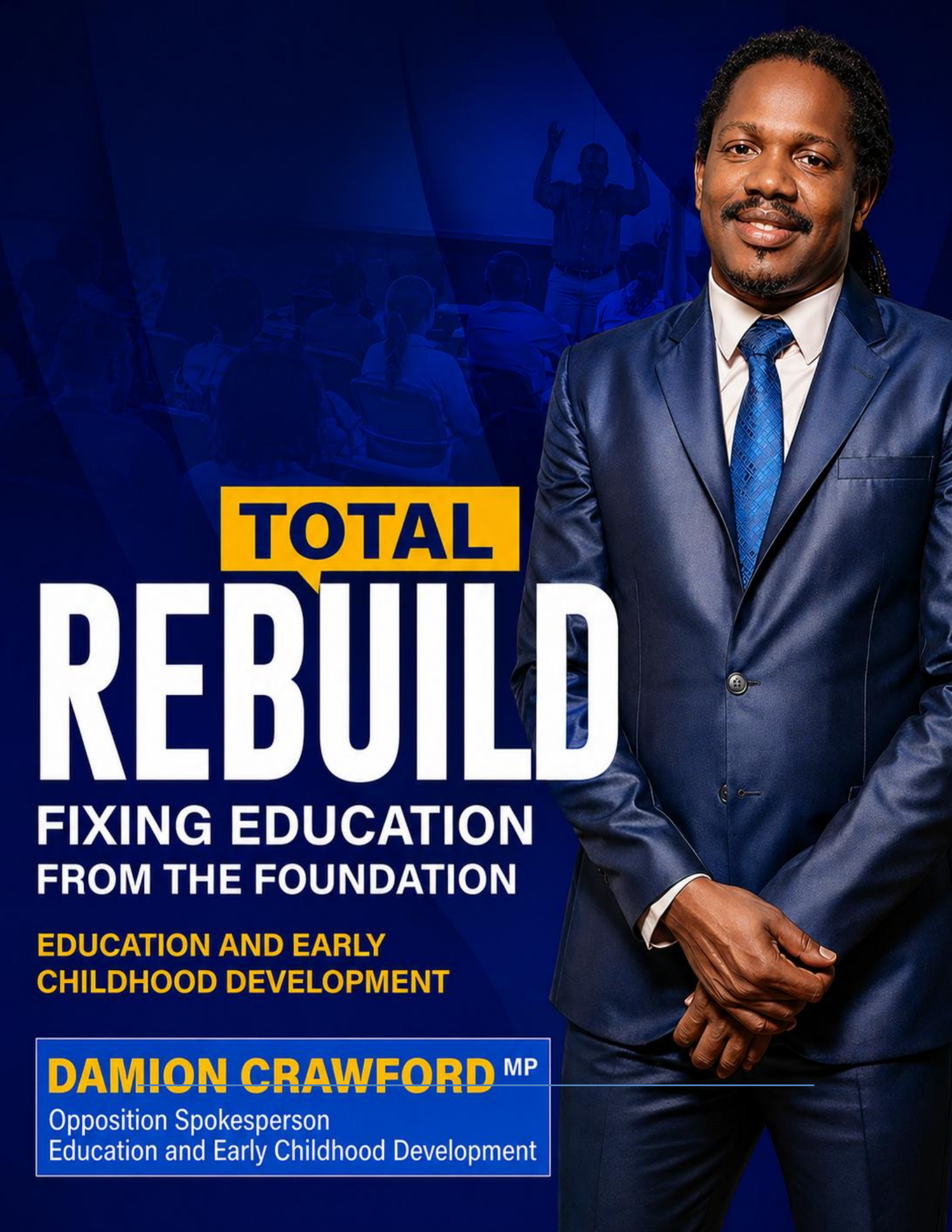


A man with dark skin, a mustache, and short dreadlocks, wearing a dark blue suit, white shirt, and blue patterned tie. He is standing with his hands clasped in front of him. The background is a dark blue gradient with a faint, semi-transparent image of a classroom where a teacher is standing at the front and students are seated at desks.

TOTAL REBUILD

**FIXING EDUCATION
FROM THE FOUNDATION**

**EDUCATION AND EARLY
CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT**

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Education and Early Childhood Development

A TOTAL REBUILD: FIXING EDUCATION FROM THE FOUNDATION UP

I stand here today on behalf of the parents, teachers, administrators, and students—the tenants of an educational system that is now in a state of progressive collapse. This presentation is therefore not a routine assessment of an education system under pressure. It is a forensic examination of a system in continued decline.

