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THE NATIONAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT POLICY

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ACRONYMS

ATLIB	Association of Tertiary Level Institutions in Belize
BDAT	Belize Diagnostic Assessment Test
BESPlan	Belize Education Sector Plan
BJAT	Belize Junior Assessment Test
NSAP	National Student Assessment Policy
NSAS	National Student Assessment System
CCSLC	Caribbean Certificate of Secondary Level Competence
CBA	Competency-Based Assessments
CSEC	Caribbean Secondary Examination Council
CXC	Caribbean Examination Council
MoE	Ministry of Education
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
PSE	Primary School Examination
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

POLICY AT A GLANCE

The National Student Assessment Policy (NSAP) establishes the Government of Belize's regulatory framework for assessing student learning within a modern, competency-based education system. It ensures that assessments at all levels of schooling reliably measure the knowledge, skills, values, and national core competencies that learners require to participate effectively in society and contribute to national development. This National Assessment Policy guides the Ministry of Education in its statutory responsibility to assure quality, monitor system performance, and guarantee that all students have equitable learning opportunities.

In alignment with global 21st-century learning standards, this Policy promotes the assessment of higher-order competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, communication, creativity, digital literacy, and personal and social responsibility. Importantly, it links national assessment practices to classroom teaching and school improvement by providing actionable data that supports evidence-based instructional decisions, targeted student support, and strategic resource allocation.

Although Belize continues to invest significantly in education, the absence of a coherent National Student Assessment System has limited the nation's ability to generate valid, comparable, and consistent data on learner achievement and school performance. This Policy addresses that national gap by establishing unified standards, principles, procedures, and governance arrangements for the design, implementation, reporting, and use of assessments across the education system. In doing so, it ensures that assessment not only measures learning outcomes but also actively contributes to the continuous improvement of teaching and learning, fosters equity, and strengthens accountability at all levels of the education system.

I. INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the National Student Assessment Policy

“The Education System of Belize will be inclusive, accessible, equitable, of high quality, technologically driven, and capable of fostering the development of good, productive citizens” (MoECST, 2021). This strategic vision provides the foundational pillar for the NSAP. The purpose of the Policy is to establish a coherent, system-wide framework for assessing student learning, ensuring that assessment practices generate reliable, actionable information to guide teaching, support learning, and inform evidence-based decision-making at the classroom, school, and system levels.

The NSAP sets out the Ministry of Education’s expectations regarding assessment in schools, including the methods of assessment and the use of resulting information to measure student learning and the overall quality of education in Belize. A central aim of the education system is to ensure that all learners receive a broad, balanced, and relevant education that meets national development needs while promoting competitiveness within the regional and global context. Schools are responsible for supporting students to acquire the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes necessary to participate meaningfully in society, contribute to national cohesion, and develop personal capacities such as self-awareness, resilience, critical thinking, interpersonal skills, and lifelong learning.

Assessment is a central mechanism for monitoring the quality of teaching and learning and for providing meaningful feedback to students, teachers, school leaders, and other stakeholders. The National Student Assessment System (NSAS) complements classroom-based assessments by generating reliable, system-level data that can be used to inform instructional planning, support targeted interventions, and guide evidence-based decision-making at the classroom, school, and system levels. By connecting national assessment results to classroom practice, the NSAS strengthens equity by identifying gaps in learning and ensuring that all students receive the support they need to succeed. In this way, assessment, both at the classroom and national level, is not an end in itself but a vital tool for enhancing learning outcomes, monitoring system performance, and advancing the broader goals of the Belizean education system.

Rationale: The Importance of a National Student Assessment Policy

The National Student Assessment Policy (NSAP) is aligned with the competency-based National Curriculum Framework (NCF) and provides a unified framework for assessing student learning and monitoring educational quality across the country. By generating reliable, actionable data, the NSAP supports teachers in adapting instruction, enables school leaders to drive improvements, and allows the Ministry of Education to make evidence-based policy and resource decisions.

