



2010

National Address,

by

THE HONOURABLE T. DESMOND BANNISTER, M.P.,

MINISTER OF EDUCATION

**Broadcasted to the Nation
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**7:30 pm
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A pleasant good evening Bahamas

Introduction:

I am honoured to have this opportunity in my new portfolio as the Minister of Education, to address you at the dawn of a new calendar year. Firstly, I wish to thank all of the wonderful, dedicated teachers, administrators, students, support staff, parents and educational partners for your steadfast commitment in the pursuit to excellence in education.

I believe that every Bahamian wants to see our children learn and succeed. Our children are counting on all of us to improve their opportunities for higher academic achievement, superior technical skill performance and greater success in school. We must not disappoint them.

Once again, this will provide opportunities, challenges and successes and I ask every-one of you to join hands with me and my team at the Ministry of Education as together we will effect positive and lasting improvements to our educational system.

The Ministry of Education:

The growth and development of a country begins with education. It is our primary responsibility to ensure that every child receives an education which permits them to develop to their full potential. It is our duty as Bahamians to ensure that our children fully appreciate the extent of their privileges and responsibilities so that they may make meaningful contributions to the progress and well being of our beloved Bahamas, and to ensure that they may also have every opportunity to succeed in life.

At the Ministry of Education we seek to do this by equipping students with the requisite knowledge and skills. We also seek to promote positive and wholesome beliefs and attitudes among our students in the 161 public schools which span our archipelago. Approximately fifty-four thousand, four hundred & eighty-nine (54,489) students who range from the Pre-School, and Primary, to All-Age, and Secondary Levels rely on the advice, support, guidance and direction which our compliment of just over three thousand, five hundred (3,500) dedicated teachers impart to them on a daily basis. We are thankful for the commitment, diligence, vision and leadership which teachers and administrators provide, and will continue to work closely with them in achieving our shared goals and vision for educating our youth.

This year you will see an increased emphasis on the fundamentals in our schools. All of our schools will emphasize the five R's:

READING

WRITING

ARITHMETIC

RESPECT and

RESPONSIBILITY

It is through our focus on these fundamental subjects and enduring values that our children will acquire the requisite knowledge and skills which are critical to their development as valued contributors to the growth of this wonderful country of ours.

The Focus:

Ladies and gentlemen, while the challenges which face our educators today are awesome, we also know that the rewards of producing a generation of industrious, committed and well educated young Bahamians will enure to the benefit of our country for many generations to come. Increased positive outcomes in our schools will ensure that our country continues to develop socially, economically, and technologically, so that we as a people may

attain our natural position as global leaders in the field of education and in the global marketplace of ideas. All of us have a role to play in this vital national mission of ensuring that our children are able to achieve their dreams through excellence in education; **and I need the help of each and every one of you.**

Students:

A word for our students.....Students, **the level of violence in our schools is unacceptable.** Schools are meant to be safe havens of learning. At school each of you should feel that you are in an environment which is conducive to learning and where you will be able to develop your skills and talents while interacting with peers in a safe and supportive environment. Schools will prepare you for a life beyond the walls of the classroom so that you may one day be able to take the reins of leadership in your chosen profession and in our country. We will ensure that you are given the opportunity to develop your full range of talents in a nurturing, caring environment.

I am concerned about the prevalence of senseless violence in our schools and our communities. This is an indication that we have lost our sensitivity and that we are not exercising tolerance or restraint. It is also an indication that we are unwilling to resolve

conflict through dialogue and reason. The Bahamas is a country founded on fundamental Christian values and as we are a Peaceful, loving people; **WE WILL NOT TOLERATE** conduct which is deviant and destructive in our schools

This year, schools will be instructed to continue to emphasize the standards of conduct which are acceptable, and unacceptable for all students. Security measures will also be enhanced for your safety; and new measures will be instituted to detect and prevent wrongdoing.

