Principles and general objectives of education

To guarantee the kind of personal and social efficacy needed to sustain and improve the democratic way of life in Trinidad and Tobago, a guiding principle, imbuing educational efforts, is the view that all citizens, regardless of their gender, class, culture or ethnic origin, have the ability to learn and should be provided with the opportunity to develop that potential to the fullest. In other words, schooling is the preparatory stage which provides the means for continued learning and acquisition of skills to enable individuals to maximise their life opportunities. It is hoped that the education system will establish and maintain the ethical and moral values necessary for civilized interpersonal and inter-group relationships in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society.

Current educational priorities and concerns

The situation in the recent past has been characterized by falling prices for petroleum and economic recession. Such trends continue to be projected for at least the immediate future. Against such a background, the capital and recurrent provisions for education development have been adversely affected. This has been largely evident in the deterioration of the learning environment in some schools and a lowering of morale in the teaching service, which has been failing to attract and retain the most qualified graduates. However, there continues to be high social aspirations for more and more education—at the government’s expense. This has long been regarded as a legitimate expectation as past governments have been committed through policy and practice to provide a heavily subsidized and equitably distributed education service, up to at least the secondary level.

Universal primary education has long been a reality in Trinidad and Tobago; today efforts are underway to achieve the same in secondary education. Secondary education, and increasingly a technical-vocational secondary education, has been considered as a means of pulling Trinidad and Tobago into the realm of modern economies. Hence, since 1962, there has been a great deal of attention paid to reform and innovation in the secondary sector. At this time as well, the University of the West Indies was emerging as the premier tertiary institution in the Caribbean. However, all these developments took place within traditional British models of education—whether it is the administration and structure of schooling, or the system of examinations, or generally the ethos and spirit of education.

Trinidad and Tobago has been fortunate to benefit from massive revenues accruing from the petroleum sector in the decade spanning the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. This has financed large-scale expansion in the secondary and tertiary sectors. Today, the peculiar problems of expanded provision in a continuing scenario of economic recession raise questions of quality in education, its cost effectiveness and efficiency, and its relevance to a Caribbean context.
Demographic trends and projections indicate quite clearly that there will be substantial shortfalls in provision at primary (where provision is almost universal) and at secondary level (where there is a provision of upwards of 70% of the relevant age cohort). In addition, current and future provisions of early childhood care and education (ECCE), largely neglected in the past, remain inadequate.

Issues of quality bedevil the education system. The quality of graduates at all levels of the system has not been of the kind hoped for, given the proportion of educational expenditure per pupil. In addition, it is also recognized that the educationally disadvantaged, for whatever reason, continue to be inadequately catered for within the system.

The cultural context also impacts on the education system. Trinidad and Tobago is a plural society—the two largest groups are those of East Indian and African descent. There is also a substantial mixed component, as well as groups of Chinese, Syrians and whites. Past governments have been supported largely from the African presence. Today, the government, for the first time, is from the East Indian community where it has its support base. Hence, in a widely diverse ethnic society, where various groups may perceive themselves to be disadvantaged, the education system has a responsibility to be transparent and appear to be catering equally to all groups.

To address these issues there is an on-going effort to expand provision, enhance the quality of teaching and learning, and increase access, equity and efficiency in the system. It is well recognized that such efforts demand stringent cost management, co-ordination, and planning programmes. In the past, policy reform in education has been piecemeal and ad hoc. To follow through on these efforts, a different policy environment is envisaged, one with the needed policy reform capability and the requisite planning and programming skills and abilities.

The dilemma is to provide a quality education in the face of continuing high social demand for free secondary and (heavily subsidized) tertiary education in an era of recession and restructuring.

The most noteworthy reforms in the education system in the recent past (and continuing today) are the efforts being made in basic education. Early childhood, primary and lower secondary levels are now commanding the attention that had been monopolized by the secondary and tertiary sectors in the past. It is now more clearly understood that to enhance the quality of graduates from the system, intervention must occur early in life. The Basic Education Project, partly funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), is concerned with training—pre-school trainers and teachers, primary school teachers and administrators—and with the expansion of the pre-school sector. At the lower secondary level (Forms I-III), efforts have been directed at streamlining the system of formative and summative assessment, in all types of secondary school, through the National Certificate of Secondary Education (NCSE).

There are also current and forthcoming reforms which seek to address the restructuring of the entire system—especially its resource management and delivery capability. These include:

• the modification of the Common Entrance Examination, the selection device for the transition from primary to secondary schools;

• “de-shifting” of junior secondary schools from half day to a whole day of school;

• conversion of two-year senior comprehensive schools to five- or seven-year secondary schools;

• the introduction of more broad-based curricula such as technology studies;

• the introduction, at the sixth form level, of the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE), to replace the external Cambridge A-level exams;

• improvement of teacher morale through training and streamlining of the system;

• school development plans through a proposal for decentralization of control from the Ministry of Education to school boards;

• finance and equity-driven strategies at the University of the West Indies to increase enrolment and decrease costs;

• increased articulation between tertiary-level institutions, so that more of the population can participate.

Vision 2020 is a national policy document that has set out the major goal “to make Trinidad and Tobago a developed country by 2020”. This vision is high up on the national agenda; within this context, there are many implications for developments within the education sector since education is seen as “a critical dimension of our positioning of Trinidad and Tobago for the global age”.

In developing its Strategic Plan 2002-2006, the Ministry of Education was fully cognizant of the commitments already made in the education system to achieving the millennium development goals, the EFA goals and its own Vision 2020 objectives, and therefore adopted as its vision: “to be a pacesetter in the holistic development of an individual through an education system which enables meaningful contributions within the global context”.