I stand not as a politician, but as a forensic engineer, assessing the complaints of those who occupy a structure called education, a structure now at risk of collapsing upon itself.

Constrained by the 30 minutes allotted, today's task is not to propose solutions or outline architectural designs for reform. Instead, it is to:

1. Examine the integrity of the structure
2. Identify its failures
3. Determine whether those charged with its management have acted with the seriousness required

What emerges from this assessment is not a series of isolated failures, but a consistent pattern of breakdown across every level of the system.

A functional education system operates as a multi-level structure, developing human potential from early childhood through to tertiary education, and ultimately exiting onto the bridge of productive participation in the economy. In Jamaica, that structure is deteriorating at every stage.

Upper Floor: Tertiary Level and Workforce

At the tertiary level, only 19 percent of individuals aged 19 to 24 are enrolled in tertiary education, indicating that over 219,000 are not. In functioning systems, this figure ranges between 40 and 50 percent. The comparative figures for Barbados and Trinidad are 65 percent and 36 percent respectively.

Additionally, only 16 percent of the labour force holds a university degree, and youth inactivity continues to rise, with over 124,000 young Jamaicans not engaged in education, employment, or training. Neither the elevator nor the stairs appear capable of facilitating the transition of graduates at the required scale.

The labour force reflects this failure. The number of individuals with no qualifications has grown significantly, increasing from approximately 727,000 in 2020 to 887,000 in 2025. This represents a structural weakening of the economy, where participation is increasing, but capability is not.

Herein lies the root of our productivity challenge—not in capacity, but in limited competence, driven by a failing system. These figures do not include the over 700,000 Jamaicans who have withdrawn from the labour force entirely.

Indicator	Jamaica
Tertiary Enrollment (19–24)	19%
Labour Force with Degree	16%
Youth NEET (Inactive)	124,000+

The labour force reflects this failure. The number of individuals with no qualifications has grown significantly, increasing from approximately 727,000 in 2020 to 887,000 in 2025. This represents a structural weakening of the economy, where participation is increasing, but capability is not. Herein lies the root of our productivity issues. Not in capacity but in limited competence due to a derelict system. It is important to note that these numbers of work force under preparation does not include the over 700,000 Jamaicans that has withdrawn themselves from the labour force.

Year	Workforce with No Qualifications
2020	727,000
2025	887,000 (+22%)

Year	Outside the Labour Force
2025	714,800

Technical and Vocational Education

Technical and vocational education, which should act as a corrective mechanism, has itself failed.

Of over 137,000 trainees enrolled in 2024/2025, only about 53,969 are certified, a success rate of approximately 39 percent. This is well below global benchmarks and

even below the 45 percent average highlighted in a damning Auditor General’s report tabled in 2020.

At the time of that audit, the targeted certification rate was between 70 and 80 percent. However, following findings of underperformance, rather than improving outcomes, the institution reclassified the original targets as “stretch goals” and lowered expectations to 45 to 50 percent. Even this revised and unambitious target was not met.

Additionally, where certification occurs, it is concentrated at the lowest levels, with approximately 70 percent at Level 2 and fewer than 3 percent reaching Level 4 or above. The system therefore fails to support upward progression and high-level competence.

HEART/NSTA Metric	Value
Enrolment (2024/25)	137,442
Certified	53,969
Success Rate	39.3% (OECD Benchmark: 62%)
Certifications at Level 4+	<3%

Band	Typical TVET Outcome (Certification)
High-performing systems	70–80%
Functional systems	60–70%
Transitional systems	50–60%
Jamaica (NCTVET)	~39–40%

Secondary Level

At the secondary level, only 19 percent of students leave with five CSEC subjects, including Mathematics and English. This is equivalent to a GED in the United States, meaning that over 23,000 students each year leave without the minimum acceptable standard.

Mathematics and English outcomes reveal deeper problems. While pass rates among those who sit the exams may appear moderate, the proportion of the full cohort passing is significantly lower. In 2025, only about 24 percent of the enrolled cohort passed Mathematics. English results appear stronger, but even here, only about half of the full cohort achieves a pass.

These results expose a pattern of presenting statistics in a way that obscures structural weaknesses. A deeper analysis shows that these are the lowest enrollment and sitting levels in over two decades. When assessed against equivalent birth rates, the data reflects increased dropouts and declining performance, despite official narratives suggesting otherwise.

