families in the rural areas and the inner cities receive a low quality education that the high enrollment rates mask. It is here that the problem of school dropout in the later years of secondary education begins, with poor quality teaching and poor attendance. This particularly affects young boys. Girls score better and stay on longer at school. This is in contrast to the male-dominated social pattern.

The secondary school structure adds to the urban-rural division. Secondary departments in all-age and primary and junior high schools which account for 16% of secondary school enrollments do not currently go beyond grade 9 and thus do not offer upper secondary education. A large percentage of these schools are small rural schools. Universal enrollment is maintained up to age 11 and net enrollment is still nearly 80% by the age of 14. Age 14 is equivalent to grade 9 i.e. the end of the first cycle of secondary education and the highest grade offered by all secondary schools. It is after this point that there is a quick fall in enrollment, partly due to the lack of upper secondary school facilities inasmuch as some 35,000 pupils are currently attending schools that do not go beyond grade 9. It is estimated that 11,000 grade 9 graduates, with a large proportion coming from poorer families, do not have places in grade 10. This is particularly problematic for rural schools with small catchment populations.

Another reason for the swift drop-off in upper secondary enrollment, which begins slowly at the lower secondary level, is the lack of motivation to stay on in school and the various costs and foregone earnings involved. This particularly affects lower secondary pupils from poorer families. Pupils from richer families usually continue to grade 11, but for the poorer students, the drop-off begins after grade 9. So upper secondary places need to be made more available and, in particular, accessible to and affordable by children of poorer families, and secondary education needs to be made more relevant and more attractive so that poorer pupils will want to stay on.

Another important objective is to improve the quality of secondary education. This is more difficult to achieve than improving availability and accessibility, particularly in a country that has been suffering from a recession for more than ten years. Examination performance has

not been very good throughout the education system and improvement for the poorer students in such circumstances is likely to be slow.

By far the most serious problem is students' reading abilities. Deficient reading starts in the lower primary grades and continues to build, year-on-year. Poor reading abilities are concentrated among boys. By the time students reach grade 6, 30 percent of students read below their grade level. By grade 9 a huge divide has occurred--large numbers of students, especially boys, cannot read or write, some are illiterate so many are so deficient that they cannot function at school, they cannot read their textbooks and they occupy chairs but do not learn. This is the tremendous paradox of Jamaican education that standard statistics do not reveal--high enrollment rates through lower secondary but low learning, interest and participation. These factors add up to a huge challenge to secondary education which must correct for these incapacitating deficiencies among a large segment of most school populations while trying to provide a quality education to students who are ready.

According to Hyacinth Evans, "...boys and girls enter grade 1 in equal numbers and with roughly the same kinds of experiences and skills, though we know nothing about their attitudes to school work at this age. ...By the time they reached Grade 5 and 6, major distinctions were detectable in their attitude to and interest in work, the quality of work which they produced and in the academic performance...In many of the schools, the streaming decisions made at the grade 3 and 4 level influenced the students' CEE chances for the remainder of the primary years. By Grade 5 boys were over-represented in the low streams according to the reports of the teachers (and to the pre-appraisal mission) ... we conclude that the primary school contributes to this differential socialization"⁸. Evans further states that non-school factors also contribute to low achievement.

To sum up, the desired social development outcomes of the project are to extend access and participation in upper secondary education of children from poorer families, to reduce the dropout of children from poorer families, to improve the quality of the secondary education that they receive while at the same time providing remedial education to a large segment of the intake, and to raise their performance levels in standardized examinations so that all students can reach the standard. To illustrate the challenge, one only has to look at the student performance in the CXC General Proficiency exam in secondary high schools. In June 2001, for example, in ten secondary schools (two of which were visited during the assessment), only 10% or less of eligible students passed the mathematics exam while at the top end, in one school (also visited) 98% of the students passed. Of course part of this is due to the stratification of the student intake but a good component is due to the quality of the education offered by the institution. In a fourth school, having a 60% pass rate (also visited), the school principal was proud to point out that their 'top girl' came from a very poor background yet had received nine distinctions.

Youth at risk

Youth at risk is a key social issue. International experience indicates that one of the best ways to address the problems of youth-at-risk is to keep adolescents in school and to improve their academic performance. The project objectives are directly related to these goals. Poor academic performance, violence in schools and increasing teenage pregnancy – all are risk factors for youth to will be addressed. Inequalities in access and the high attrition rate among students from the poorest quintiles are other key social issues that will be addressed by the project.

⁸ Hyacinth Evans, Gender and Achievement in Secondary Education in Jamaica, Planning Institute of Jamaica, Working paper No. 2, 1999.