According to the Strategic Plan 2002-2006, the Government will improve the quality and equity of access to education and training. This objective is expected to be achieved by: (a) upgrading and expanding the educational facilities to provide all citizens with free and universal access to basic education; (b) the provision of student support services; (c) an improvement in the quality of education at all levels of the system through: curricula reform, upgrading of educational professionals, improvements in security and discipline, continued computerization of schools, establishment of a school-based management system, institutional strengthening of
the Ministry of Education, increased provision for children with special needs; (d) the promotion of skills development; (e) ensuring that no student is denied tertiary-level training based simply on inability to pay by: expansion of the National Development Scholarship Programme, provision of grants and bursaries to qualified students on a needs basis, widening entry to post-secondary and tertiary education and training; and (f) the creation of a culture of lifelong learning through the facilitation of distance education, and the Adult Education Programme.

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The law that still continues to guide the process of education in Trinidad and Tobago is the **Education Act** of 1966. It is wide-ranging in scope and establishes overarching responsibilities such as the regularization of affairs between denominational and state schools, registration and operation of private schools, and the systematizing of the conditions of service for teachers.

The Act enshrines compulsory, free education for all children aged 6-12 in public schools. However, it does state that schools could also provide infant or nursery schools for children below 5 years of age. In fact, schooling begins for many children around age 3, but they are mainly catered for in early childhood care and education establishments. At the other end of the compulsory age range, the reality is that free schooling continues for most of the secondary school population, until age 15. It is only because of a shortfall of secondary school places (for about 25%-30% of the cohort) that compulsory, formal, free education comes to an end for some students at age 12. Even so, many in this group are accommodated until age 15 in post-primary classes. Free education means that students do not pay tuition fees but they do pay for books, school uniforms, and transport.

Compulsory schooling for children aged 6-12 is supported by labour legislation, which prohibits the employment of children who are under 12 years of age, between 8:20 and 15:30. The Minister of Education is empowered by the Act to appoint school attendance officers to enforce attendance and bring delinquent parents to heel.

Recent and forthcoming legal changes that may impact on education stem from the fact that Trinidad and Tobago has recently ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Certain arrangements have to be put in place to honour these goals, focusing on the adequate provision of public early childhood care and education centres, especially for those working parents who cannot afford the private establishments. A Child Care Services Bill seeks to regularize and standardize this service.

In practice, students’ rights rather than their duties are constantly being emphasized and even contested in the courts. Students have challenged the State on their right to be provided with safe and suitable premises for schooling and with the right to wear the *hijab* as part of a religious and cultural practice, the latter quite successfully despite denominational protestations and insistence on the importance of a common school uniform.
Administration and management of the education system

The Education Act of 1966 vested a wide array of powers in the Minister of Education and the Ministry of Education. These administrative and management powers refer to all matters concerning the administering of educational policies at the pre-primary, primary, secondary and post-secondary levels; establishing and disestablishing of schools; the regulation and monitoring of private schools; the selection, allocation and placement of students; prescribing curricula, textbooks and other materials; the discipline and conduct of students and teachers; and, any other matters arising in the system. In short, the Ministry of Education is the central administrative body of the education system.

With regards to tertiary level education, the Ministry has responsibility for providing teacher training for secondary school teachers at the university, primary school teachers at the teachers’ training colleges, and for Early Childhood Care and Education teachers/caregivers. However, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education has the overall responsibility for all the other aspects of tertiary level education.

This traditional, top-down structure is obstructed however by a diffusion of authority in critical areas to other Ministries and government bodies. For example, the personnel division and its functions are external to the Ministry of Education. This function is attached to the offices of the Director of Public Administration, the Chief Personnel Officer, and the Office of the Prime Minister.

The White Paper on Education (1994) recommended that the Ministry of Education be restructured in order to develop a more facilitative and supportive capacity. Its operations should be decentralized into eight local educational divisions around the country responsible for school development initiatives via school-based management.

There are several bodies, operating out of the Ministry of Education, which are responsible for coordinating specific matters: the National Council for Early Childhood Care and Education (NCECCE), the Task Force on Special Education, the National Advisory Council, the Standing Committee for the Selection of Textbooks, and the School Nutrition Board. Other Ministries are involved in matters concerning education to varying degrees.

The Ministry of Finance plays a significant role in regulating the personnel function of the education system. The Ministry of Public Administration, which has responsibility for reform in the public service, has begun to implement standards of performance and criteria of accountability amongst teachers and principals. The Ministry of Social Development has established an Economic and Social Council with a mandate of “poverty reduction”. Poverty adversely affects children’s access to school and the quality of their participation. A survey carried out in September 1997 estimated that 38% of households in Trinidad and Tobago exist below the poverty line—based on a definition of the poverty level as a monthly income of, or below, 630 Trinidad and Tobago dollars (TT$) per head of household. The Ministry also

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coordinates the National Alcohol and Drug Abuse Prevention Programme (NADAPP) in schools.

The Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs is heavily involved in schools in sponsoring sporting events and competitions and organizing training and coaching sessions. The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women’s Affairs attempts to upgrade students’ awareness of their multicultural society by mounting programmes in schools coinciding with national and ethnic festivals and celebrations. The Ministry of Labour coordinates the Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP) for out-of-work youth. Classes are usually conducted in schools after-hours when plant and equipment are idle. Basic skills are provided in a number of areas in an attempt to make the individual more employable or better able to open a small business. In 1996, the unemployment rate stood at 15.1%, comprising mainly young adults.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are also involved in education. Servol (Service for All), in partnership with the Ministry of Planning and Development and the Ministry of Education, is spearheading the expansion of the early childhood sector of the education system. They work with the disadvantaged and marginalized and provide training in a number of areas—technical skills, adolescent development, parenting and interpersonal relations. Other NGOs rescue and rehabilitate youth from alcohol and drug addictions, abuse of all kinds, homelessness and crime. They are Families in Action (FIA), New Life Ministries, the Living Water Community and others. FPATT (the Family Planning Association of Trinidad and Tobago) has advanced funds to the School of Education at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, to develop and implement a programme of Health and Family Life Education to which most teachers in the system will be exposed.