Year	Enrolled Cohort	Sat Exams	Passed	% of Total Cohort
2023	35,768	21,857	9,866	27.6%
2024	33,564	19,529	7,817	23.3%
2025	32,339	17,831	7,826	24.2%

Primary level

One level down reveals the same pattern of underperformance and systemic failure.

By the time students reach the end of primary school, deficiencies are already entrenched. At Grade 4, only 65 percent achieved literacy mastery in 2025, down from 84 percent in 2015.

By Grade 6, over 10,000 students fail to achieve basic proficiency in English, and over 12,000 fail to achieve minimum proficiency in Mathematics.

Thousands of students are already behind before entering secondary school, and fewer than 60 percent of students achieve basic proficiency across all subjects.

Primary Indicator	Outcome
Grade 4 Literacy (2025)	65% (Down from 84% in 2015)
Grade 6 English Failures	10,000+ Students
Grade 6 Math Failures	12,000+ Students

Early Childhood: The Foundation

The origin of the collapse lies in the foundation, at the early childhood level.

Of approximately 29,729 four-year-olds assessed in 2024, only 54.4 percent met all expected developmental milestones. Additionally, 19 percent of enrolled students were not assessed.

When adjusted to the estimated age cohort, only 37 percent of children were assessed as having fully met all expected developmental milestones. This indicates that a significant proportion of children are entering primary school without the necessary developmental readiness.

More concerning is that these deficiencies are largely environmental and structural, not biological. The system is failing children before formal education even begins.

Access remains limited, particularly for children aged 0 to 3. Provision is heavily dependent on private and community operators, making access contingent on the ability to pay.

Only about 15 percent of institutions are fully certified, and funding remains at approximately 0.24 percent of GDP, far below the international benchmark of 1 percent. Additionally, fewer than 19 percent of teachers at this level hold a bachelor’s degree.

Early Childhood Assessment (2024)	Value
Total Four-Year-Olds Assessed	29,729
Met All Milestones	54.4%

Feature	Jamaica	International Standard
Public Funding (% of GDP)	0.24%	~1.0%
Fully Certified Institutions	15%	Universal
Degree-Holding Teachers	18.7%	Majority

Human Capital Impact

The cumulative effect of these failures is reflected in Jamaica's human capital outcomes.

According to the World Bank, a Jamaican child can expect to complete 11.4 years of schooling. However, when adjusted for learning quality, this is equivalent to only 7.1 years. This represents a loss of 4.3 years of effective education.

As a result, a child born today is projected to achieve only 53 percent of their potential productivity, compared to what would be possible with adequate education and healthcare

Contributing Structural Gaps

These outcomes are driven by persistent structural gaps:

- Technology integration gap: limited use of digital tools restricts access and scale
- Absenteeism gap: lost instructional time disrupts learning continuity
- Nutrition gap: hunger affects concentration and performance
- Teacher availability gap: shortages and migration reduce instructional quality
- Access to learning materials gap: limits independent learning
- Homework gap: reduces reinforcement and mastery
- Knowledge gap: weak foundations prevent progression

In practice, students may receive as little as one minute of digital learning per day. Between 25 and 33 percent arrive at school hungry. Absenteeism can reach 35 percent in some regions. Teacher shortages continue to worsen due to migration and attrition.

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As it pertains to the technology gap, students in some cases have access to as little as one minute per day of digital learning. There is a nutrition gap, with 25 to 33 percent of students arriving at school hungry. There is an attendance gap, with absenteeism rates reaching up to 35 percent in some regions. There is a teacher availability gap, driven by rising resignations and migration. There are also gaps in parental involvement, access to learning materials, perceptions of safety, and student motivation.

It is in the deliberate, sustained effort to close these gaps that the solutions to the education crisis lie. Yet the responses have been inadequate. Programmes exist, but they are underfunded, poorly implemented, or misaligned with the scale of the problem. Nutrition support remains insufficient. Technology access is more symbolic than transformative. Transportation systems have not significantly improved attendance. The pattern is clear: instead of correcting failure, the system lowers expectations.

First swing of the sledgehammer.

These failures at the early childhood level are particularly indefensible when measured against the evidence. The returns are not theoretical. They are proven.