In order to improve the cognitive skills of the secondary school-age population it is necessary to understand the many factors that block children from taking full advantage of educational opportunities. International research in some 32 countries⁹ has shown that the most important factor in student achievement is not the level of resources provided to schools; it is how students use them. Students' use of school resources is more strongly associated with students' economic, social and cultural status than any other school variable. Less advantaged students do not tend to use school resources as regularly as students of higher socioeconomic status do. Socially advantaged students do not necessarily get more resources, they use them more.

What this tells us is that socially disadvantaged students need more attention than socially more advantaged students to prosper in school and yet it is these very same students that face increasing barriers as they progress through the school system. Why is this so and what are these barriers that build up like a high brick wall that stands between pupils and their school opportunities?

Academic tracking by school type has been in effect stratification by socioeconomic background. In 2000, 43% of students in All-Age schools belonged to the poorest quintile and as many as 73% from the two bottom quintiles, while only 3% of the top quintile attended these schools. On the other hand, over half of the students in the traditional, academic Secondary Highs were from the top two quintiles¹⁰.

Many students, and especially boys, simply cannot read, or read sufficiently well, to prosper when they enter secondary school. By the end of the primary cycle about 30% of Grade 6 students are functionally illiterate. These students tend to be those that come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and have other "youth-at-risk" factors. It means that they are at an instant disadvantage in many other subjects as well as language and reading. Unless they receive focused attention to help them catch up, they fall further and further behind and eventually leave the school system before completing secondary. This creates a permanent barrier to a productive life, causing low self-esteem, leading to dependence and possibly inappropriate adult behaviors.

Low reading achievement is probably the biggest risk factor that the secondary education system and the youth in society face. Children start to fall behind in the early grades and their reading deficiencies need to be identified early on to prevent them from growing steadily worse. Educators and students throughout Jamaica know this and readily identify sub-standard reading as the most serious risk factor that the education system must tackle at both the primary and secondary levels.¹¹

In large part the severe reading gap of poorer students is further widened by the very fact that poverty keeps youth at a disadvantage. How is this so? Students do not have the money to pay for travel to school on a consistent basis. As more places have been made available in comprehensive and secondary high schools, students and parents are wanting to take advantage of this opportunity and travel further to school, involving more time and more cost. This is a deep widespread problem in all educational regions. It results in poorer students not being able to

⁹ OECD, Programme for the Improvement of Student Assessment (PISA), 2001.

¹⁰ Jamaica Survey of Living Conditions, 2000

¹¹ There are efforts to address low reading achievement at the primary level through a number of interventions such as: a grade 1 readiness inventory; a diagnostic test at grade 3; a grade 4 literacy test; summer classes to assist students performing at unacceptable reading levels and non-promotion to grade 5 if summer classes have not resulted in acceptable reading levels. At the secondary level, foundation textbooks have been developed and distributed to students in grades 7, 8 and 9 reading below their grade levels.

afford to attend school every day. According to educators if students can afford bus fares only three days per week they would still rather attend schools that are "perceived" to be more prestigious, i.e. the high schools as opposed to the All-age schools. As well as travel costs, there are book costs, uniform costs, school fees, lunch money, special assessments, costs associated with extra-curricular activities, etc. etc. As a consequence, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend more often to not have any textbooks, or not all of them, often despite the availability of cost sharing arrangements which a substantial number of students do not take advantage of.

A further risk factor is that a very high number of students live with only one parent, almost always the mother, and not infrequently live with neither parent, often because one or both parents have migrated for work, being left in the care of grandmothers, aunts, sisters, brothers, or others. The impact of this incomplete family environment is yet another stress factor on students and may well be a pressure on older children to start working.

Finding a place to study may be hard as well with cramped living conditions and cramped school conditions which themselves are presenting additional barriers to educability, especially of socially disadvantaged students. Secondary schools are not able to keep up with the demand for places. Many schools are way, way beyond their capacities and holding two shifts and still taking on more students. It is not uncommon for pupil-teacher ratios to exceed 40, 45 or 50 in certain regions, such as Mandeville, Montego Bay, and certain areas of the North Coast. Space is the problem most often singled out by educators and students alike. Classrooms are so few that two classes (each exceeding 40 students) occupy the same classroom so in effect the student-classroom ratio is 80 in single shifts. Not a whole lot of learning can go on in this circumstance, one which is especially acute along the north coast of Jamaica where many are migrating for work and for access to secondary education.

