

**POLICIES AND STRATEGIES RELATED TO
ECCE/ECD**

National Report of Barbados

**by the
Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports
Barbados**

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NATIONAL REPORT ON POLICIES AND STRATEGIES RELATED TO ECCE/ECD IN BARBADOS

1. Introduction

Barbados is an Independent island nation located on the boundary of the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. It is the most easterly island of the Caribbean archipelago in the region of the Lesser Antilles.

This island nation enjoyed three hundred and thirty-nine years of uninterrupted peaceful British rule and in spite of the fact that Independence was gained in 1966, there is still a strong British influence in the island. Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom is Barbados' Head of State, but she is represented by a Governor General. However, the present Government is proposing that Barbados become a Republic within the Commonwealth, with a ceremonial President replacing the Queen.

Presently, executive power is in the hands of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. The Prime Minister is usually the leader of the winning party in the elections for the House of Assembly, the lower house of parliament, which has 30 seats. Its members are elected every five years by citizens eighteen years of age or older. The Senate has twenty-one members. Some are appointed on the advice of the government, some on the advice of the opposition and others by the Governor General himself. Barbados is a full and participating member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

Historically, the Barbadian economy has been dependent on the cultivation of sugarcane but in the more recent past this has been overshadowed by the emphasis on tourism and to a lesser extent light manufacturing. Offshore finance and services have also become increasingly important foreign exchange earners. The island continues to experience steady economic development and success which can be attributed to several factors. These include the fact that the island is a model of political and social stability and hence attracts public, as well as private foreign investments. In addition, the government provides the infrastructural development which is required of an expanding economy and this includes a sound educational system.

Housing in Barbados is affordable for all citizens as Government housing units can be rented for a low cost of between BDS \$20.00 and \$98.00 per week (US\$10.00 – \$49.00) and other low income houses can be bought for the price of BDS \$60,000 (US\$ 30,000).

With regards to social services, there is a Government Welfare Department which provides parents of underprivileged children with financial assistance as well as school uniforms. The Government subsidizes bus fares for all school children, and school meals for all students of primary schools. In addition, there is a Government's Text Book Loan Scheme. Under this 'Scheme', students of secondary schools are required to pay a small fee of BDS\$ 75.00 (US \$ 37.50) per year, in order to be issued with all of their text books for the respective school year. In situations which are deemed justifiable, there is a waiver of these rental fees.

There is also a scheme for the provision of uniforms for school children, which is attached to the Ministry of Social Transformation. It provides a once-and-for-all grant of BDS\$100.00 (US\$50.00) to each qualified student entering a secondary school for the first time.

The Government of Barbados also provides free health care services for young children. These include testing for hearing, speech and sight impairments, free immunization and medication.

Barbados has a mixed population of approximately two hundred and sixty-five thousand of African and English descent. Consequently, there is a rich blend of African-European-Caribbean customs, traditions and culture. Throughout the year, there are several activities to celebrate the culture and heritage of Barbados. "Crop Over", a five-week Carnival cultural event is the largest, most popular and colourful festival. It gets into high gear from the beginning of July, ends during the first week of August and traditionally marked the celebration of the end of the sugar cane harvest.

Religion is an integral part of Barbadian life and religious tolerance is promoted. Thus, in spite of its modest dimensions of one hundred and sixty-six square miles, it hosts in excess of one hundred different religious sects and more places of worship than days in the year. However, the Anglican faith is the most dominant religion.

The Caribbean islands of which Barbados is a part, share common historical experiences, have common institutions and use English as the common, official language. In relation to its people, there has been constant racial and cultural mixing over centuries and this has resulted in

extreme heterogeneity. Nevertheless, with the exception of Trinidad where East Indians and Africans are almost equal in number, the Caribbean states have predominantly African-derived populations. There is therefore a combination of elements of African, European, Asian and Indigenous American traditions in the region. It must be noted however that no regional, political or social organization is based exclusively on race, class or colour.

Literacy rates vary greatly from island to island but in Barbados, there is almost universal literacy with a rate of 98%.

2) Organization and Structure of the Educational Sub-System Involved in the Prevention of School Failure Programme

Barbados is among the group of developing nations that has made universal access to education a reality at both primary and secondary levels. More importantly, this education is free to all children of compulsory school age (5-16). The Government of Barbados demonstrates its commitment to the promotion of education by allocating approximately three hundred million dollars to this sector every year.