This NSAP ensures that national investments in education deliver value for money while promoting consistency, accountability, and high-quality learning opportunities for all students. By prioritizing equity and establishing clear standards, procedures, and governance arrangements, the NSAP strengthens both classroom and system-level assessment, ensuring that measurement of student achievement actively contributes to improved teaching, learning, and national development.

Situational Analysis: Belize’s Current System of Assessment

Belize’s education system is transitioning from a teacher-led model to a student-centred, competency-based system aligned with the revised national curriculum. Effective teaching in this context requires accurate information about students’ current competencies to design learning experiences that move them toward curriculum expectations. Assessment is therefore integral to improving teaching and learning outcomes.

At the primary level, the Primary School Examination (PSE), which served as the national assessment for primary school leavers, was discontinued in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and was briefly replaced in 2021 by the Belize Diagnostic Assessment Test (BDAT) to identify key areas of weakness, particularly in literacy and numeracy. Similarly, the Belize Junior Achievement Test (BJAT), administered at the Standard Three level, was also discontinued in 2020, and no alternative assessment has since been introduced, leaving a gap in systematic, national-level assessment of student learning outcomes at this level.

At the secondary level, students continue to sit the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examinations administered by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) at the fourth form level. However, participation in these examinations has declined

significantly compared to pre-pandemic levels. This decline can be attributed to several factors, including the shift to a competency-based curriculum, the costs associated with the examination, and the fact that CSEC results are not always required for further studies or employment in the country.

In addition to the CSEC examinations, students at the fourth form level are encouraged to sit the Association of Tertiary Level Institutions in Belize (ATLIB) examination, which assesses competency in Mathematics and English. Not all students take the ATLIB examination, and it is not a requirement for enrollment in tertiary programs. Rather, it serves as an indication of student competency and performance, helping to identify those who may require additional academic support prior to the start of the school year.

With the current system in place, the Ministry of Education has limited data on student performance at both the primary and secondary levels. The absence of a comprehensive, continuous national assessment framework restricts the Ministry's ability to make evidence-based decisions, monitor learning outcomes effectively, and ensure that all students are supported in reaching their full potential. This underscores the urgent need for a National Student Assessment Policy to provide a systematic approach to measuring quality, analyzing, and using assessment data to improve teaching, learning, and educational outcomes across Belize.

The Way Forward: Goal of the National Student Assessment System

The overarching goal of the NSAS is to provide high-quality, accurate, and useful information that improves teaching and learning. Specifically, the assessment system is intended to:

- Provide students with meaningful feedback on their strengths and areas for growth as measured against the learning outcomes of the NCF.
- Support teachers in adapting instruction to students' needs and competency levels.
- Equip school leaders and managing authorities with data to drive improvements in teaching and learning.
- Inform parents of their child's progress relative to national expectations, enabling stronger home-school partnerships.

- Provide the Ministry of Education with detailed evidence of system performance, including value for investment, changes in quality and standards over time, differences across schools, and outcomes for diverse groups of students.

The NSAS shapes the design, purpose, and strategies of assessment, requiring a balanced set of complementary tools rather than reliance on a single assessment method. To facilitate coherence across the assessment system and reinforce the alignment between system-level reporting and classroom instructional practice, the NSAS will articulate a clear correspondence between the performance levels used in the national assessments and the established competency-based proficiency scale (Emerging, Developing, Achieving, and Mastering) used in classroom-based assessment.

Establishing this correspondence ensures that national assessment outcomes can be interpreted in direct relation to the learning outcomes and benchmarks of the national competency-based curriculum. This will enhance the relevance and instructional utility of system-generated data. This alignment is also expected to strengthen the capacity of teachers, school leaders, and managing authorities to apply national findings to instructional planning, student support, and school improvement efforts. It will promote consistency in the communication of student progress across the classroom, school, and system levels. In doing so, the NSAS reinforces its core purpose of supporting high-quality teaching and learning through coherent, meaningful, and actionable assessment information.

II. NATIONAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT POLICY OBJECTIVES

Overview of the Policy Objectives

Grounded in the principles of equity, transparency, and evidence-based decision-making, the policy seeks to ensure that assessment supports high-quality teaching, fosters meaningful student learning, and informs strategic system-wide improvement.

