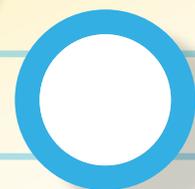
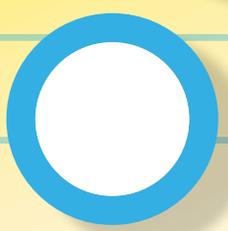
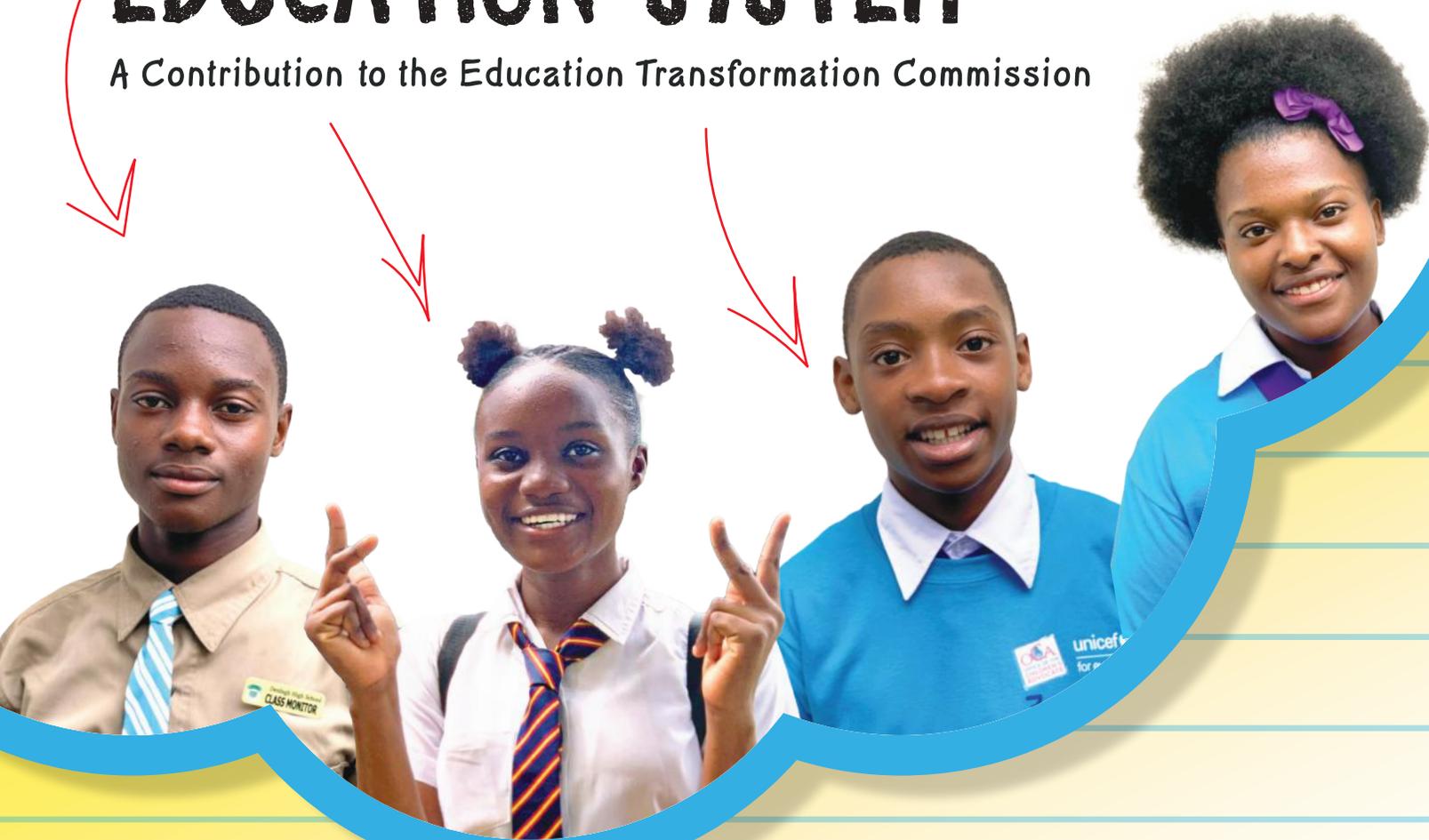


# STUDENTS REIMAGINE THE JAMAICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

A Contribution to the Education Transformation Commission



WORLD CHILDREN'S DAY  
NOVEMBER 20, 2020

# Table of contents

The table of contents is presented in a stylized, hand-drawn format. Large, colorful numbers are placed to the right of the text, with thin black lines connecting each number to its corresponding text item. The numbers are: 3 (black), 4 (pink), 5 (orange), 6 (blue), 8 (black), 10 (red), 11 (pink), 13 (blue), 16 (grey), 19 (green), 22 (orange), 24 (blue), 34 (pink), 36 (blue), and 40 (pink).

|                                      |    |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| Introduction                         | 3  |
| Message from UNICEF                  | 4  |
| Message from The NSSC                | 5  |
| About the consultation               | 6  |
| Summary of findings                  | 8  |
| Why reimagine education?             | 10 |
| Why students disengage               | 11 |
| Learning reimaged                    | 13 |
| Equity and inclusion                 | 16 |
| Relationships in learning            | 19 |
| Curriculum content                   | 22 |
| Teacher capacity and lesson delivery | 24 |
| U-Report poll results                | 34 |
| Conclusions                          | 36 |
| Mapping solutions                    | 40 |
| Acknowledgements                     |    |

Final Report Submitted to UNICEF Jamaica - March 2021  
By: Renée Rattray Ed.D. - Education Consultant

# Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC), Article 12 states: “Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.”

Globally, UNICEF marked World Children’s Day 2020 on November 20 as a major moment within its global “Reimagine” effort to listen to how children and young people want to improve their future. UNICEF Jamaica is committed to facilitating this process, and to help ensure the right of every child to form and express his or her own views in matters concerning them, as stated in articles 12 and 13 of the UN CRC, to which Jamaica is signatory, and as mandated by the Education Regulations, 1980 in the form of the National Secondary Students’ Council (NSSC).

In 2020, the Prime Minister of Jamaica established the National Education Transformation Commission to undertake a sweeping review of the current education system. The Commission is tasked with recommending actions for change and advising the Government on how to create an inclusive, world-class education system that enables all Jamaicans to fulfill their potential and develop the skills base and human capital required for Jamaica to compete successfully in the 21st-century global economy.

With no youth delegate assigned to the Commission, UNICEF sought to fill that gap through the Reimagine Education initiative – which aims to include the views of high school-age Jamaicans in the deliberations of the Commission. In partnership with the NSSC and using different means of outreach, UNICEF consulted with hundreds of children and youth, including children with disabilities and children in state care and juvenile detention.

Reimagine Education builds on a partnership between UNICEF Jamaica and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information (MOEYI) for World Children’s Day 2019. Through this collaboration, a group of children became the first in history to address a sitting of Parliament – sharing their experiences of violence and the actions they want the Government of Jamaica to take to prevent and reduce violence against children. Reimagine Education was designed to help ensure that the Government of Jamaica continues re-engaging with its beneficiaries, and for children and youth themselves to build their capacity to co-create solutions to their challenges.

# Message from UNICEF

“Children should be seen and not heard,” is a philosophy that both UNICEF and the NSSC agree has no place in a Jamaica which values its children and takes seriously its obligation to protect and fulfill their rights – which include their right to a quality education and their right to be heard. That is why we approached the Education Transformation Commission to ensure that their recommendations will be included in our “Reimagine Education” report to the Prime Minister.

To all the students, who in the words of NSSC General Secretary Jadon Hewitt gave us their “full-ticipation” – UNICEF says a heartfelt thank you. We learned so much from you and the many situations in which you are trying to maintain your education. We want you to know that your voice is not only your right, it is essential for you to be heard. You are the real experts on what it is like to be educated within the Jamaican system and how it needs to improve.

Now that the consultations are complete, we will submit this report to the Prime Minister and the Commission of which you the students are co-authors. And when the day comes that your children enter school, we hope that you can reflect with pride on the part you have played and that collectively your creativity, your ideas and your voices can be the loudest!

To the Commission, we turn this report over to you with the expectation that you will take the views within it seriously. We urge you to consider and integrate the students’ perspectives in your deliberations and your final recommendations, knowing that they have entrusted you with this task. We all look forward to seeing the ways in which the Commission plans to truly transform the education system for the benefit of all Jamaican students.

Thank you, and good luck!

*Mariko Kagoshima*  
UNICEF Jamaica Representative



# Message from NSSC Jamaica

Undeniably, COVID-19 has had a major impact on the education system which caters to over 300,000 high school students. Rising to the occasion, all stakeholders: teachers, students, parents and other officials of the Ministry of Education, cooperated to make the adaptations.

It was by no means easy, as online teaching and learning proved difficult for most. The lack of required devices proved the first major obstacle in this endeavour. On the other hand, uncontrollable factors such as internet access and electricity supply fluctuations proved discouraging for many. Mental health was also affected and stress levels skyrocketed.

