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POLICY LETTER

EDUCATION SECTOR REFORM III

Mr. Luis Alberto Moreno
President
Inter-American Development Bank
1300 New York Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20577, USA

Dear President Moreno:

Re: Education Sector Reform III

The Education Sector Reform Programme has vastly supported the efforts of the Government of Jamaica (GOJ) in improving the country's education sector over the past six years. This has been the case since the inception of the programmatic policy based approach which was initiated under the Policy Based Loan (PBL) JA-L1002 for the Education Sector Reform in December 2008. Following the accomplishment of the requirements in relation to the indicative triggers for the first policy matrix, Jamaica went on to qualify for a second PBL, Education Sector Reform II (JA-L1024), in February 2010. These reforms have been essential in improving the quality, efficiency and accountability of Jamaica's education system which will ultimately improve the overall performance of our students and schools across the sector.

Notwithstanding the significant progress under the two previous reform programmes, additional reform measures have been ongoing and require further implementation in keeping with the Extended Fund

Facility (EFF) provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the GOJ also recognizes that though progress has been made, the quality of educational services still has challenges.

The current reforms were coordinated under the Education System Transformation Programme (ESTP), supported by a team of professionals charged with coordinating all the initiatives in the reform. The ESTP ensured that the implementation of various initiatives was accomplished within the approved conceptual framework outlined in the documents related to the first and second Education Sector Reform operations. The modifications to the institutional structure and governance of Jamaica's education system have improved accountability and performance and by extension the overall quality of education. The GOJ has established performance targets to be achieved by the end of calendar year 2015 and monitors same with statistics, including national assessment data. The changes have been defined along three dimensions: (a) Modernization of the Ministry of Education; (b) Curriculum, Teaching, Learning and School Governance & Management; and (c) Relationships with Stakeholders and Behavior Modifications.

It is critical for Jamaica to maintain a stable macroeconomic framework as this provides a very good foundation for the achievement of the Programme Objectives of the Education Sector Reform. Notably, the country has done considerably well over the 2014/15 fiscal year and this has resulted in restored investor and consumer confidence.

Modernization of the Ministry of Education (MOE)

Successes in modernizing the MOE include the establishment of six (6) new agencies namely the National Education Inspectorate (NEI); National College for Educational Leadership (NCEL); Jamaica Tertiary Education Commission (JTEC); National Education Trust (NET); Jamaica Teaching Council (JTC); and the National Parenting Support Commission (NPSC). All six agencies have made considerable progress as all are operational.

The NEI, which was established as an independent agency under the ESTP, provides data on the quality of services delivered thereby contributing to increased accountability throughout the education system. It has successfully completed its first cycle of inspection in all schools, trained three hundred (300) school inspectors, and has also published the final version of its inspection handbook. The JTC was established under the ESTP with responsibility for the professionalization of the teaching profession through a system of registration and licensing of teachers, and provision of strategic direction for in-service professional development and standards to guide pre-service teacher education. The JTC has also developed specific standards for the teaching profession. The NCEL has trained in excess of 600 educational leaders and

will, in the near future, be training leaders at the tertiary level. The College has also begun offering its services in the international market. JTEC will begin the registration of tertiary level institutions in September 2015, having developed the required standards expected to be maintained. JTEC has also developed Jamaica's National Qualification Framework (NQF). The NPSC and NET are both legally established and operational. The NPSC has been very visible in its support of parenting education initiatives through the training of parent mentors and the support to parent places. The NET has provided project management oversight for over 16 school infrastructure works and has been the clearing house for small endowments for education from benefactors and the diaspora.

Curriculum, Teaching, Learning and School Management

For the first operation, MOE implemented measures expected to contribute to improved student performance. In particular, MOE advanced the design and subsequent implementation of measures intended to improve the quality of education through better teaching of numeracy and literacy at the primary school level. A support structure was put in place to address the challenges faced by low performing schools. A lower-secondary education strategy was drafted to better articulate the primary and secondary curricula. Significant advances have been made in the development of a National Standard Curriculum from Grades 1 – 9 which will address the gaps in teaching and learning identified. Additionally, work on the revision of the National Assessment Programme (NAP) is significantly advanced in the design of a new diagnostic test at Grades 2 & 9 as well as, a new primary exit exam to replace the Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT). The Ministry will also be rolling out a National School Leaving Certificate in light of these proposed quality improvements.

In order to achieve improved quality and performance in the system, MOE developed new instruments for the performance evaluation of principals, guidance counselors and teachers. The NCEL agency has been using the inspection and appraisal reports to target and train Principals in underperforming schools. The JTC also uses the NEI inspection report to focus on in-service training. MOE also created a revolving loan fund to assist in providing teachers with resources to attain graduate status, at least at the level of a Bachelors Degree.

With regard to the second programmatic loan, the MOE worked assiduously to inform stakeholders about its transformation efforts. The MOE has held regional meetings, distributed a newsletter called "Transformation News" twice per year to staff and schools, distributed "The Educator" monthly to all its staff members, and there is a weekly radio broadcast and a monthly TV show about the ESTP. The

National Comprehensive Literacy and Numeracy programmes have been fully integrated into the work of the Ministry.

Relationship with Communities and Stakeholders and Behavior Modification

Improved involvement of communities and parents in the education of their children is uniquely important to a transformed education system. To this end, MOE supported the creation of a National Parent Teacher Association (NPTA) and conducted a programme of community consultations to inform the general public about the planned initiatives. The National Parenting Policy legislation has also been approved and the NPSC is now operational and has proven quite effective. The second operation endorsed its implementation by providing some of the building blocks required to make the reform operational.