Throughout the country, and in Kingston, especially, the risk factors are even more acute. "Urban terrorism", to quote the Security Minister, Dr. Peter Phillips, whose root cause is the illegal drug trade, accounted for 1,138 persons killed last year, the highest in the Caribbean, with Jamaica being one of the largest drug trans-shipment points in the region. High schools do not always have enough students because of fear of violence from gangs and political boundaries that cannot be crossed without high risk of physical danger. Many have already dropped out and live on the street or are among the unemployed: 46% of youth between the ages of 14 and 19 and 30% of youth between the ages of 20 and 24 are unemployed. 30% of all births are to teenage girls and teenage fertility rates are increasing. The number of reported new HIV infections in adolescents has doubled each year since 1995. Over half of all major crimes are committed by youth (mostly males and 30% of inmates sentenced to adult correctional facilities are between the ages of 17 and 24.¹² Preventing students from leaving school early and giving them the necessary support to prosper in school and be engaged by it are very important ways of keeping youth out of risk.

Anatomy of a school at risk

A Primary and Junior High School in the Hills above Montego Bay has a tremendous challenge to bring the 50% of its students, which its principal estimates are reading at sub-standard levels, up to grade level. Overcrowding and large class size are a huge problem. This Primary and Junior High School, with its 1,568 students in a physical plant with a capacity of 645 students, is bursting at the seams. It was forced to move to a double shift and the shift system has provided a "blow" to extra-curricular activities, according to its principal. 4th grade classes

¹² Lorraine Blank, Youth at Risk in Jamaica, based on Jamaican research and statistics.

average 50 students and some classes reach 60 and more. Sometimes already large classes share a room with more than 80 students in the same room. The crush of students is such that there is permanent noise (classrooms are open to the outside) and a great deal of loitering, kids coming to school late, restlessness, etc. It is a physically unappetizing school plant located on a dusty, busy road in the hills above Montego Bay.

Many students come from the nearby squatter communities whose parents cannot afford the school fees, uniform costs, transportation costs, and attendance is very low (60%) on Fridays because many students do not have the money to pay for transportation to school. When it rains, even a little, attendance is always low, said the principal. This may in part be due to the lack of a "holding facility" for the next shift as they arrive at school because they have no place to wait that is covered from the rain. Nevertheless, he asserts that "the set of children doing well will always be here, rain or shine". Tardiness is a daily problem for a large number of students and incentives to arrive early haven't worked so far since the JHSC classes are the ones that always win because they are motivated to come to school to prepare themselves for the exams in order to continue their schooling. This is not surprising: the JHSC students are the 'elite' in the school who have been selected as the ones that merit special preparation (to pass the exams). Conversely the non-CXC students know they are not in this elect group and this knowledge lowers their self-esteem and their will to work. They know they are the "slow set", a term heard frequently and used frequently by principals, teacher, and students themselves.

Since the introduction of the GSAT exam at grade 6 to select better performing students into high school, many principals take the view that the GSAT "is creaming off" their best students who are headed for secondary schools while leaving them with the lower achievers. Rather than see this as a positive development, leading to better opportunities for their better students, and taking the pressure off large junior high classes, allowing for more attention to these needier students, they see it as a loss to their schools. Principals also express the view that parents are selecting schools based on the perception that schools closer to town are better schools, perceptions coming often from their children who hear this from their friends. It is hard to know whether this perception is a reality in terms of achievement since the achievement test results are not available to the public. What it has led to is a great student population pressure on some schools while the rural schools are losing students. Students and parents are choosing these schools over nearby schools and are willing to have their children only attend some days of the week (as long as the money holds out) because they think it gives their children a better education or social advantage even taking into account the financial hardship.

Overcrowded schools like this Montego Bay Junior High School must compress the school day in order to accommodate two shifts, start early and expect their students to virtually attend back-to-back classes in order to cram in the necessary number of hours of class time to meet government standards (4.5 hours). Students on the morning shift start school before 8am when public transportation is not always available that early, thus children arrive at school late. Students don't seem to be concerned about tardiness. Like other double shift schools visited, all lacked a play area. All would benefit from paving a space for play which would have a tremendous cost-benefit for giving students a place to exercise within the school compound. And this space could be covered with an aluminum open roof to provide a dry place for kids when it rains. A Rural High School in the Mandeville parish, which authorities said was one of the poorest schools in the region, had paved its play area and it was being used extensively by students running and playing. Enquiry was made as to the cost which was just over US\$ 4,000.

Another chronic concern for secondary schools is the need to raise funds to make needed repairs and improvements, to equip the library and to construct the hard porch for play. They need

to equip their school so as to provide more classes in 'practical areas where students can gain experience in order to prepare them for jobs later on. Farm has tried to raise funds in a number of ways, for example, by getting adopted by a company like other schools have done, but so far they have had no luck.