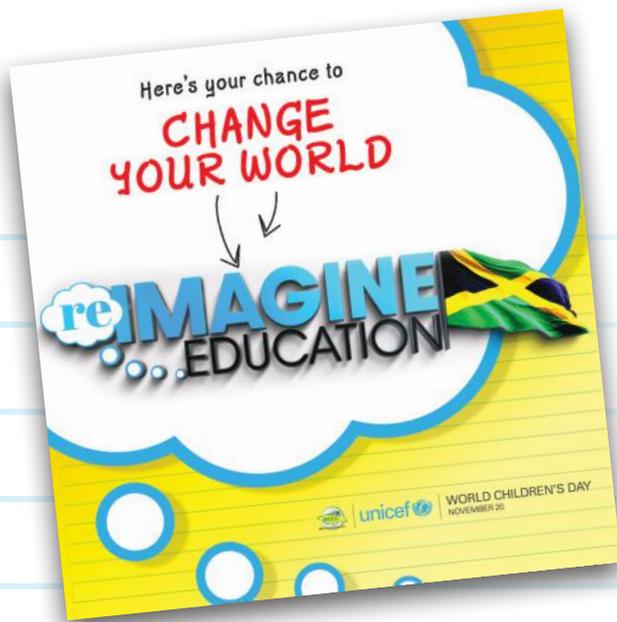
Committed to youth advocacy, the National Secondary Students' Council (NSSC) was pleased to partner with UNICEF and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information (MOEYI), in conceptualizing the Reimagine Education initiative. Of the six priority areas of the National Youth Policy of Jamaica (2017), which promotes youth involvement at all levels, education and training is perhaps one of the most important. We feel that the time has come for the fortification of our education system and that Reimagine Education is the way to achieve the desired outcome.

One of the guiding principles of the NSSC highlights the importance of student representation and involvement in decision-making processes. Students' participation is therefore vital to the transformation of the education system. We believe that the best way to bring about change is to capture the views and interests of those who are most affected by it - the students. We believe that the Reimagine Education initiative is the kind of revolutionary thinking that is needed.

The Council wishes to thank all the youth who participated in the island-wide consultations. Your uncensored opinions and timely recommendations have indeed aided in charting the way forward. A special thank you to UNICEF and the MOEYI for including us from the very start and for providing the requisite resources and guidance. We are most grateful.

*Jadon Hewitt*  
General Secretary, NSSC





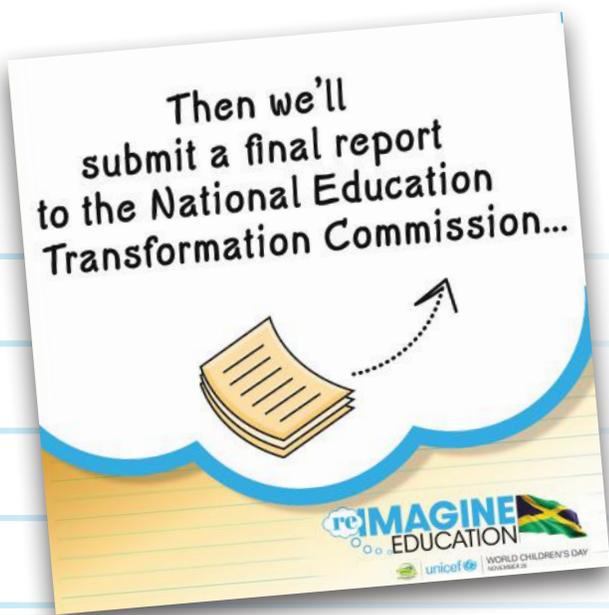
## About the consultations

Between January and February 2021, UNICEF Jamaica and the National Secondary Students' Council (NSSC) held a series of consultations with ten (10) groups of high school students across the island, including students with disabilities, students in juvenile centres and in state care, student leaders from various schools and a general representation from students in urban and rural Jamaica. A total of 74 students participated in the focus group discussions, 44 of whom were girls and 30 were boys. The sessions were facilitated by a combined team of adult educators, including UNICEF and MOEYI staff, and student leaders of the NSSC who ensured that students' voices were heard. The energy, spirit and views of the students were captured, and key concerns and recommendations are highlighted in this report.

In addition to focus group consultations, UNICEF conducted a U-Report poll (UNICEF's two-way mobile messaging service to engage children and youth about issues that impact their lives), to gauge the views of a wider group of high school age children on reimagining education. Of the 516 high school-age Jamaicans who responded to the poll, 73 per cent were female and 27 per cent male. The poll was co-designed with the NSSC and aligned with questions used in the consultations. The findings from the U-Report poll are also distilled in this report.

**“We must take bold steps now, to create inclusive, resilient, quality education systems fit for the future.”**

UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres (August 2020)



## Methodology

The consultations for students in schools were organized with the assistance of the MOEYI/NSSC. Additionally, UNICEF partnered with the Child Protection and Family Services Agency (CPFSA), Department of Correctional Services and the Peace Management Initiative (PMI) to arrange for separate consultations with students living in state care, juvenile detention centres and those excluded from school. All consultations were held online. Facilitators informed students of the reason for their engagement and advised of the recording of each session for the purposes of transcription, with an assurance that their images would not be used on public platforms without their consent and necessary notification, except in the cases of children in state care whose likenesses would not be used at all. A team from the Special Education Unit of the MOEYI supported students with special needs, who were afforded the necessary translations/interpretations.

Each consultation included a message from UNICEF Jamaica Representative, Mariko Kagoshima, the General Secretary of the NSSC, Jadon Hewitt, and remarks from facilitator and consultant, Renée Rattray. The students were asked to give their feedback on the questions provided in breakout rooms, followed by general reporting in the main room after each breakout session.

A combined team of NSSC student leaders and personnel from UNICEF and the MOEYI facilitated the breakout rooms. The process was designed to strengthen the capacity of NSSC student leaders, who expressed their appreciation for the participatory nature of the consultations and shared that they developed skills in facilitation, patience in listening and experienced deep empathy for their peers whose experiences were, in some instances, overwhelming and different from their own. For many students, it reaffirmed the need to increase their advocacy as youth leaders.

# Summary of findings

The consultations revealed the resilience and resolute determination of the students. They were unafraid, confident and eager to share their views about the education system – the way they experience it now, how they and their peers are impacted by it, and their vision for a reimagined education. The youth of Jamaica have big dreams of what they want to see, feel and be.

Students were engaged around four grounding questions:

- a. **Why should we Reimagine Education?**
- b. **What do you think the purpose of school should be?**
- c. **Is the education that you are receiving achieving that purpose and keeping youth engaged? If not, why?**
- d. **Is there anything that is not taught in school that you would like to learn?**

Student feedback to the first question overwhelmingly revealed a general feeling that there is a need to reimagine education because the traditional classroom is rapidly changing, especially with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. They were all clear that education was vital to their success in the world – and for some, the only way out of poverty. Their feedback to questions two, three and four were aligned across all schools: students imagine a more equitable classroom, enthusiastic and empathetic teachers, expanded curriculum and engaging lessons.

The students identified priority areas of focus for the future of education which could be grouped into four distinct pillars:

## **i. Equity and Inclusion**

1. Inclusive education catering for diverse learners

## **ii. Relationships in Learning**

2. Teacher-student collaboration
3. Empathy and compassion
4. Parent and teacher motivation

## **iii. Curriculum Content**

5. Real-life experiences
6. Varied curriculum that caters to interests
7. Leadership skill development
8. Physical and co-curricular activity

## **iv. Teacher Capacity and Lesson Delivery**

9. Active engagement
10. Blended learning

Students were highly appreciative of the opportunity to express themselves in a safe, non-judgmental space and felt that their opinions were valued and mattered.

# Students say...

## CONSULTATIONS 1-5

- Jan 15 - Students' Council leaders
- Jan 18 - Children in state care
- Jan 19 - Girls in juvenile institutions
- Jan 20 - Boys in juvenile institutions
- Jan 21 - Children who have been excluded from school

REIMAGINE  
EDUCATION



## CONSULTATIONS 6-10

- Jan 22 - Rural schools I
- Jan 26 - Rural schools II
- Jan 27 - Urban schools I
- Jan 28 - Urban schools II
- Feb 2 - Children with disabilities

REIMAGINE  
EDUCATION



**Students say...**  
**We must Reimagine Education because...**

**"Education is what builds a better society."**

**"We need to level up to meet the needs of a changing world."**

**"Children are the future, and we can be innovative and move forward in a changing world."**

**"The world is changing. We have to think ahead and make it better."**

**"We need to mold our future innovators and leaders."**

**"Education is the most powerful thing a person can have and how we can change the future."**

**"We are a part of a digital evolution and now a part of history, so we need to make history."**

**"We need to be taught how to dream big and think out of the box, allowing us to take up space in society in the most effective ways possible... to be spontaneous, full of energy and empowered."**



## Students say... Why they disengage or drop out of school...

The consultation revealed that some students fail to succeed in school or become disengaged from school due to several in-school and out-of-school factors, ranging from lack of family and community support, unmet emotional and social needs and schools' inability to provide the kind of supportive environment they need to thrive. Many find themselves in classrooms where they do not feel a sense of belonging and do not see themselves and their rich cultures reflected in the school environment. The following is a summary of the reasons for disengagement posited by students:

- ✧ Poor family support and home/community environment
- ✧ Poor teacher-student connection
- ✧ Ineffective teaching
- ✧ Curriculum not aligned to students' interests
- ✧ Family financial constraints
- ✧ Little appreciation for the value of education
- ✧ Peer pressure
- ✧ Bullying
- ✧ Limited or no government financial support



## Students say...

The education system doesn't reflect their realities.