Private firms are also involved in education. Sponsorship for sporting teams and cultural groups, providing funds directly to schools for purchasing of expensive equipment, organizing competitions on debating, essay writing, posters on educational issues, community service or school-based projects, constitute the main ways they are involved.
Structure and organization of the education system

Trinidad and Tobago: structure of the education system

Pre-school education

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), in its current organization, is offered through a variety of facilities that accommodate children of different age ranges. Nurseries cater to the youngest, usually from a few months to 3 years of age, but they may accommodate older children as well. Pre-schools, ECCE centres and kindergartens are similarly organized and cater to those between the ages of 2 (or 3) and 5 years. ECCE is not compulsory.

Primary education

Primary education is compulsory and usually begins at age 5, but in practice, some infants are enrolled before then. The Infants Department of primary schools is divided into Level I (ages 5-6) and Level II (ages 6-7). Pupils then move to Standard I, and progress over the next five years to Standard V. At this stage, they are eligible to sit the Common Entrance Examination in order to obtain a place in secondary school.
Secondary education

Secondary education is free and compulsory for all students who have passed the CEE. In general, secondary education is divided into two cycles: junior secondary (three-year programme) and upper secondary (two-year programme).

Higher education offers a full range of programmes from the undergraduate to the post-doctoral level.

Both primary and secondary schools follow the same school year, which on average comprises forty weeks. In secondary schools, it is usual to devote at least one week per term to internal examinations. In Form V, teaching time is reduced in the final term to accommodate the sitting of qualifying examinations (CXC, GCE, and NEC) and this may start as early as mid-May. Thus, the Form V year may only comprise thirty-three weeks of teaching.

The financing of education

A dual system, or State-Church partnership, established as early as 1870 has been at the heart of the structure of governance and financing of primary and secondary education in Trinidad and Tobago. In the era of self-government (1956-1961), the State apparatus sought to further entrench its control of education. Denominational resistance led to a compromise in the form of a State-Church agreement or Concordat of 1961.

Under that system, government-owned and controlled schools are fully financed by the State. Denominational schools (Christian and non-Christian) are provided with state subsidies and grants. Salaries, pensions and gratuities of teachers and other school personnel are paid by the State as are other recurrent costs. The State contributes 66.6% of capital cost for the construction and expansion of these denominational schools, with the religious bodies retaining full ownership and control and managerial responsibilities.

These denominational or government-assisted schools co-exist with full-fledged government schools and private schools. The latter are owned and managed by private entrepreneurs, are not subsidized by the state, and unlike government and government-assisted schools, charge fees. In the case of private primary schools, fees averaging TT$123 per month and in the case of the private secondary schools TT$85 per month are charged.

The Ministry of Education has traditionally been responsible for all personnel costs (teachers’ salaries), expenditure on goods and services and on minor equipment in all government and government-assisted primary and secondary schools. These expenses are met from a budget controlled by the Ministry of Finance, which also has the responsibility for the payment of pensions and gratuities for educational personnel in the primary and secondary government and government-assisted sub-sectors.

The Ministry of Education also finances vocational and technical education (for example, post-secondary technical institutes), teacher training colleges, special

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education and adult education. Other categories of recurrent expenditure met by the Ministry of Education include transfers and subsidies for schoolbooks and other learning materials, school nutrition/school feeding programmes, support via scholarships and the purchase of school places in some selected private secondary schools.

Beginning in 1991, the responsibility for university-level education and for the provisioning of the National Institute for Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (NIHERST), has been entrusted to the Ministry of Planning and Development and the Ministry of Finance. The University of the West Indies (UWI) obtains upwards of 80% of its recurrent expenditure for transfers and subsidies, with tuition fees now standing at 17% of the economic cost for continuing students in 1997/98. The university has taken steps, through a capital campaign, its Alumni and Endowment Fund, and through reorganization of its research and consultancy efforts, to generate income and strengthen its capacity to pursue major objectives outlined in the Report of the Chancellor’s Commission on Governance.

Household spending on uniforms, learning materials, transportation and meals and funds raised from private and non-governmental organizations, constitute the major source of private expenditure on education at the primary and secondary level. Denominational schools, which enjoy greater legitimacy in the system and boast of illustrious alumni, are much more successful in tapping private sources of funds than are government schools.

International financing of education came largely from three education sector loans in the years before 1980. These loans totalled some US$27.7 million. After that, the Bank graduated Trinidad and Tobago from IBRD funding (1984) and then resumed lending in 1991, when it provided a loan to support technical-vocational training for out-of-school youth (the YTEPP programme). The IDB also provided assistance for civil works (construction of fifty new primary schools) and for the preparation of educational managers, to the tune of US$46 million. In 1995, the World Bank also provided a loan facility of some US$121.7 million for the improvement of quality and access in Early Childhood Care and Education (8.59 million), enhancement of teaching and learning in primary schools (18.21 million), upgrading the physical environment (81 million), and educational management and institutional strengthening (13.9 million) through a Basic Education Project.

The Bank in its proposals has drawn attention to the fact that financing of public education has been marked by a tendency towards reallocation of resources from one level to the next without any real increase in total spending in the sector as a whole. The period of the 1980s was marked by economic recession and reduction in the capital and recurrent expenditure (10% cut in teachers’ salaries) with disastrous effects on morale, general quality of work life of teachers and the quality of teaching in the primary and secondary schools.

At all levels of the education system, the following support is provided to students by the Ministry of Education:

- School Transport Service - Currently over 200 maxi taxis transport 21,500 students daily, and 15,000 students are transported by Public

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Transport Service Commission (PTSC) buses at an annual cost of TT$30M;

- School Nutrition Programme – This programme provides daily breakfasts for 31,761 students and daily lunches for 96,447 students from early childhood to secondary levels;

- The Textbook Rental Programme – provides essential textbooks on loan to 175,000 primary school students, 75,000 secondary school students and resource materials to 46,260 students of special schools and early childhood centres;

- Book Grants of one thousand dollars per student are provided through an innovative visa card. For September 2004, thirty thousand students entering 4th and lower 6th form classes were targeted to receive the grant.

