Inspiring every child

NINE YEAR SCHOOLING
I am pleased to present this policy document on Nine Years of Continuous Basic Education, which is part of a deep and comprehensive reform agenda long-awaited by the nation at large.

This major reform makes provision for all students to successfully complete nine years of basic schooling. It also intends to make of the whole child development a reality. Indeed, we want every learner emerging from the system to be so inspired as to become a self-motivated individual, an autonomous lifelong learner, a responsible citizen with a strong value base and a productive contributor to society.

Unanimity today exists around the fact that the current system, with its intense competition, has resulted in a percentage of our children not being adequately literate or numerate despite completing 6 years of primary schooling. Yet, paradoxically, it is vital for every learner to complete at least secondary schooling as a foundation for lifelong learning.

The Nine Years of Continuous Basic Education reform which is built on six major pillars, namely, Curriculum Change, Innovative Pedagogies, Meaningful Assessment, Continuous Professional Development, Conducive Learning Environment and System Governance and Accountability, has been subject to a number of consultations with a wide cross-section of stakeholders and other interested parties in the education sector. These included different Unions, PTAs, the Federation of Managers and other Managers of private secondary schools as well as Members of the National Assembly. Consultations had also taken place in Rodrigues and the programme has been peer-reviewed by the World Bank.

It is equally significant to remember that the main concept behind the reform is aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 which is that of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all and promoting lifelong learning.

Hence, by being inclusive and equitable, the new system takes into consideration the development of knowledge, certainly, but also of skills and values - in itself a cardinal necessity for sustainable development.

As Minister of Education concerned about the present and future wellbeing of our learners, I will continue to invest my efforts in their education and training. My Ministry will also create stimulating learning environments in which all students have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

For we owe it to our children.
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NYCBE: Situating the Context

1.0 Rationale for the NYCBE Reform

Government presented to the nation its vision for a new Mauritius, one based on the country’s transformation “into a truly forward looking, environmentally sustainable, economically vibrant and innovative country with modern infrastructure, global connectivity, high skills and technology” (Government Programme 2015-2019). This vision was more explicitly presented in the Government’s Economic Mission Statement – that of making Mauritius attain high income country status by 2030.

Achieving this goal will require an economic model of development that is socially inclusive and that will be driven by knowledge, technology and innovation. In this model, the higher education sector is called upon to emerge as a strong pillar supporting an economy with robust growth. However, the supply of highly-skilled human resource to achieve Vision 2030 will require reforms that will contribute to improving the quality and relevance of the current education and training system.

The focus will thus have to be on:

(i) enhancing the quality of basic education - low standards of which being the root cause of unskilled labour, unemployment and rising inequality, and

(ii) improving access and relevance to TVET, including Polytechnic Education, and higher education programmes aligned to the economic needs of the country.

Moreover, today’s education system is called upon to prepare our youth for a society increasingly dominated by an accelerated pace of technology-inspired change, coupled with new challenges and uncertainties.
The requirements of the 21st Century workplace will consequently no longer be on the basis of what new recruits know but more likely on what they can do with what they know.

Hence, while literacy and numeracy skills remain important, these will no longer be sufficient. Our education system needs to develop a generation of young adults equipped with the right knowledge, skills, attitude and values and with the following core competencies: critical thinking skills, adaptability and creativity, ability to work collaboratively, good communication skills and fluency in ICT.

Different reports have over the years highlighted some of the inherent weaknesses of the current system of education. Briefly put, it is noticeable that, while there is near universal enrolment at both pre-primary and primary levels, a high transition rate to the secondary level and gender parity in school enrolment, there is a gap in so far as pupil learning is concerned.

In fact, a significant proportion of children fail to acquire a minimum level of learning achievement, with a high percentage of 15 year olds not reaching the international threshold of basic skills level. This has resulted in Mauritius not comparing favourably with its peer upper middle income countries.

It is a well-known fact that the national wealth of a country is closely associated to the skills level of its workforce. There is a growing body of knowledge from international student assessments that reflects the link between test scores and economic growth. The better the performance, the higher the gains in terms of economic prosperity.1. The number of years of schooling is seen to have little impact on economic growth as it does not necessarily guarantee that learning has effectively taken place (Figure 1). This proves that quantity alone is not sufficient but it is the quality of learning that contributes to economic growth.

