



**BROKEN
CHALK**

Submission to the Universal Periodic Review of the United
Nations Human Rights Council 4th Cycle – 50th Session

Right to Education

Country Review: Jamaica

Submitting Organization: BROKEN CHALK

April 2025

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Broken Chalk is an Amsterdam-based NGO established in 2020 that monitors and minimises worldwide human rights violations in education. We aim to promote universal and equal access to education for all.

We encourage and support achieving societal peace with our international sponsors and partners by advocating for intercultural tolerance, preventing radicalism and polarisation, and tackling educational inequalities.

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I. Introduction

1. The following report has been drafted by Broken Chalk as a stakeholder contribution to the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review [UPR] for Jamaica. As Broken Chalk's primary focus is to combat human rights violations within the educational sphere, the contents of this report and the following recommendations will focus on the Right to Education.
2. Jamaica is an island country in the Caribbean Sea and the West Indies. It is the third-largest island in the Greater Antilles and the Caribbean, after Cuba and Hispaniola. Due to fiscal austerity, Jamaica's government has limited funds for education, resulting in low participation and high dropout rates among students facing financial hardship [i].
3. Jamaica was a British colony from 1655 to 1962; English is still the official language, but Patois is frequently used in daily conversations. Jamaica's education system was ill-organised prior to independence in 1962 and mainly catered to the upper class through church institutions. The British model subsequently predominated until 1972, when the Caribbean Examinations Council introduced CSEC and CAPE. Primary enrolment is 98%, but secondary enrolment is only 58%, indicating that expenses are low even with free education. [ii]
4. In recognition of these challenges, the Jamaican government has implemented several initiatives to improve educational quality and accessibility. The "National Strategic Plan for Education 2018-2023" aims to enhance teacher professionalism and accountability while increasing resources for schools. Programs like the "Pathways to Success" initiative target at-risk students, providing additional support to ensure they remain in the education system. These efforts reflect Jamaica's commitment to upholding the right to education and enhancing the overall learning environment for all its citizens, thereby fostering a more equitable educational landscape [iii].

II. Brief overview of the last UN-UPR cycle

5. The last review for Jamaica was done in November 2020 and received 200 recommendations, with only 138 recommendations supported. Out of all the supported recommendations, six of them were related to the Sustainable Development Goal of the Right to Education. Several organisations support the recommendation and align with international human rights standards that advocate for non-discriminatory access to fundamental rights, including education, regardless of one's legal status.
6. Most of the recommendations for Jamaica emphasise the importance of guaranteeing free access to education for all children and ensuring the completion of compulsory schooling. There is a strong focus on instituting policies that remove financial barriers, thereby enabling every child to access educational opportunities (recommendation 107.71 by Mauritius, recommendation 107.79 by Iran). Additionally, the recommendations emphasise the need to strengthen mechanisms that promote high enrollment and retention rates, and ensure that all children complete their compulsory education (Recommendation 107.76 by France, Recommendation 107.78 by Maldives). [iv]
7. The Jamaican government has made efforts to improve access to higher education through various policies aimed at addressing structural inequalities and financial barriers. The Tertiary Students Assistance Programme (TSAP) has been introduced to help students manage the costs associated with pursuing tertiary education, which can range significantly and often exceed the average annual salary in Jamaica.

8. The Students' Loan Bureau (SLB) offers financing options, but is not the preferred choice for many students due to challenges such as the requirement for guarantors, issues with loan terms, and difficulties in securing timely employment after graduation. In 2016, the SLB transitioned to a Reducing Balance Method for interest calculations to ease repayment burdens. Despite these challenges, the Jamaican government continues to provide financial assistance to support students in need, and a formal policy framework was established in 2019 to enhance the administration of this aid. [v]