The Jamaican government increased the annual budgetary allocations to the Ministry of Education from 9.5% in 2000 to 13.5% in 2004 amounting to TT$2,841,179,433.

**The educational process**

One of the major goals of the education system is the establishment of a ‘seamless’ education system, whereby students transit smoothly from one level to another. This system is premised on the notion of the student’s readiness to advance to the next level at each stage of the process so that by the end of the secondary cycle students should be prepared and fully equipped either to enter the world of work or to continue tertiary education, having acquired the requisite qualities, attitudes and aptitudes required for success in their chosen options. Therefore, in such a system, it is critical that a solid foundation is laid for the student at the pre-primary level.

**Pre-primary education**

The main objectives of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) are as follows:

- the holistic development of children (spiritual, physical, intellectual, creative, emotional and social) so that they can grow into adults with high self esteem and positive self image, able to relate with others and to care for and share with those with whom they live;

- impact on the lives of caregivers and members of the community in similar fashion; to convince them of the important role they play in their children’s lives and to help them to understand and respond to the developmental stages through which children pass;

- to gradually lead caregivers and the community towards a critical assessment of certain undesirable aspects of traditional parenting and educational practices (e.g. physical punishment, neglect, nutrition, etc.)
so that a significant improvement in child-rearing practices may be
affected; and,

- to equip children with all the necessary skills to negotiate successfully the
  adjustment to the primary system.

At present, several terms for early childhood centers are in use:

- *Kindergarten, preschool, and early childhood (ECCE) centers* are used
  interchangeably. The terms refer to similar programs catering to children 2-5 years of age. Many settings offer after-school care to accommodate parents.

- *Nursery schools* may offer the same program as kindergartens, preschools, and early childhood centers, but may admit children younger than 2 years of age. The daily schedule may be flexible to accommodate working parents.

- *Nurseries and day care centers* admit children 0-5 years of age.

- *Early childhood center* is a term used for center-based care and education of children under five.

- *Laboratory preschool*: The University of the West Indies Faculty of Education owns and operates such a facility for children 2 ½ to 5 years of age. What makes this facility different from other privately owned early childhood centers is its focus on research, teacher training, and production of indigenous didactic materials. It is also a center for experimentation with curriculum methods.

- The *interdisciplinary child development center* offers care and an educational program for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who have been referred by social services. Children who are at-risk are given priority. This center is unique in that is managed by the Ministry of Health and located on the premises of the regional hospital. Nursing staff and social worker are on staff along with early childhood educators.

Historically, early childhood educational services were supplied by a host of private establishments. The government has only recently become involved. *Servol*, an NGO long established in provision of this service, has been given overall responsibility to run the public ECCE centres. It operates under the aegis of the NCECCE (National Council for Early Childhood Care and Education) responsible for monitoring all centres, both private and public.

In 1995 the World Bank reported that whilst all public ECCE programmes were similarly administered (following *Servol*), private establishments were likely to vary considerably. On average for both types of centres, the child/adult ratio was 11:1. The average time spent on the classroom activities was as follows:
While all public programmes follow the program developed at Servol, the curriculum at each private center is based on the personal choice of the administrator. Goals therefore reflect each administrator’s attitudes and assumptions about the needs of pre-school aged children. Three types of programs used are:

- **The academic program**: a heavily weighted academic program of reading, writing and arithmetic. Children are taught in large groups and are expected to sit, listen and repeat rote exercises for the major part of the day. This is the most widely used program.

- **The child-centered program**: a program in which individual needs of children are the focus of curriculum planning.

- **The Montessori method**: a planned environment offering children a choice in materials but directing the use of the materials a child selects.

In practice however, most public and private centers have environments that are predominantly teacher-dominated and that offer very few opportunities for child-initiated activities.

The private sector continues to dominate the provision at the pre-primary level—in 1992 there were 682 private-run establishments catering to 20,408 children (10,398 girls) with a total teaching staff of 1,600, the majority of whom were female (1,576). In 1995, there were 148 public establishments catering to about 4,500 children. In 2004, there were 167 public ECCE centres with an enrolment figure of 7,000 children. Altogether, the Ministry of Education was responsible for 929 public and private Early Childhood Care and Education Centres serving 27,462 preschoolers.

ECCE is not yet compulsory. The fact that privately owned centres far outnumber public centres, leads to much variation in daily hours of opening and closing. Children on average spend twenty-eight hours per week at a centre. Preschools, kindergartens, and ECCE centres tend to model their school year on that of the primary and secondary sector—about forty weeks. Nurseries catering to younger children may open longer. Fees are charged by both types of centres.

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**Activity** | **Hours per week**
--- | ---
Pre-academics (numbers, mathematics, story telling, language) | 9
Personal care (self sufficiency, social activities) | 9
Expressive activities (singing, painting) | 3
Free time | 2

Primary education

The main objectives of primary education are: (a) ensuring that all children are provided with education; b) articulation of the primary school system with the foundation developed in ECCE; (c) providing an education that is not cost prohibitive, especially to needy families; (d) transformation of underperforming schools to more effective ones; and, (e) a smooth transition within the system from primary to secondary education.

Primary education is compulsory and usually begins at age 5 although some infants are enrolled before that. Data are only available for public schools, but it is felt that this practice may be more common in private schools. For example, in 1994 there were 1,072 boys and 1,222 girls aged 4 years in public primary schools. The average pupil-teacher ratio is 25:1. In private primary schools, fees are charged and many are considered to be elite schools with a high success rate at the Common Entrance Examination (CEE).

As mentioned, the Infants Department of primary schools is divided into Level I and Level II. Pupils then move to Standard I and over the next five years progress to Standard V. At this stage, they are eligible to sit the CEE in order to obtain a place in secondary school.