Mauritius is still wrestling with issues that were raised many years ago – the salient one being the excessive competition generated at the Certificate of Primary Education (CPE) examinations that distorts the sub-sector, distracts attention from the school-supported overall development of the children, brands for life some learners as failures and hence marginalises a significant proportion of our future human resources.

Equally, while the international trend has been to shift vocational education to the upper secondary level, CPE failures have been canalized to pre-vocational education that does not guarantee a solid foundation for future learning.

UNESCO’s Basic Education for Africa Program (BEAP) has this to say:

“Instead of equipping a narrowly selected elite for further academic education, the role ascribed to basic education becomes that of preparing an entire age group for integration into adult society (life skills, key competencies and citizenship education), into the world of work (core generic skills) and for further studies as applicable in a general perspective of lifelong learning (learnability). There is also a need to accommodate problem-solving skills, civic and citizenship education, team work and ICT within the curriculum, as well as international language mastery, math and science skills.”
set of knowledge and skills and attitudes that will guarantee success in future education and, later, in their professional lives.

The Nine Year Continuous Basic Education (NYCBE) (also commonly referred to as the Nine Year Schooling - NYS) is part of a whole set of reforms aimed at strategically transforming the education system.

Thus, it addresses the distortion of learning that has become commonplace in the system. It eliminates the instrument that breeds the current unhealthy competition at an early age (A- Grade as a determinant for entry in National Colleges) and posts the transformation of perceived elite secondary institutions into Upper Secondary institutions.

Hence, in the name of equity, the NYCBE makes provision for all students to complete nine years of basic schooling that allows them a choice among multiple pathways for their progression through the system.

The NYCBE will ensure that all youth reach at least the basic skills level as per international benchmark by 2030. The economic stakes of raising learning outcomes under the NYCBE reform are high for Mauritius by virtue of the latter’s direct positive impact on economic growth. This is an ambitious but feasible target. Raising learning outcomes is thus an urgent priority for the country.

1.1 The International Context

The provision of Nine Year Continuous Basic Education is in line with the international commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, more specifically, Goal 4 on Education which is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

International commitment has also been taken to achieve the targets of Education 2000, one of which is to “ensure the provision of 12 years of free, publicly funded, equitable quality primary and secondary education, of which at least nine years are compulsory, leading to relevant learning outcomes”.

The NYCBE is not a new concept. Deeply concerned about the quality of their schooling, many highly developed countries have the equivalent of a 9 to 10 year basic education cycle where a common core curriculum is offered to all children during this stage. These countries have replaced traditional high-stake selective examinations (that restrict progress from primary to lower secondary education) by criterion-based learning assessments nationally designed or internationally comparable. Such a system also postpones the channeling of students toward vocational courses until completion of basic education.

For Mauritius, this concept is not in contradiction with the policy of compulsory education till age 16. A student will legally not leave the education system before the age of 16 which theoretically corresponds to eleven years of schooling. The first nine years of these will be the continuous basic education cycle that lays down a solid foundation for success at the end of the compulsory education period and beyond.
2.0 The Desired Outcomes of Education

Central to the reforms in the Mauritian Education and Training system is the inalienable concern for sustainability. The person emerging from this system will be capable of living a fulfilled life as an individual, but also aware of her future role as a citizen and living, up to the variegated responsibilities arising therefrom.

The expectation accordingly is that the young adult emerges from the new education system as:

- a socially and emotionally well-balanced and self-motivated individual with a heightened sense of integrity and self-respect, an autonomous lifelong learner confident in the use of all accumulated knowledge and in engaging in new ways of creative and critical thinking, thereby acting as a change agent.

- an informed and empowered citizen endowed with the right attitudes and values for sound and healthy living in diversified multicultural settings and societies, whether in Mauritius or outside, shows apperance to and concern for the community, assumes a staunch stewardship of the environment and is an upholder of values and beliefs intrinsic to a democratic way of life.

- a productive contributor to society, demonstrates aptly the ability to work with new tools, communicates effectively, works collaboratively in teams and has the resilience to adapt to constantly evolving work and social environments and an effective and resourceful participant in the global economy.

2.1 Overall Goals of NYCBE

The NYCBE reform has both quantitative and qualitative goals.