On the positive side the Montego Bay area junior high school principal asserts that his teachers are still highly motivated, caring teachers who work hard and are taking advantage of opportunities to upgrade their skills and pursue university training which is very generous: two years of study leave with one year of full pay. The paradox is that students at the same time are deprived of the books they need, often cannot afford to come to school, do not have proper classroom facilities or sufficient teacher time nor extracurricular activities or sports. There is a need to redress this imbalance and a funded School Improvement-School Development plan is a good way to do this.

What have we learned from schools, students, principals, teachers and parents?

The reality of school reform is played out in schools, classrooms and at home by students, teachers, administrators and parents. These are the actors who know first hand about the barriers and challenges of schooling and learning in Jamaican schools. They are a tremendous source of relevant information and ideas about the problems faced in getting a good education as well as being a source of innovation and experience in how they have coped with problems and have overcome them and introduced creative solutions. An important part of the design of ROSE II is drawing from discussions with students, principals, teachers, and regional education authorities. Their views and recommendations are central inputs in the design of the focus of ROSE II and its implementation. These actors have an ongoing role to play in participating in decisions about project objectives, activities, and inputs, as well as desired outcomes. The project is structured to ensure the continuing participation of these key actors.

During project design and pre-appraisal All-age, Primary and Junior High, former Comprehensive High Schools and Traditional High Schools were visited and discussions held with these schools in all six regions. Meetings were held with each of the six Regional Education Offices and their supervisory staff. Consultations were held in each regional office with teachers, principals, parents. As well, intensive consultations were held with some 15 to 20 students coming from 5 to 10 schools at each of the Regional Offices.

Voices of students: from problems to solutions

Students, being the beneficiaries of education, are the actors in the best position to assess the education they are getting. The student consultations identified what they see as the important problems that need correction. They also shared creative, innovative ideas and doable practices for enhancing education. Students are a great untapped resource for providing ideas on what they want from education, what excites them and what to do about it. They should be active participants in the ROSE II process.

The majority of students that were consulted are leaders in their schools: student council presidents, head girls, head boys, prefects, for example, they represent their peers and also regularly work with school administrators and are in a good position to have an overview of their schools. These students demonstrated remarkable maturity and judgment.

For students in Region 4 (Montego Bay) streaming is the major problem holding back student achievement. They characterize streaming as 'destructive'. The streaming of students

into classes according to their performance on GSAT scores, or tests designed and evaluated by the school itself, highly stratifies students into classes of children of purportedly similar learning capacity. Although Jamaican education policy states that streaming is not to be practiced it is, in fact, an almost universal practice that is deeply engrained. Streaming was observed in every school visited to the extreme extent of 6 to 7 individual streams according to 'ability'. Students once in a given stream stay in that stream throughout their secondary school years, an enormous disincentive to better performance. Everybody in the school knows who is in which stream and they know what that means about expectations for their performance and their futures. Although students in principle are supposed to be able to elect to take the CXC exam should they choose to, the top students in a Montego Bay Parish High School stated that students not in the CXC stream were not permitted to do so. They felt that students in lower streams were stigmatized and should have more opportunity, for example in being offered as many subjects as the top stream. They suggested that students wanting to take the exam should be tested to see if they are improving even if they aren't in the 'CXC' stream. Students also thought that counseling should encourage students to risk the challenge. Streaming was a concern mentioned in numerous other regions and schools as well.

Some schools have creative programs to help prepare their students for the working world. For example, mock job interviews where students dress up and business people come in to interview them and give feedback on their manner, their resumes, and their dress. They take field trips to observe work settings, have rap sessions and watch training videos, etc. These activities complement the three week work experiences in hotels and factories, etc. and all help to prepare students for successfully getting jobs. And they are doable in any school with a little preparation.

Computers: Students all want access to computers. They understand that computer literacy is a key competency for success. Computers excite them and allow them to pursue active learning, explore, problem-solve. They feel it is a key part of their secondary education and students in lower grades feel they should have equal access to limited computers in their schools where computers are currently reserved for upper classmen preparing for the CXC exams. Students made the correct assessment that more than a couple of years exposure would be necessary for them to pass the CXC.

Students want more 'practical' subjects and equipment: visual arts, equipped science labs, a music room, home and family management, industrial arts. They feel that students need more types of outlets for their skills and interests. It was truly astonishing to realize what is possible with creative teaching and sensitivity to students. The remarkable innate artistic talent of students in a Mandeville Parish Rural High School, a school that is counted among the more disadvantaged schools, has been brought out by one first-class creative art teacher. In just four months he has involved all grades, 7 through 11, in his art classes and students are producing professional quality art works. When the team arrived to visit the school, the art teacher was outside, surrounded by students watching him paint a large mural on one of the school buildings, the first of many he planned. He had fashioned a small cubical into a studio where his students' work was proudly displayed, representing many art forms he had taught them with low cost or no cost materials: charcoal, colored pencils airbrush techniques using a simple toothbrush, cutouts, stencils. Each student had constructed his own portfolio, in itself a work of art made from simple cardboard and decorated. One student had already started a money-making project stenciling t-shirts and selling them. The school was set to compete in the Chamber of Commerce scholarship competition. The art teacher is a beacon for this Mandeville Rural Parish school, a living statement of what it is possible to achieve with ingenuity, talent, discipline and little cost.

