



BRIEF REMARKS

by

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MINISTER OF EDUCATION**

occasion:

*The Rotary Club of Nassau Sunrise Celebrates
Literacy Month*

at

**British Colonial Hilton
Nassau, The Bahamas
7:00 a.m.**

18th March, 2010

Salutations:

1. President – Mrs. Karla Stubbs

2. Assistant District Governor – Mr. Felix Stubbs

3. Special Invited Guests

4. Rotarians

5. Ladies & Gentlemen

Good Morning!

I consider it a privilege to have been given the opportunity to engage in this dialogue with you on, **“Education: The Way Forward”** as you celebrate Rotary Literacy Month. Indeed, the Ministry of Education is grateful to dedicated stakeholders such as the *Rotary Club of Nassau Sunrise*, who support its goals not only to improve student learning and achievement levels, but to also inspire them to become respectable and responsible citizens.

“Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world.” It was former South African President and civil rights leader, Nelson Mandela who once uttered those words. Ladies and gentlemen, our education system is a work in progress. It cannot remain static in the face of world advancements. We have learnt many lessons from our predecessors who would have implemented initiatives and programmes, some very successfully and others perhaps not as successful in their outcomes. We have evaluated the data, listened to feedback from valuable partners such as yourselves, and are working towards the creation of a more dynamic and relevant

educational system. We are aware that the realization of such goals, however, calls for continued assessment of what is happening in our schools, and remaining abreast of global changes, particularly as they relate to education.

The Bahamas may not be amongst the major players in the global marketplace, but we do have a strong voice, and are very much affected by changes. Even though we have made many gains because of major advancements related to science, technology, and medicine, we still face hurdles relevant to poverty, immigration, the environment, crime, and abuse of all types.

Most recently, we have also experienced hardships due to the global economic downturn. Some of us may have had friends or family members who would have lost their jobs or have had their work week reduced. In spite of all of these developments, there are still mouths to feed and mortgages to pay. What happens to the children of these families? What happens to the immigrant children who come to our shores? What

happens to the children who live in poverty, and who experience abuse? What happens when they end up in our educational system and we are duty bound to accept them. Our responsibility is to meet these children where they are, and to provide them with *“an opportunity to receive an education that will equip them with the beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and skills required for work and life in a democratic society, guided by Christian values”* as our mission states.

The considerations of the Ministry of Education are complex in that every stakeholder that is: our educators, parents, students, and the public at large must have their needs met, while we at the same time, seek to enhance the system overall, so that at the end of the day we produce committed well educated industrious citizens who can give back to our country in a positive way. We seek to make each generation better than the previous, and as those of us who are in positions of leadership today will one day retire, we must put the necessary measures into place to ensure that we properly prepare our youth so that we may

leave the country in capable, caring and responsible hands.

The Ministry of Education has responsibility for approximately one hundred and sixty one (161) schools which are scattered throughout our archipelago. We are also obligated to providing a quality education to a student population of over 50,000, ranging from the Pre-School, Primary, to All-Age, and Secondary Levels. We must also serve and see to the professional development needs of just over 3,500 teachers in our employ. I accepted this job willingly, and do not take my portfolio lightly. I have come to make a difference, and as the Minister of Education I fully intend to give my best effort in the improvement and advancement of our educational system.

In so doing, there are certain decisions that I have made, and would make in the future to effect the positive changes that we all would wish to see. It is critical going forward that we, at the Ministry receive the full support of all stakeholders in this endeavour.

The needs of the system must be prioritized, in terms of short and long term goals, and we must be realistic with regards to our budget. It is possible for some changes to be made immediately which have already been done, however, where this is not possible, we ask for the support and patience of stakeholders as we seek to help our students *achieve their dreams through excellence in education.*

For the school year 2010, we have placed our emphasis on the basics with two added values which we have dubbed the “**Three R’s**” plus **Respect** and **Responsibility**. These comprise:

1. *Reading*
2. *wRiting*
3. *aRithmetic, and*
4. *Respect and*
5. *Responsibility*

We have taken this focus for two main reasons which include:

- Low literacy and numeracy levels amongst our students;

- Violence in the schools; and a general lack of tolerance and accountability as far as behaviour is concerned.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in a document entitled “Literacy: the Core of Education for All” defines a literate person as being: *“One who can engage in all those activities which literacy is required for effective functioning of his group and community and also for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his own and the community’s development.”* To elaborate further on literacy and numeracy, the Rigby Reads Diagnostic Assessment which is used to determine the reading levels of our students has shown that our students are weak in comprehension and phonics, and that many of them are not reading at their grade level. The results from 2009 indicate:

- Grade 2 –the majority of students are reading on grade level (62.5%). 11.2% are reading at Kindergarten Level, and 9.1% are reading at Grade 1 Level. 17.2% are reading at 2-5 Plus.

- Grade 4 –the majority of students are reading at Grade 2-7 Level (16.05). 13.2% are reading at Grade 4-1 Level, and 13.0% are reading at Grade 3-3 Level. 4.2% are reading at Grade 5-1 Plus.
- Grade 5-the majority of students are not reading on grade level (86.03%). 10.24% are reading at Grade 2 Level. 38.04% are reading at Grade 3 Level and 37.75% are reading at Grade 4 Level. 13.95% are reading at 5-6 Plus.