"Education is outdated and achievement-based."

"Teachers sometimes make students teach themselves."

"Some students are distracted. Teachers aren't really engaging, and classrooms are not comfortable. This makes students feel overwhelmed."

"We sometimes use drugs as an escape."

"The current system stifles creativity and suffocates students' self-expression."

"Bad things happen 'round you - family members kill someone and they want to kill you and so we have to defend ourselves, and sometimes it is hard to take your mind off it even though there are good things happening too"

"Other people cause us to drop out of school, cause dem draw yuh out and change yuh focus."

"The current societal construct of a man in our culture hinders males from wanting to be involved in education."



# Learning reimagined:

Student advice to the Education Transformation Commission

## i. Equity and inclusion

### 1 Students want an inclusive education system that caters for all types of learners

The 'one size fits all' mode of engagement is a recurring concern among students, causing some to lose interest in school and too many to be left behind. No child should be denied the opportunity to learn because of disability, gender, race or poverty. Every child has the right to go to school and to be included, regardless of their differences. All must feel a sense of belonging and benefit from the support of well-trained teachers and resources that best respond to their needs.

The UN estimates that 10-15 per cent of the population of any country has a disability. Based on the enrollment data of the 2018/2019 Schools' Census conducted by the MOEYI, there were 427,938 students in the Jamaican school system. Ten to fifteen per cent of the student body would therefore translate to between 42,000 to 64,000 students with disabilities in the education system. During the consultations, students with disabilities shared their desire for more inclusiveness, access to more vocational training and creative inputs in the curriculum.

#### **The students recommend:**

✧ Plan lessons to include activities that will engage all types of learners. This requires effort, resources and support from school administration. It is understood that personalized lessons are challenging in large classrooms, but a mixed learning approach can help cater to different learning styles.

✧ Give consideration to changing the current system which designates (as a result of perception) some schools superior to others and provide equal access to resources across all schools.

✧ Make provisions for the early detection and assessment of students with disabilities and sufficient training of teachers to identify and support their needs.

✧ Establish school to work transitions for students with disabilities in partnership with schools, families and communities.

## Students say...

*The education system needs more humanity.*

**"Every child deserves the chance to self-actualize, not every child learns the same way. We need to cater to everyone."**

**"Students with disabilities are left by the wayside and don't get the care they need. We need to learn too."**

**"The school system is more interested in the grades and not so much if students are actually understanding, learning or interested in what they are doing."**

**"This current system has a lot of loopholes - doesn't cater to everybody."**

**"We must remove the stigmatization of schools that make one school better than the other."**

**"Show the rural kids that they matter. Give them the same things that urban kids have."**



## ii. Relationships in learning

### 2 Teacher-student collaboration for a better learning experience

An effective classroom environment promotes collaboration with teachers and students, as well as student-to-student engagement. Building these relationships has a direct impact on how deeply students engage in school and with learning. Students reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented an opportunity for them to support teachers in ways they have not been encouraged to do before. Many have been invited to provide support in the virtual classroom by sharing their knowledge of technology with teachers, some of whom had not been comfortable incorporating technology in the teaching space prior to the pandemic.

#### The students recommend:

- ✧ Enlist students as co-designers and co-facilitators of learning by enabling exchanges for students to develop strategies alongside teachers that best suit their learning styles and needs.
- ✧ Design projects and group activities for students to interact with each other and express their opinions in face-to-face as well as remote teaching formats.
- ✧ Ensure teachers utilize constructivist theory, enquiry-based learning, reflective practice and collaborative learning approaches in classrooms in order to promote discovery and engagement in students.
- ✧ Prioritize self-reflection as a critical part of the learning experience for students and teachers and normalize the practice of receiving and providing feedback and support among peers.

#### Students say...

*Make teaching more dynamic.*

**"We would like teachers to incorporate exciting videos in subjects and use popular images like memes to convey messages clearly to students."**

**"Student evaluations should include reflective assignments to apply what we are learning, and they should be discussion-based."**

### 3 Students want empathy and compassion

Teachers and wider school administration must consider and appreciate the varying socio-economic backgrounds of their students and take into consideration the circumstances that may influence student behaviour in the classroom.

The issue of mental health was raised repeatedly during the consultations. Students expressed strong views about the value placed on their social and emotional well-being and shared openly about the prevalence of depression, anxiety, bullying and substance abuse among their peers. They suggested that students who present with these issues are generally labelled as “troubled” and find themselves engaged in behaviour that results in them being suspended, expelled or ultimately dropping out of the school system.

For example, gas-lighting a student who falls asleep in class when that student may be genuinely tired from overworking at home, or school travel, creates discomfort for the student and does not encourage such students to connect with the teacher or the content.

#### **The students recommend that teachers should:**

- ☆ Be sensitive to special circumstances affecting students’ lived experiences and be able to use their discretion when dealing with individual cases.
- ☆ Be supported and equipped with the relevant skill sets to know when to shift from empathy to compassion, actively making a difference in students’ lives.

#### *Students say...*

“Sometimes adults say we are children and so have no reason to be stressed.”

“When school feels like less of a burden, students will begin to enjoy learning.”

“Teachers have an important role in showing care especially for students who may have a toxic home environment.”

“Some teachers see teaching just as a job.”

“Only some teachers respect us and treat us fairly.”

“Formally assess teachers’ ability to connect with students.”

“The best teachers are those who go over and beyond to ensure that we are doing well in every aspect of our lives.”



## 4 Students want parent and teacher motivation

Students thrive on words of encouragement and kindness from teachers and caregivers. They are motivated by positive reinforcement and acknowledgement in school, at home and in their communities and so would welcome systems of rewards to celebrate small accomplishments in the classroom. There was overwhelming consensus among those interviewed that the words and actions of some adults communicated very low expectations of young people. They argued strongly for parents and teachers to be more conscious of the powerful impact their belief in their potential to achieve has on their self-confidence and performance in school.

Students welcomed the increased engagement of parents in their children's education since the COVID-19 pandemic, as many have been forced to become co-teachers as a result of the move to online schooling. They underscored the importance of maintaining parent engagement post the pandemic.

### The students recommend:

- ✧ Teachers should do more to solicit as much information as possible about students' families and find multiple ways to reach out to parents on their terms. Parents have important information about students that teachers will find useful to enrich a child's learning experience.
- ✧ Frequent two-way communication between parents and teachers in order to facilitate a welcoming environment in which parents can participate and help to motivate student learning. Such engagements should not happen only when students get in trouble.
- ✧ Teachers, parents and students must be partners in setting and monitoring goals for student learning, always ensuring the highest expectations for all.

### Students say...

"Parents and teachers must continue to be co-teachers."

"Create incentive programme for teachers as motivation to engage students more."

"Discussions should be increased so that teachers and parents can know whether or not students are grasping information before it is too late."

### iii. Curriculum content

#### 5 Students want real-life experience in the classroom

Students want the opportunity to make sense of the world around them and desire real-life experiences as part of their education – including as they suggested, a new course on “adulting” to prepare them for experiences in their personal and professional lives. Many did not find that they were being given the tools to navigate the many challenges that they see ahead. They believe experiential learning outside of the classroom will allow them to encounter authentic problems and challenge them to solve and interact with real-life people and projects. “We want to learn the art of thinking big; putting goals on paper; communicating effectively and public speaking,” explained one student. They want to learn more of what will enable them to be highly functional adults.

#### The students recommend:

- ✧ Include project-based learning and simulation-based learning and real-world experiences in the curriculum. This will be highly valuable to students. Giving them a chance to test their abilities while in school, through internships, is one way of preparing them for the future.
- ✧ Engage students in work that matters to them, their schools and the world outside of school. Allow opportunities for students to pursue their passions within the curriculum.
- ✧ Create partnerships with professionals from the local and global community who would enter the classroom space, whether virtually or face-to-face, to share experiences and mentor students while in school.
- ✧ Expose students to the world of entrepreneurship through career talks and real-world business leaders.

#### Students say... Prepare us for adult life.

“Teach us how to build a brand for ourselves.”

“We want to learn about becoming an adult: household budgeting, financial planning, investment and how to navigate that space.”

“We need to be prepared for applying to college and work and becoming responsible citizens.”

“Teach us how to be good to the environment and how to be good parents.”