The education system of Barbados is three-tiered with some overlapping at each stage. The first stage caters to students from three plus to eleven plus and is referred to as the Primary stage. This is further sub-divided into the Pre-primary, Infant and Junior stages. The Pre-Primary stage caters to children between the ages of three plus and four plus. These children are taught in Nursery schools and/ or Nursery classes in some primary schools and they pursue an Early Childhood Education Programme. The Infant stage caters to children who are between 5 and 7 years old. They also pursue an Early Childhood Education Programme but are facilitated at Primary schools. It must be noted that under the Education Act of Barbados compulsory schooling begins at five years old but primary schools which have adequate facilities and resources often accommodate children from just over three years old. The recommended pupil-teacher ratio for three to four year olds is 15/20:1 while 25/30:1 is the ratio for five to seven year olds. The reality is however that across the primary system the pupil-teacher ratio is approximately 18:1.

Presently, 100% of children from five years old are enrolled in primary schools. However, only 70% of three year olds currently access Early Childhood Education programmes, either through government or private institutions. The remaining 30% are those who will be addressed through the programme which is outlined in this report.

The Early Childhood institutions in Barbados are:

- Day Care Centres which provide care and nurturing not only for babies and toddlers but also for pre-schoolers from three years to four plus.
- Four Government Nursery Schools
- Nursery units and Infant Departments within primary schools
- 1 public Infant School
- 1 private All Age School

There are fifteen (15) Government Day Care Centres which operate under the aegis of the Child Care Board. In addition to these, there are sixty-eight (68) registered private Day Care Centres that offer Early Childhood Education programmes. However, there are also fifty-two (52) other private Day Care Centres which are in the process of completing their registration with the Child Care Board. These Centres, though designated 'Day Care' offer the complete Early Childhood Education Programme which is supported by the Early Childhood Education Programme of the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports.

There are four public Nursery Schools in Barbados. These originally operated a shift system with a stipulated maximum of sixty pupils

attending the morning session and a further sixty pupils attending the afternoon session. One of these four Nursery schools, in addition to the regular shift system also provides accommodation for one hundred and twenty children throughout the day. This intake serves to facilitate children in the four to five age –group who could not be enrolled at the nearby primary school due to inadequate space. Two of the other Nursery schools have also recently instituted a whole day system. Consequently, three of the four Nursery schools operate a dual system.

In addition to the four Government Nursery schools there are twenty (20) private nursery schools which are registered with the Ministry of Education. They offer the complete Early Childhood Education programme and are monitored by the Early Childhood Education Officers of the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports.

Currently, there are fifty-eight (58) public primary schools with nursery units, one Infant school and Infant departments in the remaining public primary schools with the exception of at one Junior School.

In Barbados there are no barriers to educational achievement based on religion, colour or class. There is also no gender discrimination, as school places are equitably accessible to both girls and boys. This equitable access is facilitated through a co-educational system which has been widely instituted since the late 1970s and early 1980s. There are presently only three single-sex public primary schools, one all-boys school and two all-girls' schools, while at the secondary level there are two single-sex public schools- one for girls and one for boys.

3) Enrolment Ratio in Barbados

Table 1. Enrolment for Three Year Olds in 1999-2004

YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1999-2000	828	905	1733
2000-2001	859	916	1775
2001-2002	940	966	1906
2002-2003	1000	1041	2041
2003-2004	1043	1063	2106

Statistics reveal that for the academic year 2004/2005 there were one thousand, six hundred and thirty-eight (1,638) three year olds attending public primary and nursery schools and five hundred and thirty-two (532) three year olds in private institutions. This made a grand total of two thousand, one hundred and seventy (2,170) pupils accessing nursery education.

However, the national population census puts the number of three year olds at three thousand, five hundred and eighty-six (3,586). One may therefore conclude that there are approximately one thousand, five hundred and sixteen (1,516) three year olds who are not benefiting from an early childhood education in any type of institution. These children are mainly from working class backgrounds and are therefore those who may be less likely to be provided with the kind of environment which helps to prevent school failure.

4) The Programme to Prevent School Failure

In July 2000, a document entitled Curriculum 2000 Rationale and Guidelines For Curriculum Reform In Barbados, was published by the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Culture. This document revealed that the Ministry of Education 'accepts the challenge that the design and provision of education must seek to enable all young people to be knowledgeable . . . and each child must be educated to the maximum of his or her ability' (p. 4).

As a result on-going efforts to realise the goals enunciated in this document, in September 2004 the Cabinet of Barbados agreed to address the issue of universal access to pre-primary education by agreeing to:

- put programmes in place to make pre-school education available to all
- utilize existing government properties mainly in the north and east of the island to accommodate a percentage of the children who do not now have access to pre-school education
- increase Government pre-schools beyond the existing four
- encourage the creation of new preparatory schools

In order to accomplish the educational initiative of providing universal access for the approximately one thousand, six hundred (1,600) three year olds who are currently not benefiting from an early childhood education at a public or private institution, the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports outlined the two following general objectives:

- to achieve the United Nation's Declaration on Education for All-that is, expansion of early childhood care and developmental activities, including family and community interventions, especially for poor, disadvantaged and disabled children
- to implement CARICOM's Plan of Action to address early childhood issues in the Caribbean, in terms of policy, structure and implementation.