The policy objectives focus on three interconnected priorities: enhancing the quality and coherence of assessment practices; maximizing the use of assessment data to inform teaching, learning, and system improvement; and ensuring that assessment information is accessible, transparent, and useful to all stakeholders. Together, these objectives establish an assessment environment that aligns with national policy priorities.

Policy Objectives:

Policy Objective 1: Strengthen Assessment Practices to Support High-Quality Teaching and Learning within Belize's Education System.

Establish and maintain a coherent assessment system that reliably measures students' knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes, ensuring alignment with the expected outcomes of the competency-based NCF and the broader goals of holistic education and student development.

Policy Objective 2: Optimize the Use of Assessment Data for Continuous Improvement

Ensure that assessment data is systematically collected, analyzed, and used by teachers, school leaders, and the Ministry of Education to monitor learning, guide instructional decision-making, evaluate program effectiveness, and drive targeted interventions that improve learner outcomes across all levels.

Policy Objective 3: Enhance Transparency and Accessibility of Assessment Information for All Stakeholders

Provide clear, timely, and meaningful assessment information to students, parents, educators, and system-level decision-makers, fostering shared understanding, accountability, and collaboration in support of student learning and the long-term development needs of Belize.

III. TYPES OF ASSESSMENTS

The education system is designed to meet the needs of all students, regardless of their unique physical, social, emotional or academic needs. Assessment is an essential tool in ensuring that all students are making progress to the best of their abilities.

Within schools in Belize, the main purpose of assessment is to provide information to be used to monitor and inform improvements in teaching and learning.

Specifically, assessment results are to be used:

- To provide information to students so they understand their own strengths and weaknesses against the expectations of the national curriculum.

- To provide information to teachers that can be used to adapt their teaching to the needs of the students in their class.
- To provide information to school leaders and managing authorities that can be used to monitor and support improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in their schools.
- To provide information to parents so they understand the strengths and weaknesses of their child against the expectations of the national curriculum, so they can provide support at home.
- To provide detailed evidence to the Ministry of Education about how the education system is performing and how standards are changing over time, at the national level, for different groups of schools and different groups of students, and for individual schools.

The purposes of the assessment system determine the nature of the assessments that are used as part of the system. No one assessment method satisfies all purposes and so a range of complementary assessments is included.

It is expected that teachers and students in Belize will use a variety of assessment methods, including:

1. Formative assessments (in-school tests);
2. Summative assessments (in-school tests);
3. Authentic assessment (in-school assessments);
4. National standardized tests;
5. National competency-based assessments;
6. Computer adaptive tests (national assessments); and
7. Regional and International external exams (where applicable).

National Assessments

National assessments will, at a minimum, include annual tests of Science and Technology, Belizean Studies, Language Arts/English, and Mathematics for all students for at least Standard 1, Standard 4, and Standard 6 through each year of secondary school (Form 1 to 4). These tests will assess students on a wide range of competencies, including 21st Century Skills aligned with the NCF. The Ministry of Education is responsible for designing and reporting the results of national assessments.

National Assessment Types:

National assessments can include a combination of the following types of assessments. These assessments will be administered flexibly and adjusted as needed to align with instructional practices, to evaluate students' competencies at their current level of learning, and based on the availability of technology and resources.

1. Standardized Tests

Standardized Tests require all test takers to answer the same questions, or a selection of questions from a common bank of questions, in the same way, and are scored in a “standard” or consistent manner, which makes it possible to compare the relative performance of individual students or groups of students. While different types of tests and assessments may be “standardized” in this way, the term is primarily associated with large-scale tests administered to large populations of students. In addition to the familiar multiple-choice format, standardized tests can include true-false questions, short-answer questions, essay questions, or a mix of question types.[2]

Why Standardised Tests under a competency-based curriculum?