In the current system, some students drop out during the early years of secondary education, with typically an estimated 28 percent of pre-vocational students failing to make it to the end of that programme.

The quantitative goal therefore is to ensure that all children successfully complete the basic education cycle and then move on to upper secondary via different pathways—general, vocational, or technical. This would then open avenues leading to further and tertiary education.

The qualitative goal of NYCBE is to equip students with relevant skills and improve learning outcomes for all. This is, in fact, a more challenging goal than simply expanding coverage, especially in light of current low levels of achievement.

The overall goals of NYCBE reform can thus be summarized as ensuring that ALL of our children:

1. complete 9 years of quality basic education and achieve relevant learning outcomes; and
2. successfully complete the secondary education cycle, whether General or Technical.
2.2 Specific Objectives of the NYCBE

The Nine Year Continuous Basic Education is grounded in a holistic philosophy that emphasizes both greater equity and equality of learning opportunities to all students for them to unlock their true potential, regardless of geographical location or socio-economic background.

This applies equally to student segments within the school-going population with specific needs, both cognitive and impairment-related, who require even more support.

The specific objectives of the NYCBE are accordingly to

1. Equip all students with knowledge, foundational skills and attitudes that will guarantee success to all in their future learning. This has to start right from the early childhood phase.

2. Inculcate in all students a set of values and a strong sense of moral responsibility and belonging to the country.

3. Promote the holistic and integral development of learners.

4. Provide learning opportunities to all students, including those with special education needs, for them to attain high levels of achievement according to their abilities and strengths.

5. Achieve a smooth transition to and completion of secondary education.

6. Give greater recognition to the value of TVET in building human capital that will spearhead the transformation of the Republic into a knowledge-based, skills-driven economy.

3.0 NYCBE : Making it happen

The Nine Year Continuous Basic Education reform adopts a systemic and holistic approach to the transformation of the education system. More specifically, there are six driving forces that are essential to the emergence of a better learning system. Mutually supportive and inter-related, these forces have to be mobilised and factored in concurrently so as to have the desired impact on the teaching and learning process.

Thus, the NYCBE reform agenda rests on a careful alignment of 6 fundamental pillars, namely:

Curricular Change
Innovative Pedagogies
Assessment
Continuous Professional Development
Learning Environment
System Governance and Accountability
3.1 Six Fundamental Pillars

3.1.1 Pillar 1: Curricular Change

The curriculum as the instrument that translates desired outcomes of education into school programmes will be so designed as to be comprehensive and well balanced, spanning over nine years of study to ensure continuity in learning.

Because all children have to be supported in their acquisition of basic competencies, the curriculum will recognize and accommodate the diversity in learner abilities, aptitudes and interest and also make space for learners needing special support.

All learners will follow the same curriculum over the nine year period.

As importantly, the curriculum will provide for learning experiences that cater for the holistic development of learners. These will enhance their creative and expressive capacities as well as their social and emotional well-being. They will equally shape their personal and social identity while reinforcing a strong sense of civic responsibility, entrepreneurship skills, environmental awareness and developing the spirit of teamwork and instil the value of excellence.

Greater emphasis will be placed on the acquisition of higher order skills that are at the core of problem-solving and critical thinking capabilities.

The Curriculum will establish learning standards to be achieved at each grade level against which learning outcomes will be assessed.

3.1.2 Pillar 2: Innovative Pedagogies

Implementing the NYCEP will require innovative pedagogical approaches where teaching is curriculum-driven and not assessment-driven, as is currently the case. In the name of equity, pedagogies will have to respond to diverse learners and their diverse learning needs and paces.

Teaching strategies will shift from the directive to learner-centered ones, such that learners get to be engaged in the learning process, become self-directed and autonomous and are involved in active and collaborative learning.

Also, at a time when technology and e-learning resources have already made their way into schools, IT-mediated learning will increasingly become the enabler for heightened learner curiosity and enhanced independent learning.

3.1.3 Pillar 3: Assessment

There is universal recognition of the potential for classroom assessment to influence learning, and to allow teachers to evaluate whether learning has (or has not) taken place. The student’s level of knowledge, skill or achievement can thus be soundly gauged for relevant and in-time remediation, where and when necessary.

High stake testing and examinations that characterise the system at present create undue stress on learners. A wide range of alternative modes of assessments will henceforth be at the core of teaching and learning.

