Inclusive and equitable quality education for all in the Caribbean

Assessing the effects of school closures as part of COVID-19 mitigation measures on students with disabilities, students from indigenous populations, and students with migrant or refugee status

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Contents

1. Methodology

2. Results: The educational emergency produced by COVID-19 in the Caribbean

3. Conclusions and recommendations

1

Methodology

Assignments

Assess the effects of school closure on the selected marginalized groups (migrant and refugee students, students with disabilities, and indigenous students)

Survey focused on access and barriers to education
- Pedagogical tools and curricula developed
- Special policies to reduce disadvantages
- Transition measures adopted March-August 2020
- Comprehensive data by country
- All 29 members and associated members of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee

Diagnostic assessment focused on identifying students and family learning needs
- Time-use survey targeted at students
- Support received from schools and parents
- Student performance and well-being
- 3 countries: Belize, Suriname, and The Bahamas

Information gathering strategy

Stakeholders	Tool	Countries and territories	Contents / objectives defined in ToRs
Ministries of Education	Questionnaire	29 targeted / 10 responses	Educational policies for marginalized populations
			COVID-19 educational impact and mitigation measures
	Data request	29 targeted / 6 responses	General educational data
			Educational policies for marginalized populations
	Interview	2 (The Bahamas and Suriname)	Pedagogical tools in use and curricula developed for attending the needs of marginalized populations
			Educational policies for marginalized populations
			COVID-19 educational impact and mitigation measures
Key stakeholders	Focus group	8 representatives from organizations working with children with disabilities	Educational policies for marginalized populations
		5 representatives from organizations working with migrant children and indigenous children	COVID-19 educational impact and mitigation measures Support provided by the government and the schools
School leadership	Focus group	3 (The Bahamas, Belize, and Suriname)	Pedagogical tools and curricula developed for addressing the needs of marginalized populations
			Educational policies for marginalized populations
			COVID-19 educational impact and mitigation measures
	Questionnaire	Focus groups participants	Students' time-use during school closures
			Type of support received by the children and their families during school closures
			Student performance and wellbeing

2

Results:
The educational emergency produced by COVID-19 in the Caribbean

Extended school closures forced the countries and territories across the Caribbean to implement distance learning strategies

Overall impact of school closures and main challenges

Distance education strategies adopted and estimated percentage of students using each of them regularly

Country or territory	Synchronous online classes (live virtual classes)	Asynchronous online classes (recorded video/audio lessons)	Online delivery of learning materials and assignments	Use of online platforms to organize learning materials and assignments	Direct delivery of learning materials and assignments	Face to face classes for selected groups of students
Belize	●	●	●		●	
Grenada	● (37%)					
Guyana			● (46%)		● (28%)	● (26%)
Martinique	●	●	●	●	●	●
Montserrat	●	●	●	●	● (100%)	●
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	●	●	●	●	●	
St Kitts and Nevis	●		●	●		
Suriname	●	●	●	●	●	
The Bahamas	● (71%)	● (51%)	● (61%)	● (70%)	● (46%)	● (36%)
Turks and Caicos Islands	● (90%)	● (90%)	● (90%)	● (90%)	● (90%)	● (70%)
Total	8	7	9	7	8	5

Respondents implemented a wide range of distance learning strategies to reach students, with all of the respondents declaring three or more strategies in place

Digital strategies have been of the utmost importance
- The online delivery of learning materials and assignments to the students was reported by 9 of 10 respondents

The main challenge has been the students' low level of access to the internet and to digital devices at home
- Access to the internet and digital devices at home was a key factor considered by school leaders at the time of selecting distance education strategies

The implementation of distance education strategies has led the teachers to feel increasingly overwhelmed
- Double challenge: Technology + teaching
- Increase in workload (+ housework + care)

Distance education efforts have faced difficulties to provide SwD with a learning experience that properly caters to their needs

Students with disabilities

Online learning materials made available by the ministries of education have not necessarily been made accessible for SwD

Both live and recorded online classes have made very difficult for the teachers to engage individually with each of the students

While interaction is key to create learning opportunities, during online sessions is particularly difficult to engage students that are difficult to reach

Distance education efforts also have faced difficulties achieving a sustained participation from students with migrant or refugee status

Students of migrant or refugee status

For those migrant families that happened to be abroad at the time of the closure of borders, this measure prevented their children to come back to their schools

The economic crisis has particularly impacted migrant families, limiting their ability to invest in the education of their children

Some students of migrant or refugee status faced cyberbullying inspired by xenophobia

Distance education efforts also have faced difficulties reaching students from indigenous populations

Students from indigenous populations

Students form indigenous populations often lack access to the internet, since many of them live in remote rural communities