In a competency-based curriculum, where learning is personalized and students advance upon demonstrating mastery, Standardized Tests still serve a system-level function. They provide a common measure of learning across schools, offering a blueprint of how well students are meeting national standards. These tests will support monitoring equity by outlining differences in achievement across districts, schools, and student groups, insights that classroom assessments alone cannot generate. Standardized Tests validate whether the curriculum and instructional approaches are effectively supporting the development of key competencies. The aggregated results guide decisions about resource allocation, including teacher support, interventions, and curriculum refinement. Importantly, Standardized Tests do not replace ongoing formative assessments, performance tasks, or other types of authentic assessments that drive day-to-day learning in a competency-based system. Rather, they complement these practices by providing a broader snapshot of overall system performance.

2. Competency-based Assessments (CBA)

Competency-based Assessments measure individuals' skills, knowledge, and abilities related to a specific role or learning objective. This type of assessment focuses on the actual performance of an

individual rather than mere theoretical knowledge. CBA provides a more accurate reflection of student capability to perform tasks in real-world situations and aims to ensure that an individual possesses the necessary competencies to succeed in a given role or academic program.[3] CBA will be a component of national assessments and as such it will include two levels of assessment: (1) in-school assessments of student competencies by classroom teachers using tailored and standardized rubrics, and (2) a system of external verification of assessment results by trained teacher moderators.

3. Computer-adaptive Tests

Computer-adaptive Tests are designed to adjust their level of difficulty, based on the responses provided, to match the knowledge and ability of a test taker. If a student gives a wrong answer, the computer follows up with an easier question; if the student answers correctly, the next question will be more difficult. Considered to be on the leading edge of assessment technology, computer-adaptive tests represent an attempt to measure the abilities of individual students more precisely, while avoiding some of the issues often associated with the “one-size-fits-all” nature of standardized tests. For students, computer-adaptive testing offers a shorter testing session with a smaller number of questions, since only those questions considered appropriate for the student are offered. On the other hand, test developers have to create a larger pool of test items so that testing systems have enough questions to match the varied abilities of all students taking the exam.[4]

Outline of the National Assessments

The national assessment plan for the primary level covers multiple disciplines (Language Arts, Math, Belizean Studies, Science and Technology, and 21st Century Skills) at the end of lower, middle, and upper divisions. These areas of study use a combination of standardized tests and competency-based assessments, with standardized components delivered primarily using paper-based methods.

At the secondary level, assessments in English, Math, Belizean Studies, Science and Technology, and 21st Century Skills are administered across Forms 1 through 4. English and Math rely on computer-based adaptive tests, with English also incorporating a writing component. Belizean Studies and Science and Technology use computer-based standardized tests alongside competency-based assessments, while 21st Century Skills are evaluated through authentic assessments.

[2] <https://www.edglossary.org/standardized-test/>

[3] <https://cloudassess.com/blog/competency-based-assessment/#what-is-a-competency-based-assessment>

[4] <https://www.edglossary.org/computer-adaptive-test/>

The specific subjects, class level, and formats for the national assessments are outlined in Table I below:

Table I. National Student Assessment by Subject, Level, Class and Type

SUBJECT	LEVEL	CLASS	TYPE	FORMAT
Language Arts	Primary	STD 1,4,6	Standardized Tests (inc. Writing Component) Competency-based Assessments	Paper-Based
Math	Primary	STD 1,4,6	Standardized Tests Competency-based Assessments	Paper-Based
Belizean Studies	Primary	STD 1,4,6	Standardized Tests	Paper-Based
			Competency-based Assessments	TBD
Science And Technology	Primary	STD 4 & 6	Standardized Tests	Paper-Based
			Competency-based Assessments	TBD
21st Century Skills	Primary	STD 1,4,6	Authentic Assessments	TBD
English	Secondary	Forms 1, 2, 3 & 4	Adaptive Tests & Writing Component	Computer-based
Math	Secondary	Forms 1, 2, 3 & 4	Adaptive Tests	Computer-based
Belizean Studies	Secondary	Forms 1, 2, 3 & 4	Standardized Tests	Computer-based
			Competency-based Assessments	TBD
Science and Technology	Secondary	Forms 1 & 2	Standardized Tests	Computer-based
			Competency-based Assessments	TBD
21st Century Skills	Secondary	Forms 1, 2, 3 & 4	Authentic Assessments	TBD

These assessments shall be administered as the official end-of-year assessment for all designated education levels, in accordance with the standards and procedures established by the Ministry.