Students were adamant that expelling should be abolished because it destroyed a student's future. They felt that more counseling was needed and ways to get already expelled kids back in school. Ways of preventing behaviors that lead to expulsion were discussed, especially the roles that fellow students can play and are playing such as student councils and peer counselors and prefects. It is interesting to note that when these views and proposals were shared with their principals and teachers these authorities had the exact opposite view: that these students deserved what they got. The Ministry's new PASS (Program for Alternative Student Support) which is intended to provide an opportunity for these students to modify their behavior and complete their education without further interruption is an important step forward and should be made widely available as soon as possible.

An innovative, simple idea for building positive strengthening relationships has been designed by students at a high school in the 5th region and it could easily be done anywhere. The problem arose from the large size of the class. Students proposed to their form teacher that they split the class into groups of 6 to 8 students, each student would pick a name for itself, a positive name, and function as a friendship-support group for each other for at least a year. Each group would set its mutual goals and rules, carry out projects. One group chose to call themselves "The Tapanauris Family" a local term meaning to always stay on top and not settle for anything below that.

Students talked a lot about what they called "the big family input" in student outcomes, support and building self esteem. Many students find it hard to communicate with their parents about their problems--parents don't want to be bothered and don't listen for various reasons. Apparently this is a widespread problem and one that leads to youth looking outside to other role models, frequently bad influences. How to cope with this? Aside from peer counseling in schools other solutions proposed (and being done) were youth leaders giving talks to parents at church, at school, for example on parents day, and going out to workplaces to talk with employers about problems children are facing and the need for employers to take into account that their parents had child care responsibilities that sometimes competed with work responsibilities.

Teachers. There was a very serious divide between schools where students respected and embraced their teachers, giving them much credit for their school success and very sad cases where students felt let down, disappointed, taken advantage of by their teachers. In one high school students comments were: teachers are totally negative; they show favoritism to some students; they fight students (specific examples provided and confirmed by others present); they talk down to students; they lock themselves in the teachers' room and chat, etc, etc. In this same school students complained that they had no access to their library since there was no librarian and the books in the library could not be checked out. Students from another high school in the parish that were present in the same meeting said they loved their teachers. What is this second school doing right? Discussions were held with the principal and teacher present at the meeting who were happy to share their experiences. It is a large, two shift high school with a large teaching staff. It is recommended that ROSE II follow this up, meet with the teachers, students and principal and ask them to document how they have developed this climate of mutual trust and respect.

Good practices in Jamaican schools

When it found that 60% of its intake had GSATs below their standard, a Girls' Traditional High School in Kingston gave them extra classes to bring them up to par and even to repeat an additional year but it paid off and most went on. A special class addressed problems of self-esteem and motivated students to better their performance. The weaker ones were given fewer subjects and the best teachers. The top girl is from a very poor background and has 9

distinctions which shows that the poorest child can come to that school and learn well. "Students appraise their teachers" according to the principal which has been useful for adjusting their teaching styles. The school has a very clear 'behavior policy' and each student has the local High School for Girls Student Handbook which sets the standards. Students receive a 'homework grade' for every subject. The principal's recommendation for ROSE II is to test students beginning at grade 2 and not wait until grade 4 in order to improve reading as early as possible. High school teachers are not trained to bring students from illiterate and semi-literate reading to grade levels.

The principal of a recently upgraded Primary and Junior High School in Kingston parish places great emphasis on reading at all levels and tests his students at the end of each term to evaluate their reading competencies and make mid- course corrections. He stated that he has specialist reading teachers who develop other teachers. He uses the MICO instrument.

When consulted by the social assessment team, the students of another Traditional High School in Kingston stated they would be interested to serve as peer counselors in other schools and the principal and Board supports this idea, provided that security could be guaranteed to students. At this school, counseling classes are referred to as 'personal development classes'. One innovation is 'career week'. Students have a sense of pride in their school that is built on traditions and standards. This idea could be applied anywhere in school with good leadership and discipline.