To reduce over-emphasis on examinations, a system of continuous assessment for formative purposes and school-based assessment (SBA) to complement end-of-year assessment will be introduced.

A modular approach to assessment will also be introduced in the system with a view to reducing examination pressure arising out of the traditional one-off form of assessment.

3.1.4 Pillar 4: Continuous Professional Development

Teachers are the most important within-school factor that can directly improve learner achievement. The international evidence is clear that, at the heart of “what works” in the classroom is the effective teacher. Qualifications matter but are not a sufficient criterion of teacher effectiveness as evidenced by the differences between teachers despite them being well qualified.

Educators hence need to be prepared to deliver the curriculum effectively. They must be empowered to cope with students’ learning demands, step into the digital learning environment with confidence, embed 21st century knowledge and skills in their practice, adopt new assessment strategies and respond to their changing role and responsibilities as society evolves. Such empowerment comes by way of continuous training, support, provision of relevant materials and positive learning envi
3.1.5 Pillar 5: The Learning Environment

The learning environment is a key component to support the reform initiative. Physical infrastructure is crucial, but the learning environment goes beyond the bricks and mortar. The presence in schools of new technologies that support innovative pedagogies and actively engage students in their learning has become undisputable. These technologies redefine classroom boundaries and connect students globally through interactive learning platforms.

In addition, the learning environment must support the emotional, social and physical well-being of learners. Such an environment is at once an enabler and a motivator for teachers and learners to engage in pedagogical flexibility and collaborative learning, respectively, with a suitable backup in terms of resources, including e-learning materials.

Further, in view of the natural demographic change with its downward trend, school population is also on the decline. Currently, school population has been officially capped at a maximum of 1,400 per secondary school. This ceiling is called upon to be further lowered to 1100 in the medium term. Reduced class sizes will become the norm, resulting in a positive impact on learning environment and teaching-learning transactions.
3.1.6 Pillar 6: System Governance and Accountability

The major underlying principle behind the successful implementation of the NYCE-be-student learning—will require a greater degree of accountability from the education system as a whole.

This necessitates a clear definition of roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders at all levels, starting from Ministry HQs and parastatals through the Zone Directorates to the Schools. But not only; every person in the system has to be held accountable for accomplishing her assigned task.

However, today’s reality demonstrates that publicly-funded schools are not directly accountable to their clients, i.e., the students and their parents.

Hence, accountability for student learning has to be increasingly made to shift to schools – in short, closest to the place where learning takes place.

This will have implications in terms of clear policy goals at different levels:

(i) Effectiveness in educational delivery is best ensured through a greater degree of autonomy to schools. With more responsibility for academic outcomes, schools will consequently have more management discretion to introduce new methods of teaching and learning, sometimes collaboratively with other schools in their Zones.

(ii) Wide scale institutional reform and pedagogic change will equally require a greater degree of devolution to the Zones.

(iii) The institutionalization of an inbuilt system of monitoring and evaluation will have to become an inescapable corollary to programmatic and organizational reform.

Enforcing greater accountability at the level of the different Units within the education system becomes then an imperative and a pre-requisite so as to deliver on the 15-year horizon drawn in the Government’s Vision 2030 and on the 2030 Global Goal on Education universally adhered to by the international community.

This trend has to be reversed.

Entry to TVET will hence be delayed until after the end of basic education (with the elimination of pre-vocational education).

Again, vocational courses will be run in training centres that will have their infrastructure modernized and equipped with state-of-the-art technology. This stream will be able to hold its own and attract learners to such vocational programmes on their own merit. It will also open the pathway for trainees to move on to Polytechnic education.

In addition to addressing the need for new infrastructure and the elaboration of more relevant curricula, its provision will be expanded to allow greater numbers of youth to take advantage of its benefits. With technical education being jointly delivered with general education in secondary schools, it will be an attractive educational option providing a viable pathway for the acquisition of skills and competencies.

3.2 Technical and Vocational Education and Training

The introduction of the nine year continuous basic education will lay a strong foundation for all further learning. This will be a systemic reform that will cater for the diverse interests and learning needs of all children and help prepare and empower students for the changing economic landscape.