IV. ADMINISTERING THE NATIONAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

The NSAS provides a standardized framework for evaluating student learning outcomes across all levels of the education system. Its administration is guided by protocols designed to ensure fairness, validity, reliability, and inclusivity. The Ministry of Education, through the Curriculum and Assessment Unit, is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the system, from planning and coordination to reporting and policy review.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Curriculum and Assessment Unit coordinates the administration of assessments nationally, including scheduling, field-testing and piloting, distribution of test materials, training of supervisors and invigilators, and monitoring adherence to established protocols. School administrators and teachers are responsible for supporting the implementation of classroom assessments in accordance with national guidelines and ensure that procedures are consistently followed and that all students have equal opportunities to participate.

Assessment Security and Standardization

The NSAS maintains strict protocols for test security, including secure handling, storage, and distribution of assessment materials. Standardized administration and scoring procedures are enforced to maintain the integrity and comparability of results across schools and regions. Mechanisms to detect and address irregularities are monitored to ensure that results accurately reflect student performance.

Accommodations and Inclusive Practices

To promote equity, the assessment system provides accommodations for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), learners facing language barriers, and those experiencing extreme disadvantage. Accommodations include extended time, alternate test formats, adapted or simplified materials, and the use of assistive technologies. Clear procedures for determining eligibility, implementing accommodations, and maintaining assessment validity are established. Guidelines for schools also specify participation requirements and conditions under which exemptions may be granted.

Implementation and Monitoring

Comprehensive training is provided to national-level actors (supervisors and invigilators) and school-based teams (principals

and teachers) to ensure consistent implementation of assessment procedures. Monitoring mechanisms at the classroom, school, and national levels track adherence to protocols and provide feedback for continuous improvement. It is important to note that data collected through assessments are used to inform curriculum development, teaching practices, and national education policy, ensuring that the system supports both accountability and the enhancement of learning outcomes.

Through these implementation protocols, the NSAS ensures that assessments are administered transparently, fairly, and inclusively, providing accurate, meaningful, and actionable data to support educational decision-making in Belize.

V. REPORTING RESULTS FOR THE NATIONAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT SYSTEM:

Reporting National Results

Clear and accurate reporting of results is essential to inform targeted interventions, strengthen support systems, and guide curriculum refinement. The results of the NSAS will be compiled into standardized national reports that present system-wide trends in student learning across all assessed education levels. These reports will include analyses of overall performance, patterns in competency attainment, and comparisons across districts, school types, and demographic groups. National reports, including results at all assessed levels and grades as outlined in Table 1 above, will be published annually on the Ministry's website to inform policymakers, stakeholders, and the public on the status and progress of learning outcomes in Belize. Public reporting of national student assessment results shall be designed to support system monitoring and school self-evaluation, and shall not be used to rank or label schools. Reporting shall prioritize aggregated performance indicators for each school, by grade level.

At the school level, each institution will receive a detailed performance profile highlighting strengths, areas requiring targeted support, and year-over-year progress. These profiles will include competency-level results, subgroup performance, and diagnostic information designed to guide school improvement planning, instructional adjustments, and resource allocation. Schools will be responsible for reviewing results with their staff and incorporating the findings into their school development plans.

At the classroom and student levels, scores will be recorded in BEMIS, and teachers will receive individualized student performance summaries to support instructional decision-making. These summaries will provide clear information on each learner's mastery of competencies, readiness for subsequent learning, and areas where intervention or enrichment is needed. Disaggregation will also cover reporting on students with special education needs and disabilities (SEND). Teachers will be expected to use these results to adapt instruction, provide differentiated support, and engage parents or guardians in understanding their child's progress and needs. In support of this approach, individual student performance by a rank order of achievement will not be reported.

Results from in-school tests, national standardized assessments, and competency-based assessments will be incorporated into a nationally defined Student Report Card to support consistency and transparency in reporting.