The active, energetic principal of a High School in Buff Bay has upgraded the science lab and brought in a lab assistant, introduced the CXC in first form, emphasizes English in order to compete, and is setting a higher standard for the school. Many students suffer from having one or both of their parents living abroad. Her view about low reading is that there has been a social contract: teachers don't expect too much and students don't have to do too much in return.

The Vice-Principal at a High School in Browns Town introduced an innovative "Parent Involvement and Student Achievement" program. Parents gave their time free, supervising classes when teachers were absent (since the school had no substitute teachers) or planning for known absences, for example for training courses (another occasion when students are not being taught. It would be useful to conduct a study to find out how often teachers are absent for various reasons.) The program was very effective but unfortunately it had to be discontinued due to lack of funds to pay parents for their travel which after many months became too much for them. This type of program could become part of the School Development-School Improvement plan in future by setting up a modest revolving fund to pay the parents' modest out-of-pocket expenses to allow them to continue giving their time to the school.

Everyone recognizes the important role of guidance counselors. Many primary and All age schools don't yet have a guidance counselor but more counselors are being assigned to high schools to keep up with their increasing enrollment. The impression from school visits was that in general guidance counselors are under-utilized and their roles need to be redefined to provide more relevant support to students, especially students at risk. A good development is the very recent decentralization of supervisory officers from Kingston to each of the regional offices so that each of the six regions will have a Counseling Officer. As one of these new staff commented: "I think of myself as a student advocate; the role of guidance counselors is to advocate for their students." This is a more appropriate modern function given the types of risk factors that students are experiencing. However, it is still true that guidance counseling is seen as a female function: no men were found among all the guidance counselors with whom discussions were held. It is recommended that the image of guidance counseling needs a facelift and an effort to restructure

the responsibilities and to attract men to the profession. This is particularly important in view of the fact that most children, and certainly most boys, do not have a male role model to look up to at home. Perhaps guidance counselor is not the right name for the job either. Perhaps 'Student Development Officer' would have a more neutral and more positive image. Boys need a male figure they can go to confide in at school. As it stands, students refer to counseling class as "a sleeping session".

Participatory approach: How are key stakeholders participating in the project?

In conducting the ROSE II social assessment, discussions were held with representatives of some 50 schools in all six regions. These discussions and interviews targeted principals, teachers, guidance counselors, students and parents. Discussions were also held with MOEYC Regional Directors and Guidance Officers, four NGOs, as well as out-of-school youth.

The Guidance and Counseling Unit of the MOEYC, co-operated with the social assessment initiative by conducting interviews with representatives of all critical stakeholder groups in the six regions of the Ministry to learn the perspectives of stakeholders regarding: a) the kinds of problems students face in schools and at home, why they become disengaged in school, as well as the kind of academic and extra-curricula activities which excite them; b) parents' expectations of their children and school; c) teachers' approaches to dealing with students with behavioral and academic problems; d) teachers' approaches to dealing with homework; e) Regional Offices' approaches to addressing issues of youth-at-risk, and the kind of training that would improve their effectiveness and f) the adequacy of the Guidance and Counseling system. The Unit has submitted its recommendations for the role of the Unit in the implementation of ROSE II.

How does the project involve consultations or collaboration with NGOs or other civil society organizations?

Many NGOs, faith-based organizations and civil organizations have cooperated with the education system and schools in Jamaica and youth out of school for some time. These organizations and their skills are a great resource for extending the reach of the education system and its schools, especially to deal with difficult social questions and youth at risk.

A number of NGOs and faith-based organizations, working with adolescents and youth, were consulted during the social assessment. NGOs which operate secondary educational institutions such as the Jamaica Association for the Deaf and the Salvation Army School for the Blind, as well as others which provide critical support services to secondary level students, such as the Jamaica Association for Children with Learning Disabilities, are to be consulted concerning their possible involvement in the ROSE II project.

Another group of NGOs which could become involved in the project, are those offering programs for out-of-school youth and youth-at-risk such as the YMCA, YWCA, Youth Opportunities Unlimited, Addiction Alert and the National AIDS Committee. Some of these NGOs already have a close working relationship with the Government of Jamaica but could be engaged, as a group, through the Council of Voluntary Social Services CVSS, the primary umbrella organization for NGOs in Jamaica.

Additionally, the project should endeavor to conduct national, broad-based stakeholder consultations on a biennial basis, as well as an end-of-project consultation, in order to keep stakeholders (civil society, business sector and international development partners) informed of new and on-going developments and to solicit their feedback regarding project outputs and

outcomes. Students should be involved in the process through the National Secondary Schools' Council.

What institutional arrangements have been provided to ensure the project achieves its social development outcomes?