III. High Dropout Rates in School

9. The issue of students dropping out of school in Jamaica poses a significant obstacle to both individual opportunity and the country's overall development. Although enrollment rates in primary education are relatively high, a substantial number of pupils drop out of the education system before completing secondary school.
10. The Ministry of Education reports that each year, 2,160 students in grades eight through ten leave high school. Furthermore, the pandemic highlighted and intensified existing vulnerabilities, disproportionately impacting already disadvantaged groups. The typical 70-week closure of schools from 2020 to 2022, which lasted longer than in any other region, had a severe effect, especially on at-risk students. [vi]
11. Various factors lead to elevated dropout rates in high school. Poverty severely limits educational access; the expenses related to uniforms, textbooks, transportation, and other schooling necessities impose a heavy burden on families with low incomes, often forcing children to work instead of going to school. [vii]
12. Socioeconomic inequalities have a profound impact on a student's ability to remain in school. Around 20% of households in Jamaica exist below the poverty threshold, creating considerable pressure on families. For many low-income families, the financial demands of sending a child to school, including clothing, learning materials, and transportation, often pose a substantial challenge. Consequently, many students, motivated by economic necessity, may leave school prematurely to find employment and support their family's finances. This is especially true for those in the lower-income groups, where urgent financial survival is prioritised over future educational attainments. The scenario creates a repeating cycle, as dropouts typically earn less throughout their lifetimes, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. [viii]
13. In Jamaica, male students are more inclined to discontinue their education earlier than female students, with 33% of boys dropping out before completing their studies compared to 22% of girls. This can be attributed to men needing to enter the workforce sooner. [ix]
14. In rural areas, the dropout rate is exacerbated by difficulties. Approximately 15% of children living in these regions face significant barriers to accessing education. Inadequate transportation systems mean that many students must endure lengthy commutes, often walking more than three kilometres each way. Approximately 30% of students in rural settings report encountering challenges in reaching their schools due to transportation issues. [x]
15. Cultural factors also contribute to dropout rates in rural areas; education may not be viewed as a priority, and traditional expectations regarding employment and family obligations can outweigh the perceived benefits of education. As a result, students in rural environments are more likely to drop out of school early, particularly in communities where the importance of education is not highly valued. [xi]
16. To address the dropout dilemma, Jamaica has introduced essential initiatives aimed at reducing high school dropout rates, particularly those stemming from socio-economic difficulties. The Program for Advancement Through Health and Education (PATH) provides

financial support to families with limited resources, helping to alleviate educational expenses and encourage school attendance. Additionally, the National School Feeding Programme provides nutritious meals to students, addressing food insecurity and promoting consistent attendance. By providing students with crucial resources and assistance, these programs strive to elevate the value of education among vulnerable populations, ultimately decreasing dropout rates and creating a more favourable atmosphere for learning. [xii]

IV. Low-Level Quality of Education

17. Jamaica faces significant challenges regarding poor educational outcomes, which have serious consequences for both individual opportunities and the nation's development. Although there has been an increase in access to education, particularly at the primary level, notable disparities persist, resulting in inadequate learning outcomes for many students. [xiii]
18. The PISA 2022 results reveal a troubling situation regarding Jamaican students' performance when compared to OECD averages. In mathematics, 15-year-olds in Jamaica scored 377 points, which is considerably lower than the OECD average of 472 points. Likewise, reading scores averaged 410 points, compared to 476 points in OECD countries, and science scores averaged 403 points versus 485 points in OECD countries. These significant gaps highlight a systemic issue that warrants immediate attention. [xiv]
19. The low levels of proficiency further highlight the seriousness of the issue. Only 26% of Jamaican students achieved at least Level 2 proficiency in mathematics, indicating a critical lack of basic math skills and understanding. The nearly complete absence of high achievers in mathematics (Levels 5 or 6) is especially concerning, with virtually no Jamaican students reaching these levels. [xv]
20. Other variables also contribute to these unsatisfactory outcomes. A considerably more significant percentage of Jamaican students reported feeling unsafe at school compared to their OECD counterparts: 22% on their way to school (OECD: 8%), 16% in classrooms (OECD: 7%), and 25% in other areas of the school (OECD: 10%). The extended school closures due to COVID-19, which impacted 76% of Jamaican students for over three months compared to 51% in OECD countries, likely worsened these issues. Even with high pre-primary education attendance rates (96% compared to 94% in OECD countries), the high-grade repetition rate (20% versus 9%) suggests inherent problems within the education system. [xvi]
21. To address the low quality of education, Jamaica's government has implemented several strategies, including the creation of a National Standards Curriculum (NSC) designed to enhance the quality of teaching and learning at all educational levels. This curriculum emphasises competency-based learning, incorporates technology, and fosters critical thinking skills. However, the execution and effectiveness of the NSC vary across schools and regions, influenced by factors such as resource availability and teacher training. [xvii]

