

**EDUCATION INTERVENTION**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE**

**FOURTH CYCLE OF THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW**

**OF**

**THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS**

**AT THE**

**43RD SESSION OF THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW WORKING GROUP**

**UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

**3RD MAY 2023**

 **GENEVA, SWITZERLAND**

In The Bahamas we agree that access to education, even in the most challenging of environments, is a human right.

In March 2020, following the announcement of the first COVID-19 case in The Bahamas, the closure of schools was one of the strategies implemented to mitigate the spread of the virus. This strategy though considered effective to prevent the spread of COVID-19, exasperated issues related to student attendance, academic achievement and psychosocial concerns.

At the start of the 2021-2022 School Year, it was determined that across the Bahamas there were approximately 4,512 students of the 41,813 students enrolled in the Public Education System missing. This represented some 11% of the public-school student population. Even more concerning, close to 8,000 students were completely disengaged from instruction for more than 75% of the school year.

Even though the Ministry of Education had developed three instructional models: remote, face to face and hybrid instruction, to ensure continuation of learning in the face of disruption, it was recognized that there was a need to immediately put in place strategies to Find Every Child, return them to learning AND counter the learning losses at policy, program and operational levels. Thus, the Find Every Child Initiative was born.

The strategies developed were divided into four main categories, Ministry led, School-based, Community-based and Communication Centered. The strategies for the Find Every Child Initiative included the formation of a National Task Force commissioned by the Minister of Education in January 2021. This Task Force was comprised of representatives of several government agencies, including the Department of Social Services, the Royal Bahamas Police Force, the Office of the Attorney General, as well as civic groups like the Church. The group was mandated to determine who was missing, address challenges that kept students away from school and bring them back to learning in the shortest possible time.

The Office of the Prime Minister supports this initiative, providing technical support to the Ministry of Education’ Planning Section, using the quantitative data from the Bahamas Education Management Information System. Officers from the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit along with Ministry officials make monthly visits to schools that have been prioritized because of low attendance rates.

The Government of the Bahamas has recruited 19 school attendance monitors who operate from Urban Renewal Centres. These monitors merge into communities and liaise with schools to identify, locate and bring back missing school-aged children.

The data shows that we have moved to a 94% attendance rate. We have moved from more than 6,811 students missing more than 50% of the school year, to now only 425 students missing more than 50 % of the school year.

The first round of learning loss assessment has taken place. Strategies have been developed for addressing the gaps. Education has been prioritized at the highest level of the Government. We will do what is necessary to assure comprehensive access to education.