In the primary school, all subjects are compulsory, except in certain instances of religious instruction. Subjects chosen for inclusion have to be approved by the Ministry of Education, which has the final, overall responsibility for all aspects of the curriculum.

In the Infants Department, a teaching period is twenty minutes long; in Standards I–II, it is thirty to thirty-five minutes; in Standards III–IV, it is thirty-five to forty minutes; and in Standard V and post-primary classes, the length of the period may be forty to forty-five minutes. For Standard V, the average number of weekly hours of teaching by discipline, based on a forty-minute period a week, is as follows: mathematics (three hours and twenty minutes); reading—includes silent reading and word building (three hours and twenty minutes); language arts—including grammar, spelling, vocabulary, literature, and comprehension (three hours); creative writing (one hour and twenty minutes); social studies—including family life, geography, history (three hours); science—including general science, agricultural science and food and nutrition (three hours); and creative arts—including physical education, dance, arts and crafts, music and drama (three hours and twenty minutes).

The school day runs from 8:30 to 14:30 in the case of infants, and to 15:00 for the rest of the school. The teacher or the school can arrange the subjects according to their particular contexts, once they observe the stipulated times per subject per week.

Universal access to primary school education has been achieved since the year 2000. In 2004, the enrolment figure was 136,374 students in the 481 public primary schools.

Transition from primary to secondary education has since the introduction of free secondary education in 1961 been determined by performance at the CEE. In

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1994/1995, 29,851 students (of whom 15,378 were girls) in the public primary schools sat the CEE and 20,065 were placed (of whom 10,109 were girls), indicating a transition rate of 69.2% for boys and 66.1% for girls (CSO, 1997). As a result of the tremendous pressures put on 11-year-olds, this exam is being phased out and will be replaced by a continuous system of testing and remediation. Formative evaluation will occur in Standards I and III and the CEE will be converted into a national attainment test.

Before this policy can be implemented, testing and remediation will need to be introduced and the whole process of acceleration put in place. The Ministry of Education has been spearheading a project, ELL (Established Levels of Learning), which focuses on learning outcomes. Minimum achievable goals are specified at each level so that a standardized system of assessment is put in place to evaluate students’ progress towards these standards.

Promotion in the primary schools is normally based on age. The relationship between age and class is used to calculate scholastic acceleration and retardation. The former refers to the ‘skipping’ of a grade level and the latter is a measure of those who do not advance one grade level a year. In 1994/1995, out of a total enrolment in public primary schools of 191,640 students, 19,862 (or 10.4%) were found scholastically retarded. The scholastically accelerated numbered 1,274. In the same year, there were 484 dropouts from public primary schools (0.2% of the total enrolment)—263 boys and 221 girls. Students tended to drop out in greater numbers as they progressed through the system so that the Standard V class accounted for 27.1% of the total dropouts (CSO, 1997).

Students unplaced in the secondary system may continue on in post-primary classes until age 15, but many drop out before then. Post-primary classes are supposed to provide continuing education in remedial reading and mathematics but have not been successful as many students continue to fail the School Leaving Certificate examination.

**Enrolment in post-primary classes (1994-1995)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of student</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>4,273</td>
<td>4,063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>2,074</td>
<td>1,718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>807</td>
<td>611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: CSO, 1997.*

**Secondary education**

Since the introduction of Universal Secondary Education (USE) in the year 2000, secondary education is free and compulsory for all students who have passed the Common Entrance Examination (CEE). Unplaced students may either continue in
post-primary classes or enter the secondary system through private secondary schools where they pay fees.

There are two sectors in secondary education in Trinidad and Tobago. They are commonly referred to as the traditional and the new or alternative sector. Private secondary schools are classified as traditional. In the traditional sector, consisting of five- or seven-year schools, a general academic education is offered in the disciplines. These schools are normally attended by those students who score the highest on the CEE. The curriculum is designed for those wanting to go on to higher education or to employment at the clerical level in the traditional workplaces.

**Distribution of the secondary school population in different types of public secondary schools (1994)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of secondary school</th>
<th>No. of schools</th>
<th>% attending</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional sector</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Government schools</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Assisted schools</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative sector</td>
<td>52</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Junior secondary</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Senior comprehensive</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Secondary comprehensive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Composite schools</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In the alternative sector, a two-tier system operates where students, usually those who have not scored highly on the CEE, are placed in junior secondary schools for three years. These schools operate a double shift. From here students go on to senior comprehensive schools for the next two years. Newer versions within this sector include secondary comprehensive schools which are senior comprehensive schools converted to five- and seven-year schools, and composite schools which are five-year schools situated in sparsely populated rural areas and follow a curriculum similar to that in junior secondary and senior comprehensive schools. The students in this sector may follow an academic curriculum but the emphasis is on pre-technician subjects and industrial arts.

There are two cycles in secondary education. The first cycle (Forms I–III) is assessed by the National Certificate of Secondary Education (NCSE) examination, which is in the process of being adopted to streamline and monitor achievement in the middle years of the secondary school. The junior secondary schools operate a double shift per day: 7:30-12:00 and 12:30-17:00. Based on a thirty-five-period week where each period is forty-five minutes long, the average number of weekly hours of teaching by subject is as follows:

Compiled by UNESCO-IBE (http://www.ibe.unesco.org/)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Time per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>3h45m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>3h45m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern languages</td>
<td>1h15m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social studies</td>
<td>1h15m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology studies</td>
<td>3h45m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated science</td>
<td>1h15m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics (arts and crafts, music, physical education)</td>
<td>3h45m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and social development</td>
<td>1h30m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional language or English literature or religion or science</td>
<td>1h15m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assembly</td>
<td>45m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1999, the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP) was initiated, with the following objectives:

- The reform and expansion of the secondary school system that will result in five years of high quality secondary education for all the nation’s children regardless of social and/or economic status;

- The creation of a curriculum that is relevant to the very demanding and dynamic world of work; and

- The development of teaching technologies that will produce graduates who can adapt to the rapid changes being brought about though technological advances and globalization.