## 6 Students want a varied curriculum that caters to their interests

The “one size fits all” culture of education is a thing of the past, and schools must provide students with a broad curriculum which ensures that they are fully immersed in a wide array of experiences that are relevant to the changing world in which they live. Students are better able to enjoy all subjects when they are relatable to their everyday experiences and peak their interests. There are also benefits to expanding the curriculum to include more technical and vocational subjects, especially for children with disabilities. Students stressed the importance of teaching skills and content that prepare them for life, such as self-empowerment, self-management, rights and responsibilities of citizens.

### The students recommend:

- ✧ Include an elective/option for 5th and or 6th formers with suggested options including driving lessons, parenting, entrepreneurship and investing.
- ✧ Expose teachers to best practices in project-based learning and infuse real-world examples in teaching.
- ✧ Provide a varied curriculum to include technical subjects for alternative careers.

### Students say...

*Teach us what we need for our careers.*

**“Students should start to engage with subjects that feed their career goals as soon as they enter high school.”**

**“As students are now technologically minded and informed, Technology should be a compulsory subject like Math and English.”**

**“All schools should have technical subjects as part of their curriculum and not just reserved for special schools.”**

**“How will we know what our passions are, if we can’t make a decision for ourselves?”**



## 7 Students want leadership skills and to be heard

Student leaders were appreciative and enthusiastic about the opportunity afforded them through these sessions, to engage their peers and shadow adults in leadership. Students in the consultations also expressed a desire to be mentored in the area of their career choice as well as leadership. They believe effective leadership will allow both the student population and their schools to flourish.

As co-designers and co-facilitators of the consultations, NSSC student leaders reaffirmed the need for students to be included in charting a new, inclusive and innovative approach to education. They urged decision-makers to make space for student voice, to empower youth and give them agency.

### The students recommend:

- ✧ Create a national mentorship programme to include peer to peer mentors, and adult to student mentors. Mentorship is critical to building and sustaining a pipeline of leaders.
- ✧ Require all principals to meet with the NSSC school-based executive regularly and be required to report back to the central NSSC.
- ✧ Task the NSSC to design and offer a course on leadership.
- ✧ Build leadership training into Guidance programmes.

#### Students say...

*Leadership, mentorship and input are key.*

**"We need exposure to people who are leading effectively."**

**"We need more role models."**

**"Sometimes, as student leaders, we are given a seat at the table just to check a box, but our inputs are not truly taken onboard."**

## 8 Students want to be engaged in physical activity

Physical activity and a focus on healthy lifestyles and well-being are vital to the development and growth of children. It therefore should be prioritized and made a provision of every school environment.

### The students recommend:

- ✧ Provide opportunities to move around classrooms and to engage in practical subjects that do not find them remaining in one place for prolonged periods. Participants in the consultations shared that activity levels often decline as students move into adolescence.
- ✧ Expand opportunities for physical activity, before, during and after school and build in a health and wellness programme that expands beyond the school into the communities in which they live.
- ✧ Support students to build healthy lifestyles – emphasizing this in Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) and in short courses offered for all students to take online.

#### Students say...

*Learning experience is too rigid.*

**"We don't want to sit at our desks all day and continue to learn using the same old 'chalk and talk' approach."**

**"We do not like sitting before our computers all day long. We like to be active."**



## iv. Teacher capacity and lesson delivery

### 9 Students desire active engagement in the classroom

For students to be fully engaged or to “full-ticipate” in lessons, teachers must have high expectations for student learning and performance and create environments that encourage their full involvement. They desire to have a front row seat in their learning journey.

#### The students recommend:

- ✧ Incorporate a variety of hands-on-activities inclusive of experiments, projects and field trips that are relevant to studies and the real world.
- ✧ Shift classroom discussions from the passive listener culture, where students sit quietly in class for long periods of time, to an active learning environment that is challenging and stimulating.
- ✧ Allow students to take some control over their own learning. This means giving students the opportunity to make decisions about what they learn and how. Build in opportunities for self-reflection.
- ✧ Assist students in creating learning goals that are consistent with their interests, learning styles and future aspirations.

Students say...  
Teachers can inspire us.

“Teachers who are interested and who go the extra mile to ensure learning are great motivation.”

“Learning style is standard and teachers only teach in one monotonous way and so, it is hard for various students to grasp...”

“Teachers must be more positive, remove limitations and expect good from students.”



## 10 Students want a blended learning environment

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated Jamaica's educational and digital divide. It has pushed the majority of the nation's children outside of the classroom into homes and communities with little to no connectivity, limited access to devices and very little support and supervision for online learning. Online schooling has benefitted only few and created further learning losses for some who are already disadvantaged. The students who participated in the consultations were attuned to their own realities in this regard, as well as to the plight of many of their peers, and highlighted the urgent need to find appropriate solutions to bridge this gap. As students, parents and teachers adjust to this "new normal", some have embraced the new approaches to learning while online but are clear that nothing can replace being in school, interacting with teachers and peers.

### The students recommend:

- ☆ Create a hybrid learning experience and blended classroom – utilizing synchronous and asynchronous approaches to teaching and learning. This might be part of the answer to a reimagined education system.
- ☆ Provide universal access to Wi-Fi and digital platforms to facilitate greater access to information.
- ☆ Infuse computer and media literacy across the curriculum.
- ☆ Train all teachers from early childhood to tertiary in the delivery of blended learning approaches.

### Students say...

*Online is a mixed experience.*

**"Tea, "I don't like online school because when you are online, you stare at a tablet from morning till afternoon, but when you are face-to-face you get to move, talk and socialize with friends."**

**"I love the flexibility of learning online."**

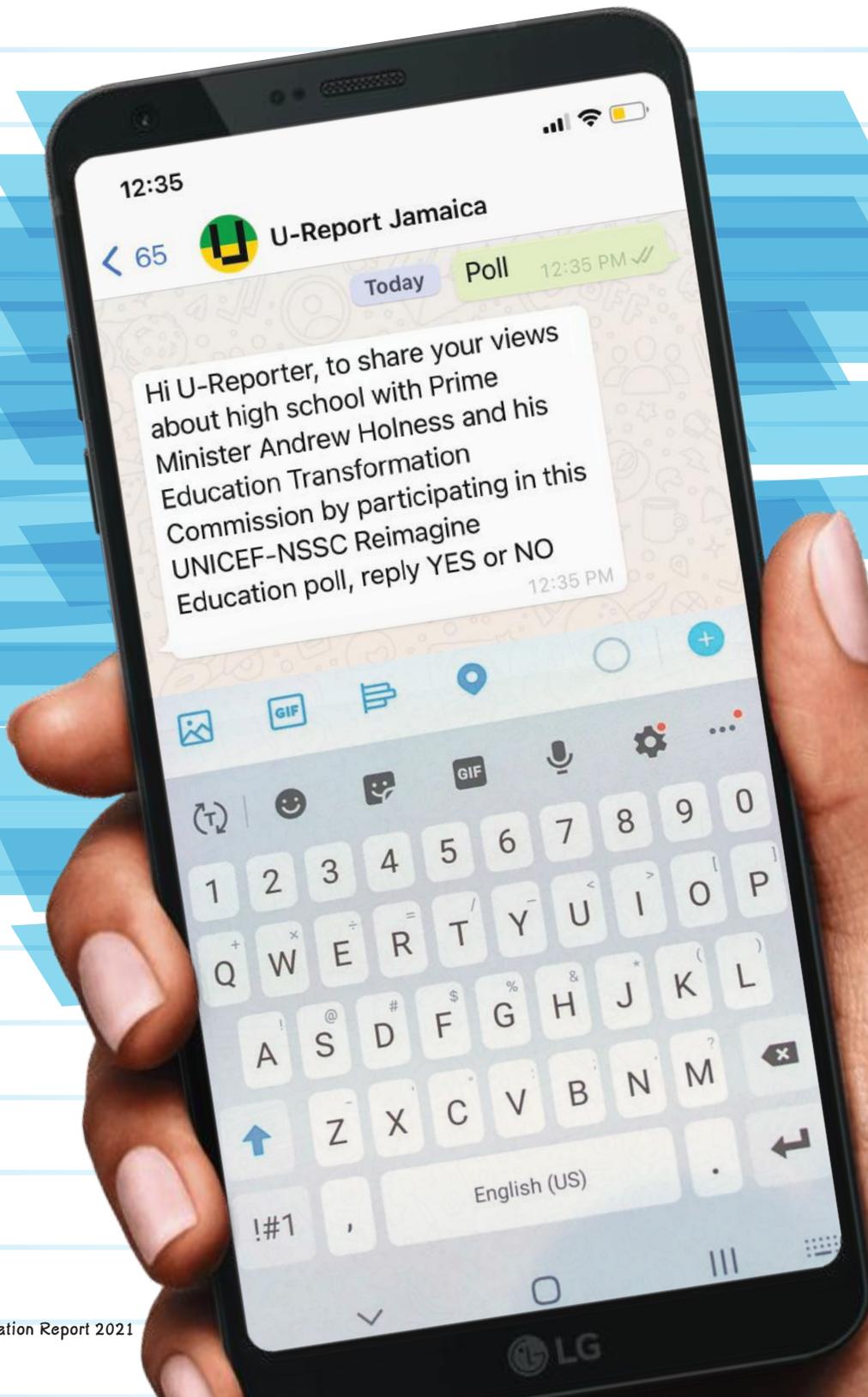
**"I don't like online school because there are always internet problems, especially with the teachers and so it is more difficult to learn online than in a physical space."**