The institutional arrangements that would facilitate this would could include:

- a) The preparation of School Improvement Plans explicitly tied to improving learning outcomes, especially reading, and incorporating specific ways in which students will be assisted, especially youth at risk and students with deficient reading levels, making cost-effective simple changes in school management and school practices that are within the control and realistic budget of schools.
- b) The role of the Regional Offices will be critical in linking schools with partners, providing training and exchange of experience on innovative ways to improve school performance within realistic limits of resource availability.
- c) Strengthening the networking/collaborative arrangements between the MOEYC and NGOs and other civil society organizations, possibly through the establishment of a *Stakeholders' Planning and Review Committee* which would identify opportunities for joint initiatives and elaborate arrangements for utilizing such opportunities. The Stakeholders' Committee would also carry out a monitoring function and feed recommendations into the ROSE Secretariat on an ongoing basis. Secondary school students should be represented on this committee.
- d) Building the capacity of the Guidance and Counseling Unit of the MOEYC to enable the division to effectively implement the Guidance and Counseling Policy which is shortly to be approved by Cabinet. To this end, it will be necessary to increase the staff of the Unit at the Centre to facilitate the training and special projects aspects of the work of the Unit.
- e) Town hall meetings will be organized annually in each region for the review panel and regional officers to report to the community on the progress made in school development planning, to review whether the targets have been met, and to discuss how to move forward.

Monitoring performance in terms of social development outcomes

The monitoring of social development outcomes will necessarily need to flow from and be a subset of the overall monitoring plan. It is advisable that it makes use of readily available data already being collected and collated by schools through the Ministry's administrative data collection systems and on a national population basis using the Survey of Living Conditions through monitoring the percentage of students by income quintile enrolled in secondary and primary schools by type. Some elements that contribute to improved participation and performance are already being monitored, like enrollment rates, rates of attendance/absenteeism, and teacher qualifications, and performance on standard examinations (GSAT, CXC, etc.).

The literature on the subject suggests that poorer students in good schools with excellent facilities require special assistance to be able to effectively use these facilities if their performance is to improve¹³ So it is important that we know as clearly and as soon as possible the

¹³ OECD, PISA, 2001.

ongoing outcomes of placing students in good schools so as to be able to understand how the intervention is working and then to correct on the spot those aspects that are not working as anticipated. In this way we will be not just monitoring the intervention but also improving it as we go along. Tracking these corrections will be also be a part of the monitoring process. This two-pronged approach will thus allow for the participation of key stakeholders in a continuous way (See Annex 1 for suggested list of Social Monitoring Indicators, prepared subsequently).

MOEYC's guidance and counseling policy and program

It is expected that the draft Guidance and Counseling Policy of the MOEYC, dated March 2000, will be approved by the GOJ's Human Resource Council and the Cabinet during 2002. The policy is based on the principle that guidance should be recognized as an essential and visible component of the total education program, owned and supported by policy makers, curriculum developers, program implementers, teachers, parents and students. The primary objectives of the policy are to highlight guidance as a social engine for curriculum development and delivery and to define the parameters of the national guidance and counseling program.

It is evident that there is great disparity in the quality of guidance counselors and this should be addressed. The new policy calls for the establishment of acceptable minimum qualifications for counselors. Although most secondary schools have two counselors, they still have not achieved a realistic ratio where most students may be assured of access to counseling services. The policy stipulates a ratio of 450 students to 1 counselor, a significant improvement.

In spite of the provisions of the GOJ and the interventions of schools and the private sector, many children were still hungry at school, have no textbooks, need bus fares, school uniforms and other supplies. Attendance is affected by the lack or insufficiency of resources which are often the reason given by youth at risk for dropping out of school. Schools address this problem with varying levels of efficiency. The more committed, compassionate and innovative counselors, principals and teaching staff have greater success in addressing the problems of needy students. Welfare programs have greater success when the counselor had a good relationship with the teaching and administrative staff and the school nurse. Also very useful is the networking with NGOs and entities such as the MICO CARE Centre. (It would appear that it is necessary to expand the services of the MICO CARE Centre, as it appears to be highly-utilized by the school system and others and has difficulty coping with the demand on its resources).

Co-ordination with the NGO sector needs to be facilitated by providing counselors, principals and teachers, students and parents with an up-to-date directory of NGO services in written and electronic form. This could be supplied through collaboration with the Council of Voluntary Social Services. This directory would be made available to all staff in the education system at all levels beginning with the Ministry in Kingston, the Regional Offices and Officers, and all schools. Best practice School-NGO collaboration should be made available.

Enhanced coordination is needed for the Program for Alternative Student Support (PASS) which provides special diagnostic and treatment services for maladjusted students with behavioral and discipline problems. It is recommended that the PASS methodology be adapted for use in assessing student behavior in situations other than the presentation of maladjusted behavior, in order to broaden the scope of diagnostic services to the student body.