As a result, changes in the secondary school curriculum have been made to respond to the challenge of providing young people with flexible appropriate learning opportunities and life skills development to enable them to face the new challenges of the 21st century, all within the context of the holistic development of the individual into a well rounded, balanced citizen of the country who is capable of being productive and achieving his/her fullest potential. It is anticipated that students would achieve the essential learning outcomes of aesthetic expression, citizenship, communication, personal development, problem-solving and technology competence. By engaging in these core subjects, students would also achieve foundational skills such as numeracy, literacy and research skills as well as core work skills such as teamwork, learning to learn skills, safety competencies and basic manipulation skills. Further, a Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) programme has been introduced, designed to promote psychosocial competence in children and youth by teaching them life skills, which are abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour.

Compiled by UNESCO-IBE (http://www.ibe.unesco.org/)
The promotion rate from lower secondary to upper secondary is 100%. This is because the NCSE is not a selection device. Part I of the NCSE focuses on the middle school years. The purpose of the NCSE is to provide all students with a comprehensive testimonial of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they have developed from active and successful participation in a programme of academic, vocational and aesthetic education designed to cater to their varying abilities, interests and aspirations. Previously, the five years of secondary school were assessed by a terminal exam sat in Form V (CXC/GCE) which catered to only 40% and 20%, respectively, of the secondary school population. Consequently, large numbers of adolescents left school each year without any type of certification. This innovation seeks to implement continuous assessment over the first three years using a credit system, and a national examination (at age 14+) at the end of Form III.

The second cycle of secondary education covers Forms IV and V. Schools in both sectors follow a seven-period day where a period is forty to forty-five minutes long. In most schools, periods are shorter in the afternoon session. Schools begin at 8:00, sometimes earlier, and usually dismiss at 14:30. In the traditional sector, students may offer six or seven academic disciplines to be examined by the regional body of CXC (Caribbean Examinations Council) or the Cambridge General Certificate of Education (GCE) O-level, at the end of Form V. The average number of weekly hours of teaching, if a forty-minute period is observed and seven disciplines are being offered per student, will be three hours and twenty minutes per discipline.

In the new sector, there are a smaller number of classes offering the traditional disciplines and students usually register for about five for examinations. The pre-technician curriculum stream caters to a larger number of students and includes some combination of the following-business studies, office procedures, typing, information technology, accounts, computer literacy and technical drawing. These subjects are examined at the end of Form V by the CXC and GCE bodies. Technical-vocational or industrial arts subjects are also offered to a large number of students and include combinations of the following subjects: auto mechanics, machine shop, welding, masonry, carpentry, plumbing, electrical installation, air conditioning and refrigeration, electronics and home management. These subjects are examined by the local body, the NEC (National Examinations Council).

Throughout secondary education, English and mathematics are compulsory. However, in new sector schools more time per week is devoted to these subjects—approximately four hours and forty minutes each. The other subjects may be offered for an average of four hours each per week. In addition, there are on-going efforts in new sector schools to incorporate other subjects as core curricula—e.g. aesthetics, human and social development, entrepreneurship, and sport activities. Such efforts are envisaged as having potential in addressing the needs of these students who are often low achievers and considered to be at risk.

Seven-year secondary schools, which may be either in the traditional or new sector, continue on to sixth form and offer upper secondary education to the 17-19 years age group. Sixth form is divided into lower and upper sixth and takes two years to complete. Students become eligible for sixth form if they obtain full certificates (i.e. five passes) at CXC/GCE. However, because of limited places, schools select those students with the best profiles. Mainly disciplines are offered and are examined...
Sixth-form students usually intend to pursue tertiary education. In the academic year 1997/1998, the regional examining body of CXC introduced the CAPE (Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination) which was intended to eventually replace the GCE A-level. This new examination brings academic, technical and vocational courses of study within a single system certification. Not only do students interact with a syllabus more relevant to their context, but the CAPE also expects to widen the base of persons becoming eligible to pursue higher levels of tertiary education by ensuring that this programme is offered in all institutions of higher learning. In September 2003, the Ministry of Education adopted the CAPE programme as a unified system of certification. This move away from the traditional system of accreditation reflects the Ministry’s vision to provide quality education for young people in non-traditional areas, so they can adapt to the changing needs of the labour market both locally, regionally, and in the wider global economy.

In 2001, approximately 5,000 students attended fifteen technical and vocational schools. The government also sponsors a Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme (YTEPP), whose nine-month courses turn out 8,000 graduates a year. The Trinidad and Tobago Hotel School, in Chaguaramas, offers courses for the hotel, catering and travel industries. Various other technical and vocational programmes exist, some of which are managed by non-governmental organizations.

In 2004, enrolment in the 133 public secondary schools was 106,637 students. Furthermore, to sustain its commitment to USE, the Ministry of Education also purchased school places for 7,766 secondary students at private institutions, as there were insufficient places at the public secondary schools.

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

No national programmes for assessing and monitoring the learning achievement of pupils and students are reported.

Higher education

Institutes of higher learning include the University of the West Indies (UWI), the National Institute for Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (NIHERST), technical and teacher colleges, and a host of private institutions.

The UWI is a regional institution, largely maintained by contributions from the governments of fourteen Caribbean countries. There are three campuses: at St. Augustine (Trinidad), Cave Hill (Barbados) and Mona (Jamaica). The other contributing countries are known as non-campus territories. All stakeholders—e.g. governments, employers, students, other tertiary level institutions (TLIs)—are represented on various boards in the managing of the university. The Mona campus has 54% of the UWI’s enrolment.
As a regional body, the university has set an enrolment target of 20,000 full-time equivalent students by the end of the century. In 1996/1997, about 18,000 students were expected to register. A full range of programmes is offered from the undergraduate to the post-doctoral level. The UWI Institute of Business offers post-graduate programmes including Executive Masters of Business Administration (EMBA) and International MBA. Staffing and student enrolment at St. Augustine campus, by faculty, in the 1996/1997 academic year, are given in the table below.