**"Students are more relaxed and don't show up for class in online school and also, most of the students don't have devices, so, I prefer face-to-face because it is easier for us to learn."**

**"I would make face-to-face learning to controlled numbers available on a schedule. Everything else is going on. So why not school?"**

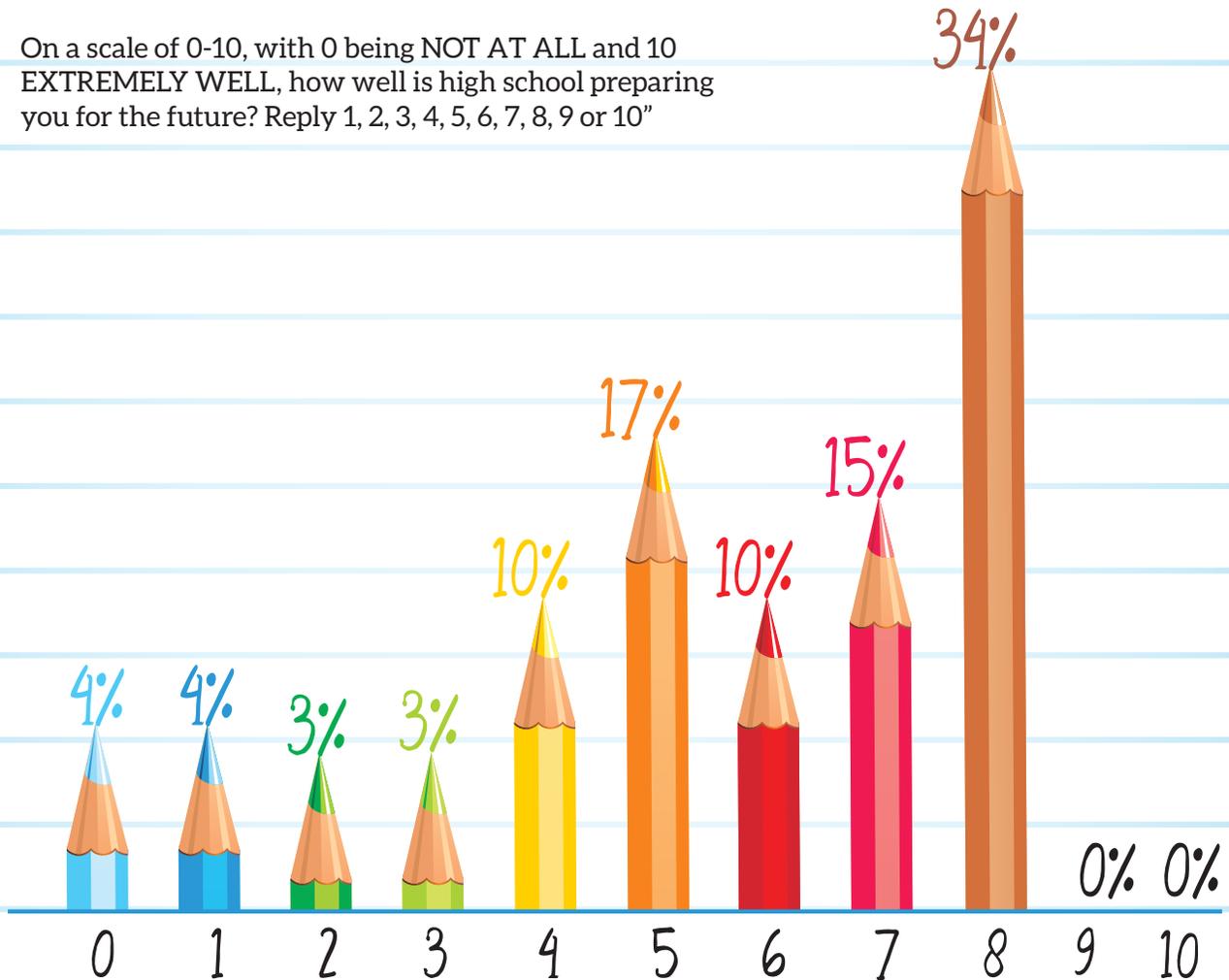
# U-Report poll results

U-Report is UNICEF's social messaging service for youth and allows youth to share their views over popular messaging apps like WhatsApp. More than 500 high school age Jamaicans responded to this poll. Results can be found on the U-Report Jamaica website: <https://jamaica.ureport.in/opinion/2195>



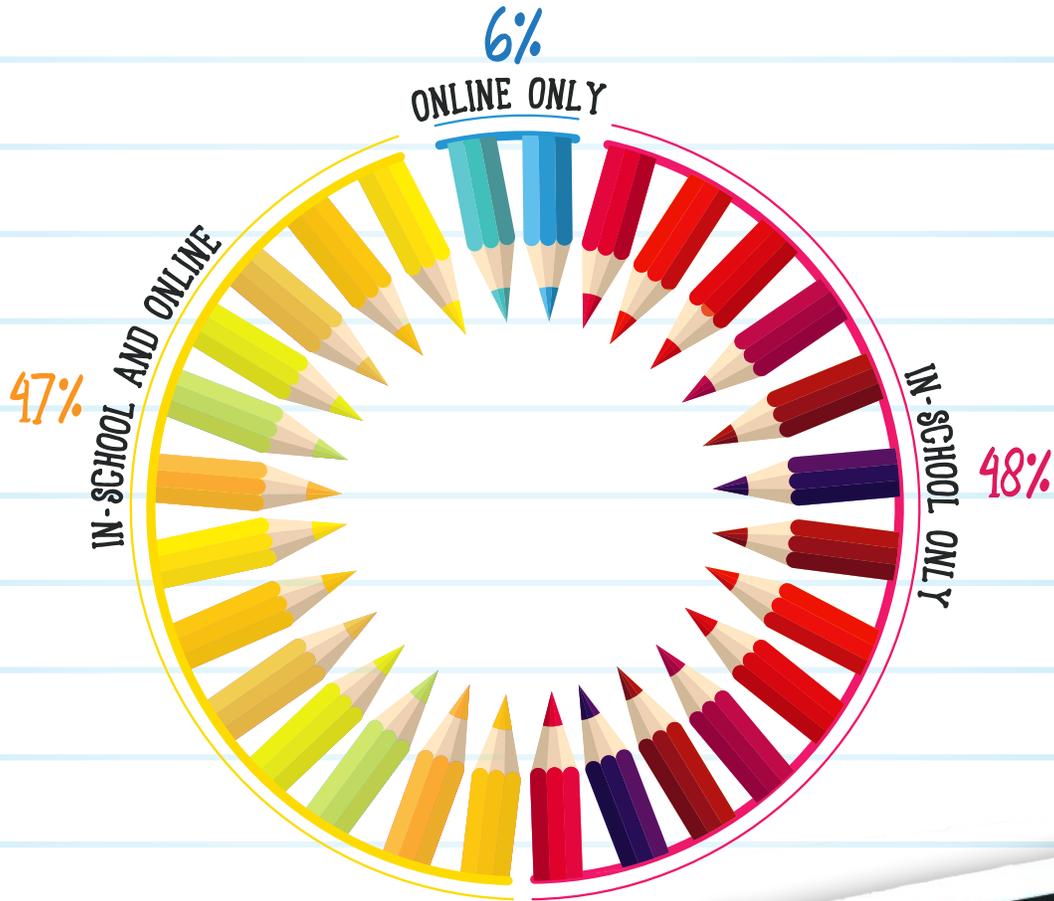
# HOW WELL IS HIGH SCHOOL PREPARING YOU FOR THE FUTURE?

On a scale of 0-10, with 0 being NOT AT ALL and 10 EXTREMELY WELL, how well is high school preparing you for the future? Reply 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 or 10"



Thirty-four per cent of students agreed that the education system is preparing them very well for the future, while 25 per cent of respondents agreed they were sufficiently prepared for the future and 41 per cent disagreed that the education they presently receive is preparing them well.