Technical and Vocational Education & Training (TVET) has an important role in the reform process. Evidence from most industrialized countries has shown the extent to which TVET has helped produce the skilled workforce that underpins industry and boosts economic growth. However, in Mauritius, despite its proven relevance to employment and the high priority policy status, it fails to attract talented students and is viewed as playing second fiddle to General Education.

Learning pathways will thus be established with articulation of TVET with secondary and tertiary education along with the introduction of Polytechnics. The goal is to have TVET recognised as a prestigious mode of learning capable of attracting quality trainees.
4.0 The Outcomes of the NYCBE Reform

The far-reaching impact of education reforms can only be felt in the medium to long term. Similarly, the outcomes of the NYCBE are defined here keeping in view that the results that will emerge from its implementation will not be immediately measurable. These will require a time span of some 15 years to present a realistic picture of the achievement levels and standards learners will have achieved.

The Outcomes defined in broad terms are the following:

- All learners leaving the pre-primary sector are ready for a sound primary school experience.
- All children complete the NYCBE and have the foundational skills and attitudes for upper secondary schooling.
- Universal Secondary education is achieved with all students completing secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. Schools are successful in providing a fulsome education for an enhanced all-round and holistic development and all learners acquire the appropriate knowledge, skills and values.
- The system successfully attracts many of the best and highly qualified graduates to the teaching profession.
- All schools are accountable for student learning as per clearly defined criteria / parameters
- All graduates emerging from the TVET stream are highly skilled and ready for employment.
- There is a two-fold increase in the percentage of the cohort that pursues post-secondary education.

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<th>DESIRED OUTCOMES</th>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
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| **Early Childhood Education** | - Compulsory one year pre-primary education
- Professionalisation of the ECE sector | - All children ready for Primary School |
| **Basic Education (9 years)** | - Early Support Programme for early intervention
- Improved pedagogy
- Adapted interventions for children with special needs
- Holistic education
- Institutionalisation of new assessments for meaningful learning
- Elimination of Pre-Vocational stream
- Extended stream for low-ability students
- Increased autonomy to Zone Directorates and Schools | - All children achieve national standards of learning |
| **Upper Secondary/Technical Education** | - Broadening of curriculum for greater relevance to 21st Century realities
- Sustaining holistic education
- Academies for Excellence in Education
- Making TVET an attractive, opted-for pathway
- Polytechnic education
- Regional scholarships | - Improved learning outcomes for all
- Highly skilled TVET graduates ready for labour market |

Well-rounded and responsible citizens, equipped with the knowledge, skills and right attitudes for further education and future employment and driving Mauritius’ vision for national development.
NYCBE: Implementation Process
5.0 Implementing the NYCBE Reform

In keeping with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), basic education, which corresponds to the first 9 years of formal schooling, is made up of two levels. Level 1 corresponds to the first six years of primary schooling while the remaining three years (Level 2) correspond to lower secondary education (where teaching is more subject-focused, requiring specialized teachers).

- The first six years of basic education (Grades 1-6) will be taught in primary schools.
- The last three years of basic education (Grades 7-9) will be taught in secondary schools and correspond to lower secondary education.
- Grades 10-11 will be taught in secondary schools.
- Grades 12-13 will be taught in secondary schools.

4 Change in terminology: “Standards” will henceforth be replaced by “Grades”.

5.1 The New Education Structure

To implement the Nine Year Schooling system, a new Education Structure has been elaborated as per the following stages:

1. Early Childhood Care and Education - duration 2 years (ages 3-4 years).
2. Basic Education - duration 9 years (ages 5-14 years).
3. Post Basic Education/Upper Secondary - duration 4 years (ages 14-18 years).
4. Post-Secondary and Higher Education: duration at least two years (above 18 years).

The pictogram overleaf clarifies the framework further.
The NYCE is premised on the necessity to ensure a seamless progression of learners across the levels. Thus, all children entering primary will, after six years of study, move on for three years of Lower Secondary education and hence complete the nine year cycle of basic education.

From there onwards, new pathways and opportunities will be open to them: learners will opt to pursue their secondary schooling in either general or technical education. The new system places a value-adding dimension to technical education so that its traditional image as a track fit for the academically less able is done away with.

A strong technical stream in secondary schools will encourage its uptake by choice and not by default. Pathways are also established that will lead to post-secondary and higher education.