For every dollar invested in early childhood development, the return can reach as high as seventeen dollars through reduced costs in education, healthcare, and the justice system. Longitudinal research in Jamaica shows that children who receive early stimulation earn approximately 25 percent more by early adulthood, and up to 43 percent more later in life.

Early childhood education:

- Improves cognitive development and learning readiness
- Increases academic performance
- Reduces dropout rates
- Increases lifetime earnings
- Reduces crime and social costs

The contradiction is stark. The level with the highest return remains the least funded.

Instead of committing to finding and implementing real solutions, the Government of Jamaica, and the Ministry of Education in particular, continue to paint over cracks at the foundation with misleading statements.

One example: the Minister of Education has repeated, on no fewer than four occasions, that only 108 early childhood institutions lack a degree-trained teacher. Yet the 2025/2026 Early Childhood Commission Census shows that only 1,518 ECIs have one or more trained teachers. This suggests that, across the system, well over 800 institutions are not known to have a trained teacher. Of the 2,172 respondents, 658 are confirmed to have none.

Even these figures mislead. Despite the stated policy that all teachers should be degree-trained, many of those counted are diploma-trained. Further, many trained teachers are not compensated by the government.

More recently, the Permanent Secretary indicated that the government is investing \$38 billion in early childhood education. The budget before us states \$8.5 billion.

Beyond policy and performance, this becomes a constitutional matter.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms guarantees every child the right to publicly funded tuition at the pre-primary and primary levels. This is not aspirational. It is binding.

The Charter states:

“the right of every child—(ii) who is a citizen of Jamaica, to publicly funded tuition in a public educational institution at the pre-primary and primary levels;”

A right that exists in law but not in practice is a right denied. Where access depends on ability to pay, where institutions operate below required standards, and where outcomes reflect widespread developmental failure, it cannot be argued that this right is being fulfilled.

A deeper analysis of the sector reveals the following:

Failure Type	Issue	Key Statistic / Evidence	Constitutional Breach Narrative
ACCESS FAILURE	Limited access (ages 0-3)	Only 7% in formal care	The State fails to provide access at the most critical developmental stage, undermining the universality required by the constitutional right.
ACCESS FAILURE	Unequal access	System dominated by private/community providers	Access is determined by ability to pay, meaning the right is not equally available to all children.
ACCESS FAILURE	Parent-dependent system	Schools rely on fees & fundraising	The burden of provision is shifted from the State to parents, contradicting the guarantee of publicly funded education.
QUALITY FAILURE	Low certification rate	Only 15% of institutions fully certified	The majority of institutions operate below required standards, meaning the education provided is not of constitutionally acceptable quality.
QUALITY FAILURE	Low teacher qualifications	Only 18.7% degree-trained	The system lacks the professional capacity necessary to deliver meaningful education outcomes.
QUALITY FAILURE	Low certification levels (teachers)	Majority at vocational Level 1-2	Instructional capacity is insufficient to produce competence, weakening the effectiveness of the right.
QUALITY FAILURE	Misaligned teaching methods	Overuse of rote learning	The system fails to develop critical skills, meaning education delivered is not fit for purpose.
SYSTEM FAILURE	Underfunding	0.24% of GDP	The State has not allocated sufficient resources to meet its constitutional obligation.
SYSTEM FAILURE	Limited state provision	15-18% government-operated	The State does not directly provide the majority of education, weakening its ability to guarantee the right.

Failure Type	Issue	Key Statistic / Evidence	Constitutional Breach Narrative
SYSTEM FAILURE	Non-compulsory attendance	30%-90% attendance variability	The absence of consistent participation undermines the effectiveness of education delivery, meaning the right is not realized in practice.

Conclusion

What has been presented here is not a system in need of minor reform. It is a system that is structurally incapable of delivering its intended and necessary outcomes.

For that reason, on two occasions in this House, I stated my intention to file a constitutional challenge—not as an act of malice, but as an act of duty to the Constitution, to the children of this country, and to the people of Jamaica.

Having heard the position that the current reality satisfies the constitutional guarantee, I have concluded that there is no alternative.

It is my intention to ensure that the promise made to the children of this country—a fair start—is upheld.

To this end, on Tuesday, April 7, 2026, a constitutional challenge was filed on behalf of the people of Jamaica and served on the Attorney General, the Prime Minister, and the Minister of Education.

In a just society, education is not a privilege to be managed. It is a right to be guaranteed.

Children must be placed at the centre of Jamaica's future.

I thank you.