# "WHAT IS YOUR PREFERRED WAY OF LEARNING?"

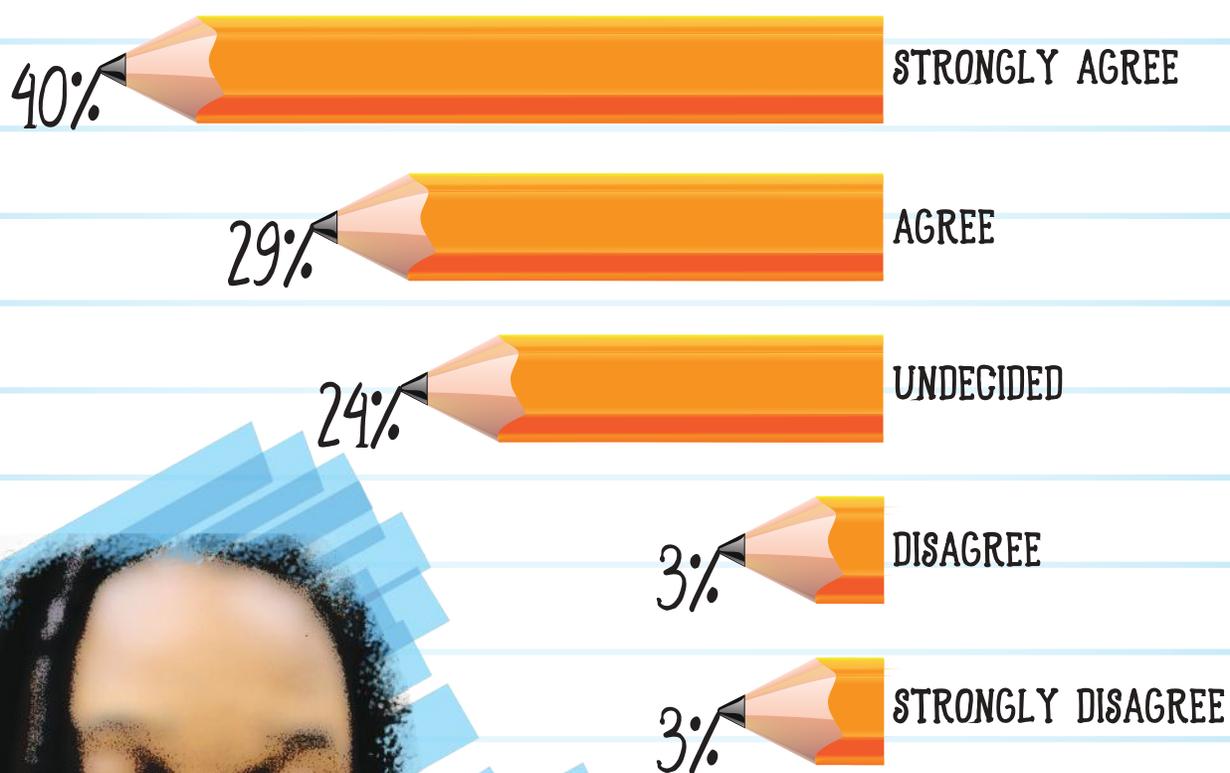


Among respondents, 48% want a return to in-school learning, 47% a hybrid and only 6% are ready to transition to online only.

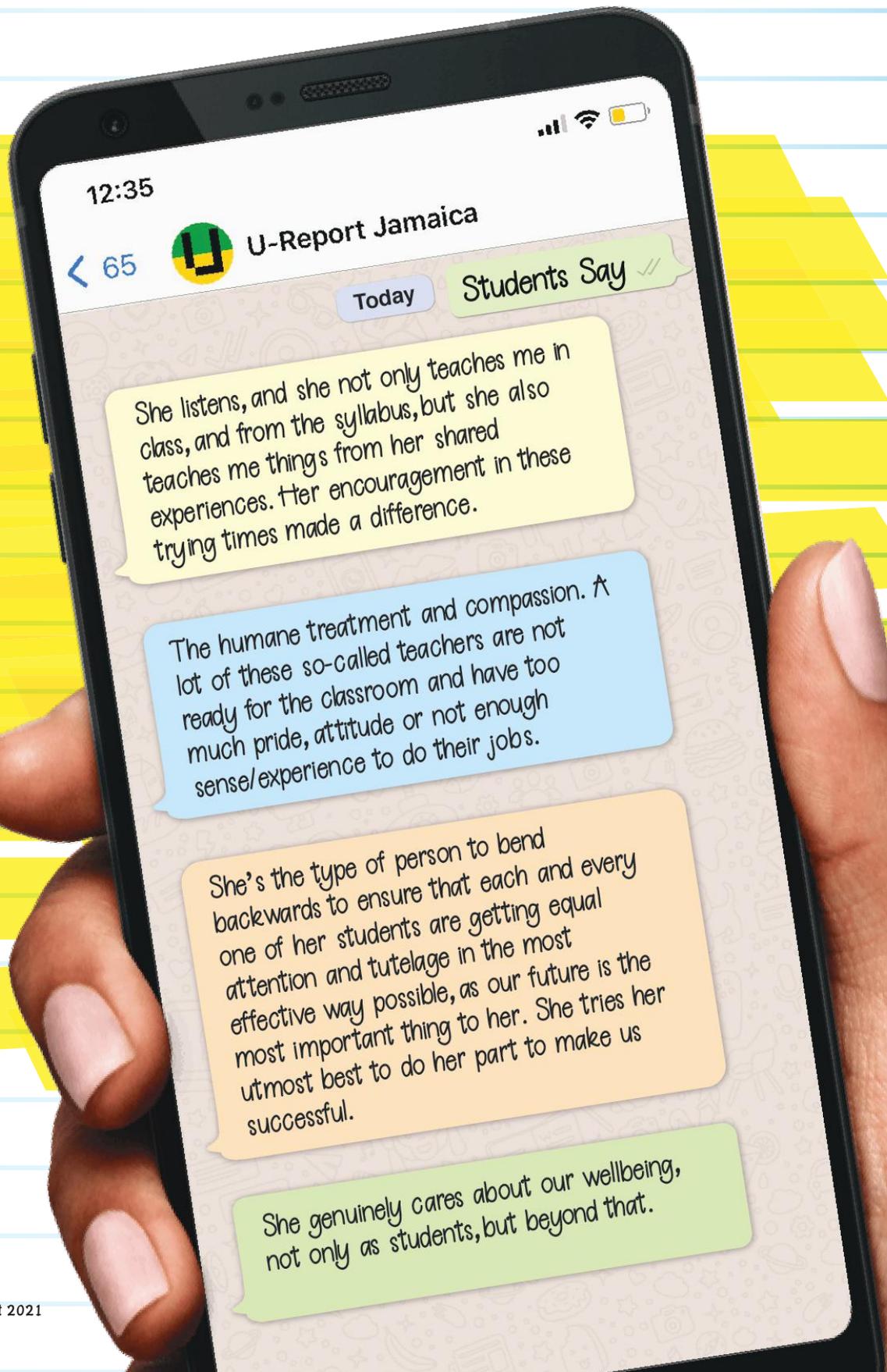


Our high school students remain resilient. U-Report data revealed that 69 per cent of students are hopeful about their future, while 31 per cent are either undecided or doubtful about a bright future. Throughout the series of consultations, students emphasized the urgent need to reimagine the education system to reflect their interests and to make it more modern, relevant and accessible to all.

## HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT: "I AM HOPEFUL ABOUT MY FUTURE"?



# MY FAVOURITE TEACHER IS SPECIAL BECAUSE:



She listens, and she not only teaches me in class, and from the syllabus, but she also teaches me things from her shared experiences. Her encouragement in these trying times made a difference.

The humane treatment and compassion. A lot of these so-called teachers are not ready for the classroom and have too much pride, attitude or not enough sense/experience to do their jobs.

She's the type of person to bend backwards to ensure that each and every one of her students are getting equal attention and tutelage in the most effective way possible, as our future is the most important thing to her. She tries her utmost best to do her part to make us successful.

She genuinely cares about our wellbeing, not only as students, but beyond that.

# "MY FAVOURITE TEACHER IS SPECIAL BECAUSE:"

12:35

< 65



U-Report Jamaica

Today

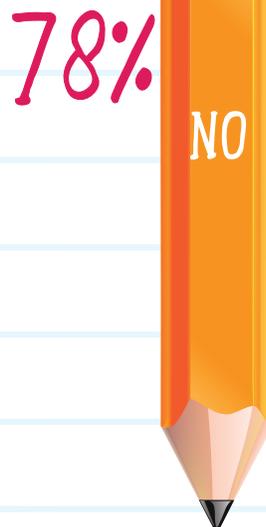
Students Say

What made that teacher special for me was multiple things, one being he cared about the mental health of the students and as a result remained organized so as to not burden us with sporadic work or even unreasonable deadlines. Another could be his passion for teaching which was evident in how he carried out his duties and maintained his relationship with the students to allow for an effective learning environment.

She is special because she's genuinely invested in not only the academic but also the social and emotional development of absolutely all her pupils. She also interacts with us in such a balanced manner: she created a wholesome, friend-like relationship with us, but also has a personality that demands respect. Also, despite initially being discriminated against at school for being an immigrant, having a different accent, etc. she blocked out the negativity and made no excuses. She puts her students first. Always. She is my favourite because she is the epitome of resilience.

# "SINCE SCHOOL MOVED TO DISTANCE LEARNING LAST MARCH, HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED DANGER ONLINE"

Young Jamaicans polled by U-Report have consistently expressed concern about online dangers with previous poll results revealing cyberbullying and impact on their mental health.



# IF YOU WERE THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION IN JAMAICA, WHAT IS THE FIRST CHANGE YOU WOULD MAKE AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL?