**Staffing and student enrolment at the St. Augustine campus, University of the West Indies (1996/97)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACULTY</th>
<th>Academic Staff</th>
<th>All Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; general studies</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical sciences</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural sciences</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social sciences</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>773</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The NIHERST has several colleges—languages, nursing, health sciences, information technology, business studies and medical laboratory technology. They offer associate degree programmes and are accredited to U.S.-based universities, where students can obtain the full degree. In 1994, there were three technical colleges with a combined enrolment of 3,879 students. There are two teacher colleges engaged in the in-service training of primary school teachers. In 1993, they had a combined enrolment of 539 teachers.

There are a growing number of private tertiary institutions of overseas origins, which have accredited status with various North American universities; for example, the Caribbean Union College offering degree programmes in theology is accredited to Andrews University. Recently, the business sector has been establishing post-secondary schools and training centres—for example, Roytec (the Royal Bank Institute of Business and Technology) offering associate degree programmes of the Wilfred Laurier University in Canada.

Some TLIs are articulated within the UWI’s system, for example, the Institute of International Relations and the Seminary of St. John Vianney. However, there is a need to streamline this level of education and implement and monitor standards of quality control. Articulation with the UWI is considered to be the best option. Both degree awarding and non-degree-awarding TLIs are being encouraged to make cooperative arrangements with UWI so that students from other TLIs may be able to

finish their programmes at UWI, and not have to go abroad. In this way as well, the university will become more broadly based than it has been in the past.

In 2004, a total of 16,751 students were enrolled in tertiary level institutions in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Special education**

In Trinidad and Tobago, exceptional students are: those with sensory disabilities (around 50% of the school population has undetected problems with vision that contribute significantly to their inability to maximise their learning potential); those intellectually below normal; students with learning disabilities; and the gifted and talented (virtually no attempt is being made to identify this last group of students and to provide the accelerated programmes they require in either the academic or aesthetic area).

Presently, there are two government and 10 government-assisted public special schools, and 21 private special schools.

The 1994 White Paper reported research estimating that: of the children identified as having special needs, 13.1% attended no school at all, 5.8% were in preschools, 5.1% attended special schools, 6.7% were in other facilities, and 67.2% were in mainstream primary and secondary education.

Pre-schools, primary and secondary schools have few or no resources to identify and cater to the needs of special children. That leaves a very small number of children in institutions designed to address their special needs. Yet, even in these schools, there is a large number of untrained staff. They are supposed to follow the primary school curriculum, adapted to suit their varying contexts of needs and abilities. However, the result is a range of programmes that bear little relation to the intended curriculum.

Special education has been neglected in the past. Today strategies are being put in place to identify special students and their category of disability, and to undertake diagnostic testing to formulate appropriate educational programmes for them. The concept of inclusion, as it relates to students with special educational needs, suggests a commitment to educating them in the school and classroom; bringing support services to the child rather than moving the child to the services. Therefore, the preferred path is to accommodate as much of this population as possible in the mainstream, where self-contained classrooms and resource rooms may house special students for part of the day.

**Private education**

Private education is more evident at the early childhood, primary and tertiary levels than at the secondary level. There are very few private secondary schools and they tend to be associated with failure at the CEE. Private ECCE centres have long existed, been established by small-scale entrepreneurs and are mainly home-based. The wide
variation in quality of service and the high fees charged encouraged the government to enter this sector through Servol.

Private primary schools charge high fees and are run by individuals and denominational bodies. They are favourably regarded because many have a high success rate at the CEE. The Education Act of 1966 makes it mandatory that all private schools be registered with the Ministry of Education and they are subject to periodic inspection and investigation. Such schools must conform to stipulations as to size of classrooms, adequate equipment and facilities. All curricula must conform to that in the public sector as students are registered for the same examinations—the CEE for primary schools, and the CXC and GCE for secondary schools.

Recently, there has been a mushrooming of private tertiary educational institutions, many of them having accredited status with foreign universities. They charge high fees and offer courses mainly in business, accounting and information technology. A recent trend is for large corporations (such as Royal Bank) to establish business-oriented schools (Roytec) offering associate degrees. While curricula must conform to that of the accrediting body, there is an overall lack of quality control, and no kind of articulation and coherence between the tertiary institutions of the public and private sector.

Means of instruction, equipment and infrastructure

As a part of its ongoing aim of maintaining quality schools, the Ministry of Education is at present refurbishing over 126 primary and 34 secondary schools and has an ongoing school rebuilding programme for replacement of dilapidated schools.

In keeping with rapid technological changes, the Ministry is seeking to equip primary schools with the necessary technology to lay the groundwork for the establishment of a knowledge-based workforce. To this end, a large-scale plan has commenced at the primary school level to provide schools with computers and computer aided instruction and management software. The process is ongoing since the schools have to be refurbished prior to the installation of computers. As of 2004, one hundred and twenty-four primary schools were equipped with a total of 1,499 computers.

Under the Secondary Education and Modernization Programme (SEMP), which commenced in 1999, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago embarked on one of the largest restructuring and modernization programmes of the education sector. Under the construction component of this programme, 18 secondary schools were constructed thus increasing the number of available school places by 9,975 and bringing the number of public secondary schools to 133 in 2004. Furthermore, over 100 secondary schools will be upgraded and refurbished and additional facilities will be provided at double shift schools to facilitate their conversion to single shift schools.
Adult and non-formal education

The emphasis in the education system on examinations and credentials has led in the past to a large section of the population being left out of any form of continuing education. In 1996, it was reported that 63% of adults aged 18+ left school without examination passes or accreditation of any kind. On an annual basis, a total of 8,000 students leave school without marketable skills. A national literacy survey carried out in 1995 showed that 12.6% of the persons over 15 years of age were illiterate and 8.7% were only functionally literate. This contributes greatly to the problem of social alienation and hopelessness experienced by this very large “at risk” group in the society.