The language barriers between teachers and families that do not speak the official (or the local) language, have gained particular relevance for both students from indigenous populations and students of migrant or refugee status

The experiences reported by Surinamese principals and teachers are illustrative of this situation

- This emerges as a key challenge for the teachers, since frequently they do not speak the same language than the families, making the communication about the educational process very difficult

Governments have been active on implementing measures to mitigate the educational impact, according to survey responses

Mitigation measures against the educational impact of COVID-19

Government policies to support distance education strategies in schools

Country or territory	Distribution of digital devices	Internet connectivity at home	Online platforms to access learning materials	TV or radio educational programs	Other
Belize	●		●	●	Videos that address socio-emotional needs
Grenada	●			●	Remote learning guides for teachers, parents and students. Math program
Guyana				●	Distribution of printed materials to indigenous groups
Martinique	●	●	●	●	
Montserrat	●				
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	●	●	●	●	
St Kitts and Nevis	●	●	●	NR	Framework for continuity of learning with parameters and expectation of distance education
Suriname	●		●	●	
The Bahamas	●	●	●	●	Development of learning packages for all levels to complement distance learning
Turks and Caicos Islands	●	●	●		Development of e-learning guidelines
Total	9	5	7	7	

The ministries of education of the ten participant countries and territories report multiple mitigation measures

- The most frequent mitigation measure to support distance education was the distribution of digital devices
- In contrast, the least implemented mitigation measure among the listed options was the provision of internet connectivity at home

Most of the mitigation policies enacted by the respondents were targeted towards the general school population, and not specifically adapted or targeted to address the needs of marginalized groups

- The mitigation measure for which most respondents (5 out of 7) reported adaptations was the implementation of TV and radio educational programming, either translating contents to indigenous languages, developing specific programming for SwD and their families, or including sign language in mainstream programming

23

Challenges for the implementation of school reopening

School reopening measures and its implementation

The availability of infrastructure (classrooms and other spaces) and teachers can limit the ability to split classes in smaller groups and keep the pace defined by the curriculum, teaching a higher number of classes, as reported by a school leader from The Bahamas:

> *"The challenges that we face are the shortage of teachers and janitors (…) we reduced our class sizes to avoid crowded classes and so that also forced us to now utilize every available space on campus. We had to create classrooms and so our cafeteria became a classroom in order for us to have those three feet space for each of all of our students. Our teacher's timetables are pretty heavy, so they have increased teaching periods. (…) we encourage our janitors as much as possible to go in sanitize after each classroom, it's kind of difficult, the reality is it is difficult, it doesn't always happen. But as much as possible, we encourage it".*

Another challenge is to develop trusting relationships with the school communities and the staff, in order to build credibility for a safe return to face-to-face instruction.

> *"(…) there are two opposing thoughts in this time. One is, "please get our kids back in to the classroom", and the second is "Oh, no way you really can't expect my child to come back to the classroom"*

3

Recommendations and conclusions

Overall recommendations on removing barriers and fostering engagement

Short-term recommendations

Strengthen programs that support students' internet access at home
- Many families have access to a digital device (such as a smartphone), but cannot bear the cost of internet connectivity in times of economic downturn

Support families in the use of technology to teach and learn
- Active strategies of parental involvement, such as training sessions to teach families how to use online platforms

Support teachers in the use of technology and in adapting their teaching strategies to distance education
- Professional development opportunities: use of technology + teaching strategies for distance education
- Specific strategies at school level, such as "team teaching"

Support students in their distance learning process
- Monitoring student progress through formative assessment and self-assessment

Medium-term recommendations

Consider distance education not only as a strategy to respond to an emergency, but also as an option to reach remote areas and address teacher shortages in order to improve education quality for marginalized populations

Better equip teachers with ICT competencies to practice their profession, including distance learning methods in teachers' initial training and professional development

Recommendations to better cater to the needs of students from vulnerable groups

Students with disabilities

Advance the accessibility of online learning materials and platforms, as well as of educational TV and radio programing
- Materials, programs and platforms were not necessarily developed accessibly for blind or deaf students, among others

Keep individual and regular communication with SwD and their families
- Engage them individually through phone calls, and provide guidance for their families

If possible, keep schools open for SwD; otherwise, prioritize students with more severe disabilities when reopening schools
- Schools and special education units that work with small groups of SwD should be prioritized for face-to-face teaching, since it is more feasible to organize the classroom with social distancing

Students from indigenous populations and with migrant or refugee status

Involve families in the educational process, reaching out to them in their own language through online learning materials and training sessions, in order to increase students' participation
- Students' participation in distance education activities highly depends on the ability of their families to support them in these efforts

Increase flexibility to enroll students with migrant or refugee status
- Integrate students at different points of the school year, independently of their legal status

Thank you.

Pablo Alfaro
pa2343@columbia.edu