Furthermore, through the expansion of Early Childhood Education it is hoped that the pupils will achieve the following goals:

- develop the ability to speak/communicate effectively
- acquire an innate curiosity and desire to learn
- engage in playful activity
- develop the ability to imitate and interact with each other, as well as with adults
- gain the ability to use concrete and multi-sensory materials and tools
- acquire knowledge and skills in multiple areas
- develop the capacity to learn at different rates
- acquire the ability to use real life experiences in their learning
- acquire the ability to distinguish right from wrong
- foster a sense of security and self-confidence

The Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports plans to accomplish its goal of providing universal access to pre-primary education over a three year period commencing in September 2005 of the academic year 2005-2006.

It is therefore, proposed that three hundred and forty-five (345) places will be provided at the twenty-two (22) existing government primary schools in Phase 1 of the programme. In addition an existing, but no longer in use building in the north of the island will be converted to a Nursery school and will accommodate approximately one hundred and five (105) three to four year olds. Therefore, four hundred and fifty (450) new places will be made available in the coming school year.

The schools which have been selected are all rural schools since the urban schools cannot accommodate additional students due to their high enrolment rates.

The funds allocated for Phase 1 of the expansion programme will be apportioned as follows:

ITEM	NUMBER	COST
Human Resources (Teachers' Salaries)	25	\$ 772 100.00
Learning Resources	-	\$ 34 500.00
Chairs (Students)	345	\$ 22 425.00
Nesting Tables	101	\$ 20 000.00
Chairs (Teachers)	25	\$ 5 626.00
Desks (Teachers)	25	\$ 16 125.00
Structures	-	\$ 129 025.00
TOTAL		\$1 000 000.00

It must be noted that the human resource component requires the bulk of the expenditure since the pupil/teacher ratio at this level is 15/20:1. To fully implement phase 1 of the programme twenty-five (25) additional teachers will be required.

Phase 2 is scheduled to commence in September 2006. In this phase, former primary school buildings that have been abandoned or returned to the Church as new buildings have been erected, will be considered for renovation to facilitate the expansion process. Included in this Phase will be the establishment of three new Nursery schools. These will be established in the north, east and central areas of the island. The financial requirements will include provision for both teaching and administrative personnel, structures/renovations, physical resources and appropriate

learning resources. It is proposed that five hundred and fifty (550) places be provided in this phase.

In Phase 3, consideration will be given to assisting private nursery schools capable of expanding their operations. During 2005, the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports will commence discussions with the private nursery schools to determine their capacity for expansion and the levels of assistance which can be provided to them. This phase will provide all other places required for universal access at the Nursery level.

Pedagogical training in Early Childhood Education Care and Development will be provided for all new teachers who will be involved in the expansion programme. This training will seek to provide the teachers with sound theoretical and practical knowledge which will enable them to deliver quality early childhood education. It will be conducted for fifty (50) hours over a two week period and will include practical activities as well as visits to schools with 'best practices.' The training sessions will be conducted prior to the commencement of the expansion programme.

A critical component of the early childhood expansion programme is the Parent Volunteer Support Programme, a Government initiative which commenced on 3rd September 1996. The programme is designed to secure the assistance of parents/guardians of a pupil of the school on a voluntary basis in order to facilitate an appropriate nursery programme in the public schools, nursery schools with four to five year olds, special schools and schools where special education programmes are provided.

The volunteer can be a male or female who is selected by the principal of the school in collaboration with the Nursery teacher and the local Parent Teacher Association (P.T.A). The maximum time period for serving as a parent volunteer is four years, but the volunteer is free to stop providing assistance at anytime during that period. It must be noted however, that the word 'volunteer' may be regarded as a misnomer since each parent receives an honorarium of BDS \$100.00 per week (US\$50.00) for providing assistance in the classroom for a minimum of ten (10) hours per week. However, most parent volunteers offer their services every school day for the entire day. The honorarium is disbursed in two instalments - at the middle and the end of each term.

According to the document Guidelines For Administering The Parent Volunteer Support Programme, the general goal of the programme is 'to enable principals, teachers and parents to work in partnership in order to use all available resources, which would empower each child to develop his or her early potential to become a lifelong learner'. It is important to highlight the point that 'the role of the parent volunteer is a supportive one and is in no way intended to diminish or reduce the professional responsibility of the principal or the teacher who must be seen at all times to be in charge, with the parent playing a supportive role'.