Compensatory interventions are being implemented in government-run organizations, such as youth camps, vocational or trade schools, YTEPP, the technical institutes where craft courses are offered to this clientele, and in Servol’s forty adult education Life Centres spread throughout the country. Courses and programmes service largely the needs of out-of-school youth and more mature adults who have no qualifications. The Life Centres cater to more than 3,000 persons. The courses combine general education concerns such as literacy and numeracy with occupational, mainly technical-vocational beginning preparation, as well as training in interpersonal skills and personal development. The government contributes a base amount for remuneration of teachers; and the communities in which the centres are located must acquire the site, organize an administrative council, and obtain the necessary financial resources to complement the salaries of teachers.

Children in difficult circumstances usually live in homes, assisted by government subventions. Here, they are taught along lines suggested by the primary school curriculum, but their educational experiences are largely constrained by the fact that most of the staff in the homes is untrained. A few attend schools in the mainstream but there are no specially tailored courses for children in difficult circumstances. There are two custodial homes, one for boys and one for girls, where vocational training is offered.

Teaching staff

Teachers are selected and recruited by the Teaching Service Commission, an independent body appointed by the government. For primary schools the minimum qualification needed for entry is five CXC/GCE passes, and for secondary schools, a first degree in a subject specialization. Technical-vocational teachers come from a wide variety of backgrounds and their requirements vary.

The regularization of qualifications for teaching at ECCE centres is now being undertaken. The pre-schools run jointly by the government and Servol train teachers on-the-job. The School of Education at UWI also offers in-service, part-time courses leading to a Certificate in Early Childhood Care and Education. However, there continues to be many untrained teachers, particularly in the private pre-schools, which far outnumber those in the public sector.

Compiled by UNESCO-IBE (http://www.ibe.unesco.org/)
Primary school teachers are required to be in the system for at least two years, before they proceed to two years of compulsory, in-service training at the teacher training colleges. Most teachers in the primary system have been trained at this initial level. Continuing training is available and optional on a part-time, in-service basis for one year at the School of Education where a Certificate in Education is offered. This is recognized as the first year of completion of a three-year Bachelor of Education programme, introduced in 1992 at the School of Education. For the B.Ed., students attend full-time for two years; cross-faculty courses are also offered. The three levels of training described here are intended to develop a highly trained and competent primary teaching corps.

The Ministry of Education also offers a special course, Primary Headship, for senior teachers, principals and vice-principals lasting six months. The content is derived from the Better Schools Module developed by the Commonwealth Secretariat. The course is being funded by the IDB, and by 1993/1994, there had been 955 participants.

At the secondary level, professional training remains optional. However, the School of Education has been offering a Diploma in Education, initial teacher training for this sector since 1973. It is an in-service programme delivered in the holidays and on Fridays during the school term and lasts one year. In public secondary schools today, out of a total of 4,995 teachers, 2,557 are trained.

All teacher-training courses address, at varying levels of depth and exploration, the foundation areas in education—the psychology, philosophy and sociology of education, as well as language issues in education. Training for primary schools is designed to deliver some measure of content in the different subjects and in areas of specialization. Such areas in the Certificate of Education include mathematics, language arts, science, social studies, integrated arts, the art and science of coaching and educational administration.

The Diploma in Education is offered in mathematics, language arts, modern languages, social studies, science, and educational administration. Training for both primary and secondary schools emphasize the practice of education in classrooms all over the country. The School of Education also offers a Master in Education (M.Ed), a two-year part-time degree programme, designed for teacher educators, school principals, administrators and supervisors. Courses are offered in the foundation areas as well as teacher education, curriculum development and materials production. M.A. (Ed.) and Ph.D. degrees are also available, where the emphasis is on research in the education system.

The Ministry of Education recently established the Caribbean Centre of Excellence for Teacher Training (CETT). The centre was set up to provide innovative leadership in inspiring, empowering and equipping teachers in the first three grades of primary schools, in particular to improve the teaching of reading. In order to ensure continued professional development of teachers, CETT will also train teachers in the latest and best evidence-based strategies of teaching and reading and will engage them in the best practices.
Teachers’ workload varies according to the level of schooling and type of school. At the primary level, on average, the pupil-teacher ratio is 25:1 and teachers work about thirty hours per week in the classroom. Private, denominational primary schools tend to have larger student-teacher ratios. At the secondary level, the student-teacher ratio varies from 27:1 in junior secondary to 15:1 in senior comprehensive schools. Teacher workloads also vary from approximately twenty-two hours per week spent by junior secondary teachers in classroom activities, to seventeen hours spent by senior comprehensive teachers. It is estimated that both student-teacher ratios and teacher workloads may be higher in the public and private denominational secondary schools than the statistics given above for public government secondary schools.

In 2004, there were 2,223 teaching staff in pre-primary education, 7,839 in primary schools, 5,422 in secondary schools, and 1,720 in tertiary level institutions.

Educational research and information

The two main organizations engaged in educational research are the Ministry of Education and the School of Education, UWI. There were 140 diploma and higher degree students registered at the School of Education in 1995/1996, each being involved in some educational research. The main fields of research on the part of the Ministry of Education are basic education, literacy, teacher education and materials production. Students and staff at the School are involved in a variety of research efforts having to do with school effectiveness, school climate studies, “at risk” students, curriculum development and reform and distance education.

To a certain extent the work of these research communities, while being available, is not easily accessed by teachers in the system and by parents. Users of educational information tend to be researchers, decision-makers and administrators rather than those who interact most with students. Whilst the School of Education attempts outreach activities in the community, there is a great need to make information more accessible to the wider public. The School itself still relies heavily on traditional print media and is much in need of an injection of capital to develop modern, computerized on-line services to tap easily into international databases.

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**Web resources**