# IF YOU WERE THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION IN JAMAICA, WHAT IS THE FIRST CHANGE YOU WOULD MAKE AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL?



Give teachers better wages. I have seen many teachers leave my school to go abroad.

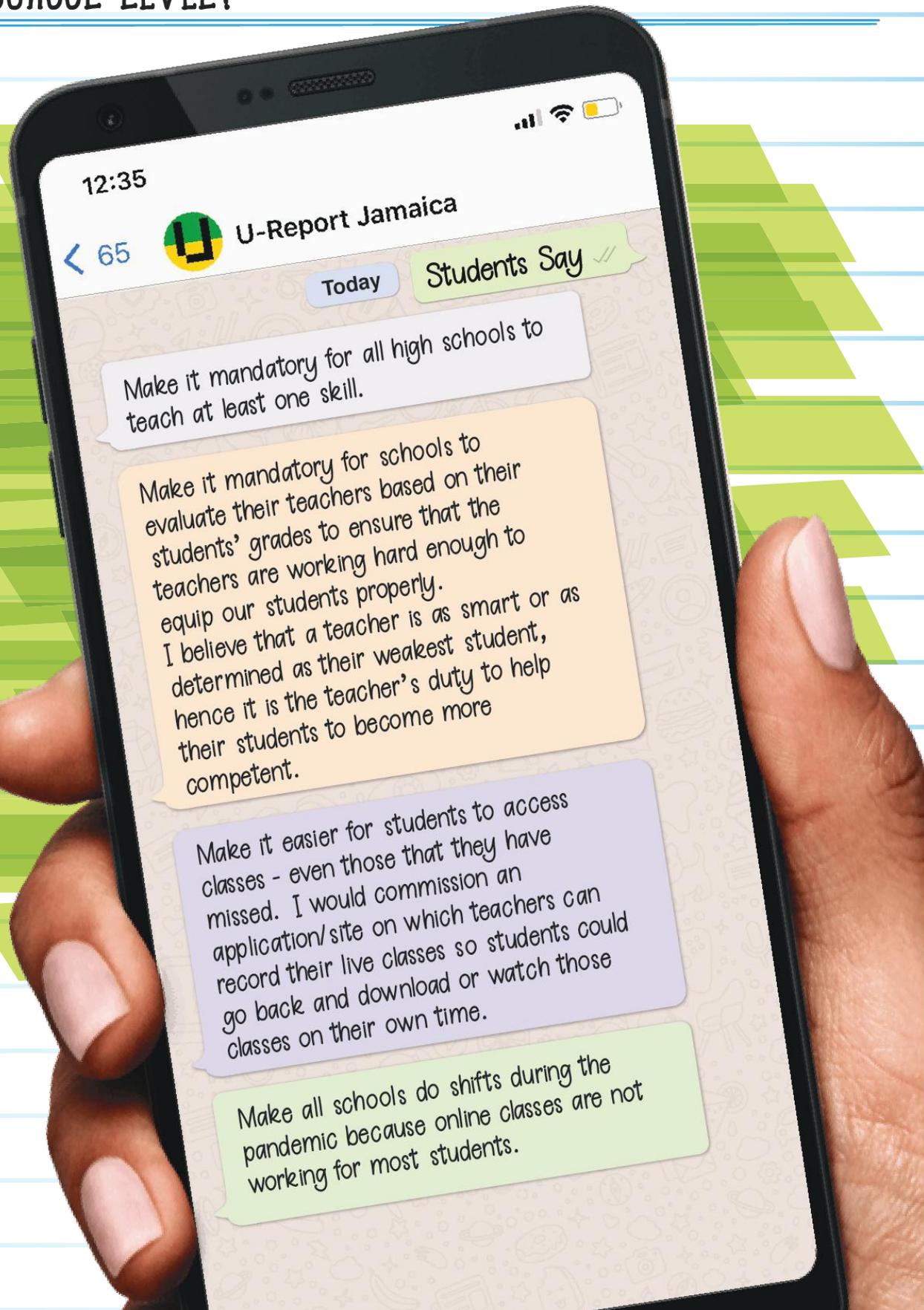
Change the curriculum in a way that benefits everyone.

Invest more in STEM and the arts.

Provide more support to ensure the mental stability of high schoolers. A lot of students are dealing with all kinds of emotions. Many are depressed. Some feel hopeless and others feel extremely sad. This needs to be addressed.

Ask students how well they are coping with their teachers and do something about it; slow down the syllabus because the rush is preventing students from learning.

# IF YOU WERE THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION IN JAMAICA, WHAT IS THE FIRST CHANGE YOU WOULD MAKE AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL?



# Conclusions

The children and youth of Jamaica have a dream of a reimagined education that is inclusive, relevant and modern. They dream of classrooms that are filled with discovery and cater to their diverse interests. Students reimagine safe schools, sufficient resources, caring and engaging teachers and supportive parents. They expect to build a successful future with a solid education. In his charge to the Education Transformation Commission, Prime Minister Andrew Holness reminded commissioners of their mandate:

**First** to advise us as to what we need to do as a Government to create a world-class educational system geared towards enabling our people to fulfill their potential and develop the skills base and human capital required for Jamaica to compete successfully in the 21st century global economy.

**Second** is to ensure inclusivity. The system we build must ensure that all our children and learners have access to this world-class education system that we build. If we build a world-class education system, but it is still not accessible to the ordinary Jamaican child, we would have failed.

The call to ensure equity and inclusion for all Jamaican children was echoed by the students who participated in the Reimagine Education consultations. Students spoke passionately about their dreams and hopes for a bright future, they openly shared their reflections on the present education system and made bold statements about how to create the best outcomes for Jamaica, with the well-being of children being central. Students emphasized the need to address disparities in schools by exploring ways of funding schools to ensure all Jamaican students have access to the necessary resources for learning.

It is recommended that more focused attention be paid to children who are most vulnerable. Currently, there are approximately 4,000 registered students with special needs in our education system and it is imperative that others are identified and that all be given equal opportunities to fulfill their potential. Additionally, adequate accommodation is required for young persons with special needs who are transitioning into the world of work.

The connection students have with their teachers is vital to their achievement. Students reported the most memorable teachers genuinely care, listen, encourage, show compassion, never give up on them, are genuinely invested in the whole person and are passionate about the work they do. Students who had spent several years in school struggled to identify many teachers who they felt possessed these qualities. Focused attention must be placed on recruiting, deploying, supporting and enriching teachers as facilitators of a new kind of learning, which includes ongoing sensitization to social and emotional learning and leadership that will nurture, awaken and empower youth to innovate and find solutions.

Consideration should be given to expanding the curriculum to include real-life skills, internships and mentorship programmes, creating space for partnerships in the schools and in the teacher training colleges. A review of the national curriculum to ensure a balance of theory and practical based lessons reflecting real-life situations and modern agendas is recommended.

Teacher capacity, lesson delivery and assessment methods are to be given focused attention, particularly in a COVID-19- induced blended learning environment. This must be matched with the strategic provision of access to connectivity and suitable devices.

As evidenced by the rich contributions of students in the consultations, the views of children must be elevated and given prominence in any deliberations about their learning and their future. Overwhelmingly, students were appreciative of the opportunity to share their ideas about how to Reimagine Education and expressed that they felt valued and empowered by the engagement. Students were resolute about their need to be seen and heard, and to be active participants in their learning.



# MAPPING SOLUTIONS

- i. Equity and inclusion
- ii. Relationships in learning
- iii. Curriculum content
- iv. Teacher capacity and lesson delivery

UNICEF continues to support efforts to Reimagine Education in Jamaica through numerous programmes. As part of the way forward, the recommendations from this consultation should, where possible, be integrated with existing programmes supported by UNICEF and other agencies within the Education sector. This will serve to strengthen and inform policy and interventions, simplify decision-making and enable exploration of the best solutions to create a modern, responsive and inclusive education system. The following is a list of UNICEF-supported initiatives in Jamaica aligned to the recommendations made by the students outlined above:

## i. Equity and inclusion

- ✧ Digital divide: Learning Passport (learning at home platform by Microsoft, University of Cambridge and UNICEF) and GIGA project (to connect every school to the Internet)
- ✧ Child-Friendly Schools (CFS) course with National College for Educational Leadership (NCEL)
- ✧ National Curriculum for Students with Moderate to Profound Intellectual Learning Disabilities
- ✧ Tablets provided to 530 students with special needs in partnership with Unicomer and Digicel
- ✧ Ongoing support to the National Parenting Support Commission (NPSC) to build out parenting resources
- ✧ UNICEF-funded creation of NPSC and National Parenting Support Policy and Parents Place Strategy
- ✧ The Jamaica School Readiness Assessment (JSRA) administered nationally at age four Relationships in learning
- ✧ Mental health: Ministry of Education Youth and Information (MOEYI) Guidance Counselling Unit and Ministry of Health and Wellness (MOHW) tele-therapy system; and U-Report mental health chatline - in development with the Ministry of Health and Wellness and Caribbean Child Development Centre (CCDC) at the University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona
- ✧ Health: Ministry of Health and Wellness Teen Hubs are being expanded (currently only in Kingston, UNICEF is helping expand to St. Thomas and western Jamaica)
- ✧ Bridging the gaps: Towards a national system of early years care and support (mapping of services for children with disabilities)