Consequently, it is the volunteer's responsibility to provide assistance in the following general areas:

- interacting with the children
- assisting the class teacher with indoor/outdoor activities
- assisting with feeding and dressing students
- encouraging good habits and values

- assisting the teacher with compiling portfolios for children's assessment

5) Final Reflections and Pending Challenges

In summary, this report indicates that:

- Barbados is a democratic country with a population of approximately 265,000. The population is mainly of African and English descent.
- This small developing country experiences political and social stability and has a sound educational system.
- Under the social services, bus fares, school meals and text books are subsidized and there is also free health care for school children.
- Affordable housing is made available for all citizens as Government housing units can be rented from as low as BDS\$20.00 (US\$10.00) per week.
- Barbados is a member of the Caribbean islands which share a common language, common historical experiences and common institutions.
- In the Caribbean, no regional, political or social organization is based exclusively on race, colour or class.
- Literacy rates vary greatly across the Caribbean but in Barbados it is approximately 98%.
- The Government of Barbados acknowledges the importance of education in the attainment of personal and national goals and hence approximately three hundred million dollars is allocated to this sector every year.
- In Barbados there is free universal access to education at all levels with the compulsory age for schooling from five to sixteen years old.

- There are no barriers to educational achievement based on religion, colour or class. There is also no gender discrimination as school places are equitably accessible to both boys and girls.
- The education system is three-tiered with overlapping at each stage. The stages are Primary, Secondary and Tertiary. The Primary stage is further sub-divided with a Pre-primary level which caters to children between three and four years old.
- Children between three and seven years old pursue an Early Childhood Education programme as their course of study. They may be enrolled at public or private Day Care Centres, public or private Nursery schools and Nursery units and Infant departments within primary schools.
- The stated pupil-teacher ratio for three to four year olds is 15/20:1 while for five to seven year olds it is 25/30:1. In reality however, at the primary level it is 18:1.
- Statistics over the last year reveal that at present there are approximately two thousand, one hundred and seventy (2,170) three year olds enrolled in either a public or private early childhood education institution, and approximately one thousand, five hundred and sixteen (1,516) not currently enrolled in any of these institutions.
- The Government of Barbados is embarking on a programme to provide universal access to pre-primary education. This is being addressed through the implementation of the Early Childhood Expansion Programme which will commence in September 2005.
- The expansion programme has been divided into three phases. In phase 1, approximately three hundred and forty-five (345) three year olds will be enrolled in twenty-two (22) existing government primary schools. One new school will accommodate approximately one

hundred and five (105) three to four year olds. This will bring the total number of new places to four hundred and fifty (450).

- One million dollars (BDS \$1,000,000.00) will be allocated to phase 1 of the programme and will be used to pay the salaries of twenty-five (25) teachers, refurbish some of the existing school buildings, and purchase furniture and teaching/learning materials.
- Phase 2 is scheduled to commence in September 2006. Included in this phase will be the establishment of three new Nursery schools. These will be erected in the north, east and central areas of the island. Five hundred and fifty (550) places will be provided in this phase.
- In phase 3, private Nursery schools which are capable of expanding their operations will be provided with the necessary assistance from the Government so that they can facilitate an increase in their enrolment. When this phase has been completed, there will be universal access to nursery education in Barbados.
- Training in Early Childhood Education, Care and Development will be provided for all new teachers who will be assigned to the nursery classes which have been established due to the expansion programme. Training will be conducted for 50 hours per week over a two week period and will include visits to schools with 'best practices' as well as practical activities. The training sessions will be conducted prior to the school term in which the expansion programme will commence.
- One group which will play a supportive role in the Early Childhood Expansion Programme is the Parent Volunteers. These are members of the Parent Volunteer Support Programme, a Government initiative which commenced on September 3rd 1996.

- These parents/guardians must have a child/ward attending the school at which they are offering assistance and must be selected by the principal of the school in conjunction with the nursery class teacher and the local P.T.A.
- The Parent Volunteers are required to provide assistance to the class teacher for a minimum of ten hours per week for a maximum period of four years. However, they may withdraw their assistance at anytime during the four years.
- Each Parent Volunteer receives an honorarium of BDS \$100.00 (US \$50.00) per week, but it is disbursed twice per term.
- The Parent Volunteer Support Programme is not intended to be used to diminish or reduce the professional responsibility of the principal or the class teacher, but rather, to foster a partnership among these stakeholders for the purpose of empowering each child to develop to his/her maximum potential.

A detailed account of the main hurdles faced by the Early Childhood Expansion Programme cannot be presently identified, since the programme is yet to be implemented. However, what can be stated is that there is a challenge to provide access for all sixteen hundred (1,600) three year olds in one phase of the programme since all the costs cannot be absorbed in one year.

This has been addressed by dividing the implementation over three phases. It is therefore expected that by September 2007 all children of nursery age in Barbados will be enrolled in a school. It is hoped that this will address the needs of those children who may be at the greatest risk for school failure.