

# RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

## **M.Ed. In TESL Program Country Informational Reports**

Produced by Graduate Students in the M.Ed. In TESL Program  
In the Feinstein School of Education and Human Development

Country: Republic of Panama

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<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/media/151472/The-instrumental-version-of-the-national-anthem-of-Panama>



# Location of The Republic of Panama

- Country located in Central America
- Borders Costa Rica and Colombia in South America
- Borders Caribbean Sea and North Pacific Ocean
- Well-known for Panama Canal located in the midsection of the country
- Tropical nation
- 28,640 square miles

## [Panama Canal Video](#)

To view video, click on link below

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/media/68302/Since-its-opening-in-1914-the-Panama-Canal-has-linked?topicId=440784>



# The People of Panama

- **Population:** 3,701,00 (est. in 2012)
- **Literacy of population over 15:** Male (2008) 94.1%; Female (2008) 92.8%
- **Schooling:** compulsory for ages 6-15 or until completion of primary school
- **Official Language:** Spanish; 14% English; Many Panamanians are bilingual.
- **Religion:** Roman Catholic 85%; Protestant 15%
- **Poverty:** about 30% live in poverty; which from 2006 to 2012 decreased 10 percentage points.

# Family in Panama

- Family and kin have a very important role in the social lives of Panamanians.
- An extreme sense of loyalty to kin begins at very young age.
- Families often reside with one another generationally.
- Birthdays and holidays are celebrated together.
- Significant life decisions are made with the family's assistance.



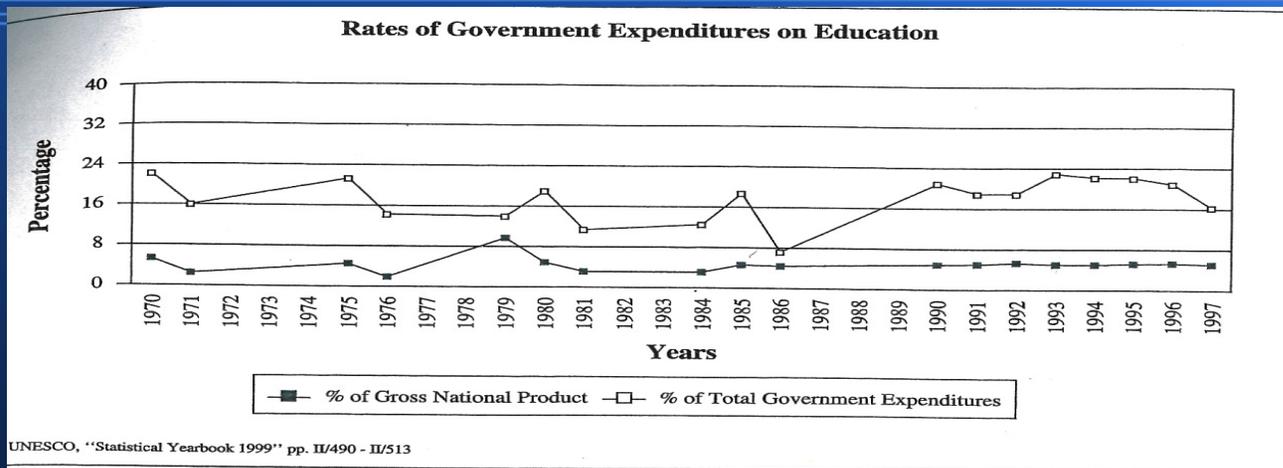


# Important Political Information

- The Republic of Panama has one president and two vice presidents who are elected by the popular vote for a 5-year term.
- Two political coalitions have struggled to govern the country: the Pro-Government Coalition and the Democratic Revolutionary Party.
- A political crisis occurred due to lack of democratization and scandal with Commander Manuel Antonio Noriega Moreno who was indicted in 1988 for drug trafficking.
- Ricardo Martinelli has been serving the country as its president since 2009. He was formerly a businessman.



# Education in Panama



- There is compulsory school attendance for children ages 6-15 or until completion of primary school.
- The school day usually starts at between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. and ends between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m.
- The school year begins in April and ends in December. Most schools divide it into four terms.
- Education is free at the primary level due to government support.

# Special Education in Panama

- Schools exist in Panama for children with special needs.
- These schools are both international and private in the larger cities.
- This private education costs about \$6000 a year or more.
- An appointment occurs prior to enrollment in a private special education school to see whether or not space exists for a child.



# Curriculum in Panama

- The academic-oriented secondary school has two tracks: the lower cycle and the upper cycle. The lower cycle is a general and exploratory track which includes the studies of Spanish, social studies, religion, art, and music. The upper cycle is a more rigorous study of the arts and sciences and leads to studying at the university.
- There is vocational type of secondary school program which provides professional and technical courses. In the mid 80s one quarter of secondary schools' population attended a vocational school.
- A university education requires a graduation certificate or baccalaureate upon completion of the upper cycle of academic study.
- Bachillerato is considered an essential component of a middle class students' education. Public secondary school offers baccalaureate degree to those completing the lower cycle education.

# Students and Teachers in Panama

## Students' Obligations

- Compulsory attendance from ages 6-15 in six-year primary cycle.

## Student Background Information

- Educational Enrollment:  
Primary: 371,250; Secondary: 221,022; Higher: 80,980
- Educational Enrollment Rate:  
Primary: 105%;  
Secondary: 69%; Higher 32%

## Teachers' Obligations

Teacher education became important in 1970s-1980s due to prior poor training.

Teachers acquire a certification after a three-year program.

Teachers are required to attend a training college following their secondary education.

Secondary teachers go to a 4-5 year university.

The Ministry of Education evaluates teachers yearly. The teachers provide self-evaluations as well.

# Classrooms in Panama

- Schools in rural areas are very basic.
- The number of children attending the school are usually high.
- Pupil to teacher ratio in the mid 80s was 19 to 26 students per teacher.
- Children are often taught in a one room classroom since it is difficult to locate teachers for remote areas due to an increase of schools at every level.
- Many living outside of the city have chosen to home school.



# Teaching of English: A Crisis

- Spanish is the official language of Panama, yet English skills are extremely valuable especially in the Panama Canal Zone.
- Among the classes of people: elite, middle, and lower some tension exists over the ability to acquire English.
- English skills are seen as a sign of social status, material achievement, and potential source of power.
- English has helped improved their country's business productivity internationally.
- The public schools which many of the middle and lower class children attend do not teach enough English. However, middle and lower SES individuals can't afford to send their children to the private schools.

# Teaching of English: A Crisis

- Wealthier people are able to send their children to private schools which teach English.
- These private schools also teach all content subjects in a bilingual format.
- Many of the poor people who are unable to afford to send their children to private schools continue to speak Spanish and see the usage of that language as power in their country.



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