Consequences of Unacceptable Behaviour:

I have faith in the young men and women who attend our schools, and I believe that most of you will adhere to levels of conduct which are acceptable and conducive to learning. **You are in the majority. Your conduct will be a credit to you, your families, teachers, your school and your community.**

On the other hand, however, there are others who may attempt to circumvent the rules. Let me advise you once again that such conduct will not be tolerated. The Ministry and our schools will take appropriate steps to ensure that discipline is maintained, and that those who refuse to comply with the rules and regulations are

punished in accordance with the level of the infraction. You should know that such punishment may range from Detention to Suspension; to Corporal punishment and Expulsion in severe cases; and **where violent, dangerous conduct is displayed such matters will be referred to law enforcement authorities.** Parents should also be warned that juvenile courts have the power to make orders against parents, and to order that parents pay fines, damages or costs whenever the court imposes these punishments on a child.

Effective immediately, in order to ensure the safety of our students, no student will not be permitted on school grounds during school hours unless they show their school issued I.D. Cards. Additionally, cellular phones and electronic devices such as ipods will not be permitted on campus, and if found will be confiscated and will be donated to charitable organizations. You have been warned and so please do not send your parents to school to ask for the return of confiscated items. They will not be returned. Chewing gum will not be permitted on any school campus either. Additionally, the most severe penalties will be reserved for any student who seeks to bring a dangerous instrument on campus. We therefore encourage each student this year to be guided by the twin pillars of respect and responsibility. Respect yourself and school

property, as well as schoolmates, teachers administrators and friends. Each of you is a leader. Decency and common courtesy are expected, and you will be required to be responsible for your actions.

Parents:

Parents, the biblical admonition to train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it is as true today as it was when the Book of Proverbs was written many years ago. I take this opportunity to encourage every parent to play an active role in the education of your children. You are their first and most important teacher. **It is your responsibility to ensure that they come to school ready to learn.** The attitude and conduct which children display at school generally a direct reflection of what happens in the home.

The prohibitions which I have outlined earlier apply to your children. Encourage them to obey the rules, rather than to seek ways to circumvent them. These rules are for their safety, and will be strictly enforced. As we enter this new year of hope, inspiration and achievement, we are asking all parents of school age children to carefully reflect on the role that they are playing in the lives of

their children. You may wish to ask yourself one or more of the following questions:

1. Am I a positive role model (providing an example that) my child can respect, or am I, by my conduct sending them the wrong message?; and
2. Am I doing all that I can do to give my children the opportunity to become well adjusted and to succeed in school?

As you reflect upon and consider these questions, strive to be honest with yourself. This is the only way that you can truly help your child.

Please also strive to work in partnership with you school and the Ministry of Education as we seek to deliver the highest standard of education to prepare your child for the future. Here are a few of the things that you can do to make a difference:

- *Review and familiarize yourself with school discipline policies;*
- *Control, guide and correct the behaviour of your children;*
- *Visit the school to discuss the performance and conduct of your children;*

- *Become actively involved in the school community;*
- *Ensure that the school can contact you during the day, and please please please get to know your child's teachers .*

Parents, with your commitment and support we will instill and reinforce the message of respect and responsibility among our students.

Conclusion:

My fellow Bahamians, I began this address tonight by stating that I believe that every Bahamian wants to see our children learn and succeed. We all have a stake in the education process. Our country cannot afford for any of us to play the role of passive, disinterested spectators. We at the Ministry of Education concede that we do not have all of the answers, and so we are open to ideas and suggestions from all who care about the education of our children, and who are willing to make a difference in their lives and contribute to the growth and development of our nation.

In this regard we will be seeking respected members of our business community and inviting them to contribute to the education of our children by participating in mentorship and leadership development programmes in our schools. Let's work

together to improve education for all. Yes, we have come a long way and have realized much success, however, there is still much more that can be done. Join hands with us. Together, we will meet the challenges which confront the education of our children. I'm looking forward to working with all of you, as we restore Respect and Responsibility and enhance Reading, Writing, Arithmetic.

May Almighty God continue to protect our students and bless our beautiful Bahamaland

Thank you and good-night.