V. Insufficient Numbers of Teachers

22. The severe shortage of teachers has long been a challenge in enhancing education in Jamaica. A report from the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Information indicates that the nation struggles with a notable shortage of teachers across various subjects and grade levels. This shortage is particularly pronounced in key fields such as science, special education, and mathematics. [xviii]
23. Several factors contribute to the teacher deficit in Jamaica, including low retention rates, insufficient salaries, and a scarcity of training opportunities. The issue of low retention is particularly impactful, as many educators leave for better-paying positions abroad. In Jamaica,

teachers receive significantly lower compensation compared to the national average salary, with annual earnings ranging from 20,000 to 2,000,000 JMD, averaging 1,184,584 JMD. In contrast, the average salary in other professions is about 3,799,003 JMD. This wage gap leads teachers to feel undervalued and struggle to meet their basic needs, prompting them to seek work overseas. As a result, the lack of financial incentives hinders Jamaica's ability to attract and maintain qualified teaching staff. [xix]

24. The Jamaican government recognises the urgent need to address the teacher shortage and has initiated measures to address it. Programs such as the National Mathematics Teacher Training Program and the Jamaica Emergency Employment Program for Teachers (JEEP) demonstrate efforts to address these gaps. The National Mathematics initiative aims to improve the quality of math instruction, while JEEP is designed to provide financial support for job creation in Jamaica. [xx]
25. Nevertheless, there are still challenges to overcome, including the need for improved infrastructure, stable funding, and practical strategies to attract and retain talented educators. While the struggle to resolve Jamaica's teacher shortage may appear distinctive, it is a widespread issue observed globally. Even highly regarded education systems in countries like Singapore and Finland face teacher shortages, despite offering competitive salaries, continuous professional development, and a nurturing work environment, which are intended to recruit and retain skilled teachers.[xxi]

VI. Recommendations

26. Broken Chalk advocates for enhancing vocational and technical education options in secondary schools, providing students with hands-on skills that motivate them to complete their education.
27. Broken Chalk recommends the continuation and expansion of nutritional support initiatives, such as the National School Feeding Programme, to ensure that students receive healthy meals that enhance their learning ability and attendance rates.
28. Broken Chalk recognises an urgent need to improve the execution of the National Standards Curriculum (NSC) across all levels of education to ensure uniform quality in teaching and learning nationwide.
29. Broken Chalk strongly recommends boosting investments in teacher training programs that emphasise contemporary teaching methods, competency-based learning, and the efficient use of classroom technology to enhance educational outcomes.
30. Broken Chalk advocates for developing extensive support systems that offer resources and training to underperforming schools, ensuring that every student has access to quality educational resources and proficient teachers.
31. Broken Chalk urges the Jamaican government to enhance transportation alternatives for students, especially in rural regions, by creating subsidised transport services to guarantee safe and dependable trips to school.
32. Broken Chalk recognises the need to improve financial assistance for families through programs such as PATH, enabling them to cover school-related costs and reduce dropout rates caused by economic pressure.

33. Broken Chalk suggests establishing focused support initiatives for male students, such as mentorship and career guidance, to emphasise the advantages of completing their education and address their specific challenges.
34. Broken Chalk promotes the enhancement of school support services, including counselling and mental health resources, to help students dealing with personal and social issues that could lead to dropping out.
35. Broken Chalk advocates for heightened involvement of parents and community leaders in school programs, fostering a supportive atmosphere that encourages students' commitment to learning.
36. Broken Chalk highlights the pressing need to elevate teacher salaries in Jamaica to enhance the competitiveness and appeal of the profession, thereby boosting retention rates and attracting qualified educators, especially in essential fields such as science and mathematics.
37. Broken Chalk firmly advises the Jamaican government to enhance the National Mathematics Teacher Training Program and expand its scope to encompass additional subjects, ensuring that educators receive comprehensive training and support to improve their teaching skills.

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