- ✧ Return to Happiness (RTH) psychosocial support programme with the Jamaica Teaching Council (JTC) and the University of the West Indies (UWI) Department of Social Work
- ✧ Health and Family Life Education (guidance curriculum) – UNICEF contributed towards its creation and ongoing updating
- ✧ Investigating the prevalence and impact of peer abuse (bullying) on the development of children; participation in multi-agency anti-bullying task force; and ongoing Kids Online study
- ✧ Updating of the Safe Schools Policy
- ✧ The Child Health Development Passport
- ✧ Support to the Early Childhood Commission (ECC) First 1,000 Days strategy and First 1000 Days mobile app
- ✧ Survival: Staying Schooled in Rural Jamaica – best practices towards an attendance policy document from the Western Union-funded project
- ✧ 'Resilient Schools' Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) project upgrading school infrastructure by UNICEF, Food for the Poor, Scotiabank and UNICEF

## ii. Relationships in learning

- ✧ UNICEF-supported National College for Educational Leadership (NCEL) course:
  - o Child-Friendly Schools (CFS)
- ✧ School Wide Positive Behaviour Intervention and Support (SWPBIS) framework scale-up
- ✧ National Guidance Counselling Policy

## iii. Curriculum content

- ✧ EduSport Manual and training of all physical education (PE) teachers in the sports for development (S4D) approach which includes games that focus on literacy, numeracy and life skills
- ✧ Game-based and Interactive Learning Activities for Early Years curriculum for grades 1-3 available online at the MOEYI site

✧ Jamaica Moves in Schools is supported by UNICEF with funding for a consultant employed at the Ministry of Health and Wellness

✧ Play and Learn kits distributed to children in quarantine affected communities by the Early Childhood Commission (ECC), the University of the West Indies (UWI) Department of Child and Adolescent Health and Food for the Poor

## iv. Teacher capacity and lesson delivery

✧ Online free-to-access, Introduction to Special Needs Course for Early Childhood Practitioners by the Early Childhood Commission (ECC)

✧ Child Development Therapy programme (CDT) – soon to be available virtually via the University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona

✧ UNICEF-supported National College for Educational Leadership (NCEL) courses:

- o Leadership for Safer (LSS) (in progress)
- o Virtual Instructional Leadership (VIL)
- o Teaching Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

✧ Support to scale up the child-centred, discussion-based, positive behaviour support-focused Irie Classroom Toolkit training at for Early Childhood Practitioners.



# Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all who took part in this phase of the journey to Reimagine Education in Jamaica. We value the support of our partners in ensuring the success of the consultations. Each individual and organization involved in this initiative understood the importance of centering youth voices in discussions that concern their future.

Thank you to the NSSC, our lead partners, who assisted with the concept design, facilitation and promotion of the consultations. The dynamic team of student leaders acted as co-facilitators during the breakout sessions, ably led by Ruth Lawrence and Jonelle Murray, team members at the Ministry of Education Youth and Information (MOEYI).

We wish to thank our other partners – the Department of Correctional Services (DCS), Child Protection and Family Services Agency (CPFSA) and the Peace Management Initiative (PMI) for granting us permission and for coordinating consultation sessions with the youth in their care.

Sincere thanks to the staff from the Special Education Unit in the MOEYI, and to sign language interpreter, Stephanie McIntyre, who provided additional support for the session with students with disabilities.

## Thanks to our co-authors

Finally, and most importantly, thank you to our co-authors – the youth of Jamaica. Your “full-ticipation”, courage and willingness to share your experiences and opinions about education, as well as your vision and hopes for the future, are inspiring. It is your imagination, insight and innovation that will be necessary to shape a system that best serves all the children of Jamaica, so they not only survive, but thrive in the modern world.

### NSSC LEADERS AND CO-FACILITATORS\*

|                    |                            |    |
|--------------------|----------------------------|----|
| Amanda Slew        | York Castle High           | 17 |
| *Graham Evangelist | Glenmuir High              | 18 |
| *Ree-Anna Robinson | Immaculate Conception High | 18 |
| *Amelia Fearon     | Vere Technical High        | 16 |
| *Jamaul Hall       | Munro College              | 17 |
| *D'Jahanae Roye    | St. Hugh's High            | 17 |
| *Dahlia Johnson    | Belmont Academy            | 17 |
| *Shanice Slack     | Guys Hill High             | 17 |
| Matthew Thompson   | Jose Marti Technical High  | 18 |
| Davia Oliver       | Morant Bay High            | 17 |
| *Jadon Hewitt      | Cornwall College           | 18 |
| *Helle Black       | Mount Alvernia High        | 18 |
| *Destini Edwards   | St. Hugh's High            | 17 |

## RURAL SCHOOLS

|                    |                          |    |
|--------------------|--------------------------|----|
| Ajaè Clacken       | Munro College            | 17 |
| Cameo-Lee Smith    | Westwood High            | 18 |
| Ronaldino Collins  | Glenmuir High            | 16 |
| Dane Egla          | Rusea's High             | 19 |
| Zidanihno Williams | St.Jago High             | 14 |
| Akishma Payne      | Hampton                  | 18 |
| Latonia Hinds      | Ferncourt High           | 16 |
| Kevoughn Malcolm   | Belmont Academy          | 18 |
| Shantae Palmer     | Anchovy High             | 16 |
| Yonique Wright     | deCarteret College       | 16 |
| Dé Ondra Falconer  | Charlemont High          | 19 |
| Tori-Ann Ashman    | Bellefield High          | 16 |
| Keron Smalling     | St.Thomas Technical High | 18 |

## URBAN SCHOOLS

|                    |                                |    |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|----|
| Aaliyah Livermore  | Camperdown High                | 19 |
| Breanna Bisnott    | Immaculate Conception High     | 17 |
| Tashae Fagan       | Merl Grove High                | 18 |
| Ackeera Campbell   | Convent of Mercy Academy Alpha | 19 |
| Tanea Baccas       | Convent of Mercy Academy Alpha | 17 |
| Britney Pitter     | Convent of Mercy Academy Alpha | 18 |
| Jayques Nelson     | Excelsior High                 | 18 |
| Denroy Watson      | Camperdown High                | 18 |
| Abi-Gale Johnson   | Queen's School                 | 18 |
| Romarie Bartley    | St. George's College           | 18 |
| Camryn Calvert     | Convent of Mercy Academy Alpha | 18 |
| Queen-Anne Edwards | Excelsior High                 | 18 |
| Kevaughn Walters   | Bridgeport High                | 17 |
| Kiara Rochester    | St.James High                  | 16 |
| Krysanne Clarke    | Spot Valley High               | 18 |
| Nelson Cole        | Dunoon Park Technical High     | 18 |
| Tavarri Hall       | Irwin High                     | 18 |
| Aliah Miles        | Irwin High                     | 17 |
| Danesha Ranger     | Jose Marti Technical High      | 16 |
| Deedranay Lewin    | Jose Marti Technical High      | 16 |
| Dain Dixon         | Papine High                    | 18 |

## STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

|                 |                                       |    |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|----|
| Nathaniel Facey | Lister Mair Gilby School for the Deaf | 14 |
| Kalea Williams  | Lister Mair Gilby School for the Deaf | 16 |
| Afreka Gordon   | Windsor School of Special Education   | 17 |
| Alex Sanchez    | Promise Learning Centre               | 14 |
| Brittany Chang  | Belair High                           | 16 |
| Omario Myrie    | Belair High                           | 14 |
| Nicola Anderson | Salvation Army School for the Blind   | 16 |

## PEACE MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE

### Students attend schools within Kingston & St. Andrew

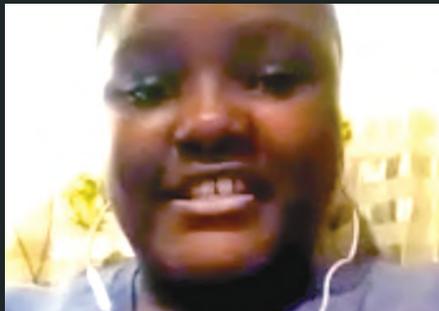
|                 |  |    |
|-----------------|--|----|
| Jazeela Martin  |  | 15 |
| Damien Byfield  |  | 16 |
| Dwayne Grant    |  | 18 |
| Rickell Wilson  |  | 15 |
| Richtrinna Reid |  | 15 |

**\*\* Boys of Rio Cobre Juvenile Correctional Centre** Boys attend school within the facility Ages 14-18

**\*\* Girls of South Camp Juvenile Remand and Correctional Centre** Boys attend school within the facility Ages 14-18

**\*\* Children in state care** Boys and girls attending high school

# THANKS TO OUR YOU



# YOUNG CONTRIBUTORS



**YOU HAVE ALL HELPED TO  
REIMAGINE EDUCATION IN JAMAICA**



End Meeting

unicef  | for every child

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