It must be emphasized that any and all assessments under the NSAS are not intended to be "high-stakes tests" and are non-punitive. Similarly, school performance will not be determined solely by the results of national assessments. It is important to consider that the national assessments may not cover all the learning outcomes in the curriculum and may not assess all student competencies. A broader accountability system that includes other assessments and other indicators, such as classroom visits and observations, classroom-based assessment, and teacher/student/parental surveys, will provide a fuller picture of student and school performance.

Technical Reporting

Technical reports are a crucial element of the NSAS because they provide members of the research communities and policymakers with detailed information about the NSAS process that allows them to evaluate it critically. Technical reports also act as a record of the activities involved in the assessment development, which is needed to implement future cycles of an assessment.

Inclusion of Questionnaires within the NSAS

Questionnaires may be added to determine success, limitations, gaps, and barriers in the education system. They can also serve as a basis for monitoring and evaluating system performance, with the data gathered used to improve performance further. This tool can collect information on students' socio-economic status and health (both physical and mental). They can also collect evidence of

interactions between students, teachers, families, and schools. Thus, questionnaires can be used to determine the degree of satisfaction of students and parents with school learning conditions and teaching methods.

Data Protection and Ethical Use of Assessment Information

Data Protection and governance protocols shall be established to safeguard the confidentiality, integrity, and ethical use of all information collected through the NSAS. These protocols will apply to all forms of assessment data, including sensitive information such as socio-economic status, special education needs, and indicators of student well-being. All processes related to data collection, storage, analysis, reporting, and dissemination shall comply with education regulations and internationally recognized standards for data protection. Access to individual-level data shall be strictly limited to authorized personnel who require such information for legitimate educational purposes, and secure systems and procedures shall be used to prevent unauthorized use or disclosure. Wherever possible, data shall be anonymized or aggregated to reduce the risk of identifying individual students.

Clear expectations regarding data retention, privacy safeguards, and the ethical analysis of demographic information shall be outlined. Primary assessment data shall be stored securely for a period of at least ten years, while secondary or derived datasets shall be retained for at least seven years, after which all records must be anonymized or disposed of in accordance with approved Ministry protocols to ensure the continued protection of student privacy. The analysis and reporting of demographic and sensitive data must be guided by principles of equity, fairness, and non-discrimination, ensuring that such information is used solely to support improved learning outcomes, system monitoring, and the advancement of educational equity. No personally identifiable information shall be publicly released, and measures shall be implemented to prevent the inadvertent identification of individuals or small groups in published reports. The Ministry of Education will oversee compliance with these data governance requirements and guide schools and managing authorities to ensure consistent and responsible implementation across the education system.

Integrated National Assessment Management System (INSAMS) - BEMIS Integration

The aim is to build a well-designed and maintained INSAMS that facilitates easy data access, transparency, and collaboration among education stakeholders. INSAMS will enable efficient data collection to report successfully on the NSAS results. This data might include students' socio-economic backgrounds, their first language (whether different from the language of instruction), place of birth, special educational needs, and any other relevant information. INSAMS will be critical in collecting, processing, storing, analysing, and disseminating this range of data and the assessment results. Once fully in place, INSAMS will play a key role in ensuring the reporting process is accurate, comprehensive, and meaningful for all stakeholders.

VI. MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND POLICY REVIEW

To ensure the continued relevance, effectiveness, and integrity of the NSAP, a structured five-year policy review cycle shall be established. The assessment system will be evaluated using a defined set of indicators that measure policy implementation, assessment quality, system responsiveness, and the impact of the NSAS on teaching and learning.

The Ministry of Education, through the Curriculum and Assessment Unit and the Policy, Planning, Research and Evaluation Unit, shall assume responsibility for coordinating this review process, including the collection and analysis of monitoring data and the facilitation of stakeholder consultations.

Findings from each five-year review shall be used to inform revisions and updates to the NSAP, to ensure that it remains aligned with national priorities, international best practices, and the evolving needs of the education system. In this manner, this NSAP functions as a dynamic framework that is periodically refined to support continuous improvement across the assessment system.



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