Improved participation of communities and other major stakeholders in the education of their children has had a major impact on the transformation process. This is expected to continue to contribute to the reduction of violence among young persons. Consequently, the MOE, through the ESTP, continues to engage its major stakeholders in activities to effect more positive behavior changes in students and also parents. To this end, MOE has implemented the School Wide Positive Behavior Intervention Support (SWPBIS). In support of these initiatives, the Ministry, through the ESTP, has implemented a citizenship education programme aimed at producing citizens that are more culturally aware, emotionally mature and infused with a spirit of volunteerism, and demonstrate pride in being Jamaicans. The National Parenting Policy will also give effect to the MOE's behavior modification programme and the MOE also supports events organized by the National Parent Teacher Association (NPTA).

In addition, MOE conducted an internal marketing campaign to inform its staff about the reform process to generate ownership and commitment among employees. The outreach and involvement of stakeholders remain important elements of the reform.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

The MOE will be introducing an Enterprise School Management System (ESMS) which is a more robust school management system that will replace the JSAS that was introduced 4 years ago in 500 schools. The JTC has also launched a teacher registration website and 95% of all teachers have been registered. The NCEL, NEI and NET will be launching their portals by the end of the second quarter with JTEC and the NPSC having their systems up by the end of October. These will contribute to the build-out of the MOE's Education Management Information System (EMIS).

The Provision and Maintenance of Adequate School Infrastructure

The provision and maintenance of adequate school infrastructure is a dominant feature of the transformation programme. A census exercise conducted by the Planning and Development Division of the MOE as well as a survey conducted by the ESTP indicated that approximately 60% of school plants need to be repaired. Of the total number of secondary schools, one hundred and twelve (112) operate a double shift and over two hundred and ninety (290) operate in overcrowded settings. Some areas, despite a high demand for secondary education, have no facilities, impeding MOE's goal to have universal access to secondary education. In some areas with limited or no access to secondary places, students have to travel more than the maximum distance considered acceptable to get to school. The lack of adequate infrastructure is further exacerbated by MOE's recent policy decision to extend the compulsory age for school attendance from 16 to 18 years. Cognizant that the traditional MOE budget will not provide for resources for maintenance of infrastructure, GOJ is exploring alternative means to perform that function and anticipates that the ongoing reforms will facilitate the ease of accomplishment of those goals.

For the proposed third operation, MOE/ESTP will continue to work on the three reform areas as detailed below.

Reform Area I: Modernization of the Central Policy Ministry and the Department of School Services (DSS)

Reform Area I will entail the restructuring and streamlining of the MOE to focus on policies and strategies that were outlined in its Action Plan and implemented under the first two education sector operations. To demonstrate progress in the implementation of the proposed institutional changes, MOE will indicate advances of the National Education Trust (NET) since its incorporation in 2010, the establishment of DSS, and the production of key operational guidelines and manuals for the JTC and NEI. In the area of Curriculum and Assessment, MOE will develop new primary and secondary (grades 7 – 9) curricula in addition to developing a National School Leaving Certificate.

Recognizing the limited space for investments and maintenance in its regular budget, MOE advanced the creation of the NET with the intent to pursue more innovative means of addressing its infrastructure and maintenance needs. The NET is an entity with legal status as a limited liability company that can receive and raise funds from both public and private sources. A preliminary background study indicates that the education sector is a good candidate for such an initiative.

Reform Area II: Curriculum, Teaching, Learning, and School Governance & Management

This reform area intends to promote ownership of the transformation process within the Ministry, and advance the initiative of a previous IDB loan which provided support to improve the quality of primary and secondary education through the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy, the National Mathematics Strategy, and the Lower Secondary Strategy. Besides these pedagogical interventions, the MOE will broaden the use and implement new appraisal tools for Principals, Guidance Counselors, and Teachers while simultaneously providing more support to effect improvement in the teaching/learning process. Cognizant of the performance difference identified among boys and girls, results of the assessments have been segregated by gender to allow for the close monitoring of performance of the sexes over time. The MOE will be introducing the use of Depth of Knowledge approach to encourage higher order thinking and will use project based learning and STEM methodologies to promote child centered learning. The MOE will also focus on completing the development and teacher training of the National Standard Curriculum.

Results of the 2010 Grade 4 Literacy Test indicate that the system enjoyed some level of improvement as there was an increase in the percentage of students in two hundred and twelve (212) underperforming schools achieving mastery, from 69% in 2007 to 82% in 2010.

Reform Area III: Relationship with Communities and Stakeholders


Improving stakeholder and community involvement in education continues to be critical in transforming the education sector. The MOE will continue building relationships with communities and stakeholders, giving effect to the National Parenting Policy and the Parent Act (2012), through the work of the NPSC. MOE will also continue its education campaign and its programme for behavior modification in schools.

Government Support for the Programme

The implementation of the Education Sector Reform is ambitious but crucial and the effect of the intended changes will be far-reaching. The timely availability of technical and financial resources for the successful implementation of the various policy measures will be necessary while the GOJ continues to rigorously pursue the implementation of its economic reform programme, and the Education Sector Reform III PBL will form part of an overall envelope of support from our international partners.

The GOJ reaffirms its commitment to the transformation of the Education Sector presented and welcomes the technical and financial support of the Inter-American Development Bank provided previously and through this operation as part of the programmatic approach agreed upon between the GOJ and the Bank.

Sincerely,



Peter D. Phillips, PhD, MP
Minister of Finance and Planning
Jamaica