A survey conducted by Guidance Officers at the start of the school term, which sought the opinion of 120 students randomly selected across the six regions, indicated that students felt that they had problems at home. These were problems which could and do impact on student

behavior at school. They included -- not getting along with siblings and other family members; no place or opportunity to study without disturbance; not getting along with parents; not being trusted; and exclusion from decision-making.

The survey further indicated that students lost interest in school because they felt that they were -- not accepted by teachers; inferior or less capable than other students; not dealt with fairly and not reading at their Grade level.

Strengthening critical aspects of school life will assist in enhancing the guidance and counseling program. The survey conducted by Guidance Officers indicated that students identified major problems with school to include-- noise levels; indiscipline of students; poor attitude of students towards school; negative peer pressure; lack of understanding academic material and teachers' attitude towards students. Students were excited by school when they had good quality teachers; recreational and cultural activities; clubs and societies; the option to select the subjects of their interest (special interest was expressed in vocational subjects and computer classes) and could be proud of their school.

The findings of the survey, which was conducted to provide information for the ROSE II Social Assessment, confirmed some of the findings based on pre-appraisal social assessment visits to several schools island-wide. It is recommended that the excellent work completed by the Guidance Officers be fully documented and shared throughout the education system.

Solving the problems identified by the Social Assessment

School Improvement Plans

The most immediate way to improve the school environment through the project is through the School Improvement Plans which are to be developed through a consultative consensus-building process involving students, teachers, parents, principals, guidance counselors and the community. It should not be forgotten that students are critical participants in this process since they are the beneficiaries of it. The goals of the school improvement plan need to be explicitly defined in terms of student learning goals such as strategies to improve standards of achievement and personal development goals. Cost effective innovations to spark the interest and involvement of students will be especially important and the Social Assessment has described some of the current innovations that students, teachers and principals have already put in place. It is hoped that these innovations can be tapped and that their creators can be called upon in the preparation of School Improvement Plans and project initiatives. The names of these people have been duly recorded and everyone has expressed a strong interest in sharing their experiences with other schools and working with ROSE II, within and beyond their schools and school districts to the benefit of secondary education for all. These innovators are principals, teachers, counselors, and students alike.

Expanding access to upper secondary education

The Social Assessment confirmed that overcrowding, together with streaming, are the most intractable and damaging factors facing the reform of secondary education and the quality of and access to secondary and upper secondary education. The project will tackle these factors in two ways: through the construction of new schools and through public financing of private school places. The placing and funding of students in private schools which have excess capacity is a cost effective, immediate and high quality solution that will greatly benefit students and reduce pressures on school populations in overcrowded schools. Interviews conducted during the Social

Assessment with private school principals and students themselves confirmed that poor students can thrive in these conditions and can be given the additional help needed to benefit as much as possible from the educational offerings in their schools.

Annex 1

Social Monitoring Indicators

Social monitoring indicators. To the extent feasible, these are the social indicators that would be ideally monitored. (Unless otherwise stated, the basic disaggregation should be at least by parish and rural/urban so that problem schools can be identified more easily).

1. Percentage of public secondary schools in “poorer” areas providing education beyond grade 9
2. Percentage of enrollment in public secondary schools of pupils from poor areas or poor families in grades 8 to 11, separately
3. Transition rates from grade 9 to 10 of pupils from poor areas or poor families
4. Attendance/absenteeism rates of pupils from poor areas or poor families
5. Percentage of teachers, by level of qualification, in secondary schools in poor areas
6. Teacher-pupil ratios in secondary schools in poor areas
7. Average journey of poor pupils to secondary school in relation to some established, desirable minimum
8. Dropout rates of pupils from poor areas or poor families by grade
9. Total and per capita project expenditures for schooling costs, e.g. uniforms, books, transport, etc for pupils from poor areas of poor families
10. Total project expenditure on additional educational and recreational facilities e.g. libraries, computer centers, multimedia centers, sports facilities, for secondary schools in poor areas (by element)
11. Percentage of secondary schools in poor areas with a library, a computer facilities (to be quantified), a sports facility (to be quantified) (%age per element)
12. Percentage of “free places” awarded to pupils from poor areas or poor families
13. A tracking system to monitor the progress of pupils from poor families receiving “free” places
14. Ensuring that all test and examination scores and cut-off presentations show separately the performance levels and trends of pupils from poor families or poor areas
15. Percentage of secondary schools in poor areas with a parent-teacher association or a community school body or some similar partnership/ownership organization
16. (It is assumed that for indicators 3, 4,5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 13, and 14 these can be compared to the same indicators for other pupil population groups.