In looking at the Grade Level Assessment Test (GLAT) for grades 3 and 6 for the school year 2009, it has been reported that in the areas of Numeracy there has been a slight improvement, however, areas of concern are:

- Mathematical terminology and symbols;
- The fact that many students are taking short cuts in their work by not showing how they arrived at their answers. Students showing how they arrived at their answers in many cases could have gotten points if the work or process shown was correct;

- Students seemed unfamiliar with high order topics such as Probability.

In the area of Literacy, the biggest problem reported was that students seem to struggle with the exam itself because of reading deficiencies. Students were reported as having mastered low-level simple recall questions, and demonstrated competency in sequencing, and in differentiating facts and opinions. Skills which required higher level thinking, however, proved problematic for students.

These developments call for a more concerted effort in the training of teachers, and in the creation of programmes geared toward improving reading levels in our schools, and the eradication of illiteracy. The Ministry launched the “Read to Lead” programme in 2008 which is a joint effort between the Ministry of Education and the United States Embassy, Nassau. This initiative which has also been launched on the Family Islands has proven to be successful in encouraging more students to read, and in getting citizens from the community to be volunteer readers.

Additionally, to enhance this effort the Government has employed aides in the areas of Literacy and Numeracy to assist teachers in our schools.

We have not forgotten that our country has illiterate adults and as a result we have placed our focus directly on them through the “Literacy for Life” television programme which teaches adults how to read in the comfort of their own homes. UNESCO has reported that regional literacy levels have increased and that countries such as Honduras Nicaragua have made considerable progress. It has also been reported that adult literacy rates in Latin America and the Caribbean are high due to the overall high level of participation in education, especially in at the secondary and tertiary education levels in those countries. UNESCO’s Institute for Statistics shows that Latin America and the Caribbean are doing very well as compared to other countries in terms of literacy. It reports estimated illiteracy rates by region as follows:

- Developed countries (males and females) = just above 0%;

- Latin America & the Caribbean (males & females at 10%)
- East Asia (males just under 10% and females at 20%)
- Sub-Saharan Africa (males at 30% and females at 50%)
- Arab States (males at 30% and females at just over 50%), and
- South Asia (males at just over 30% and females at just under 60%)

Another initiative that the Government of The Bahamas, and the Ministry of Education in collaboration with its Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) partners have engaged in to improve the literacy levels in our country can be seen in the Grandfathering Programme that was launched in June 2008. This programme was designed to ensure high quality early childhood programmes, for our students, through the training of Daycare and Pre-School providers. We are committed to remaining focused in our fight to enhance the literacy levels of our students as they move through the pre-school, primary,

secondary and tertiary levels into adulthood. Our desire which we shall accomplish with the assistance of our dedicated partners such as you is to have a literate citizenry.

In our fight to improve student behavior we have sent a message to all students that anti-social and deviant activity will not be tolerated on our schools campuses. We have placed our emphasis on safety and have implemented several measures to that effect which include:

- Revision/Review and stricter implementation of the Safe School Manual;
- Enforcement of Student ID Card policy to gain entry to schools;
- Confiscation of cellular phones, ipods, and other electronic devices if brought on to campuses; and the
- Enforcement of *no gum chewing* policy at school

These are measures we were able to implement almost immediately, and I wish to inform you that others will soon be forthcoming. The Ministry of Education in its

effort to emphasize acceptable conduct, and to retrain students who cannot function within the regular system offers alternative schooling through programmes such as Transitional Alternative Programme for Students (TAPS), which is a four component system comprising, psychological, disciplinary, educational and vocational training. There is also Success Ultimately Reassures Everyone (SURE) which seeks to rehabilitate our troubled students, along with Providing Access for Continuing Education (PACE) which is geared toward ensuring student mothers continue with their studies and remain healthy. Our children must be given the best possible opportunities to succeed, and The Ministry of Education endeavours to do its best in this regard.

We believe that focus in these and other areas of the national curriculum will contribute to the improvement our national exams results. Many of our students are desirous of entering careers in the technical and vocational fields, and so we continue to partner with the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI) as they upgrade their programmes so

that they are on par with other tech/voc institutions elsewhere in the world.

The quality of teachers that we attract in the teaching profession is critical to the results that we are able to realize in education. We are therefore, actively seeking to attract and retain the best minds in The Bahamas. This can only be done through improved remuneration, training and retraining efforts, and ensuring that there is an attractive functioning career path in place.

Parents are also being urged to play a greater role in the education of their children and to become more committed partners with the Ministry of Education. We find that too many parents have left the responsibility of rearing and training their children solely to the schools. Schools are not baby sitting institutions, therefore, we encourage parents to play the role that God has chosen for them.

The Ministry is also faced with an aging physical plant which requires repair, replacement, and ongoing

maintenance. We are continuing with our assessments of the physical plants, and will prioritize in terms of the most urgent needs. We must also take our budget into consideration and make decision that will bring about lasting change.

Finally, we are encouraging all students to aspire to Tertiary Education. The Government, in partnership with the College of The Bahamas, the University of the West Indies, the BTVI and other entities have made various scholarships available to students who qualify. We want students to understand that higher education can open many more doors to success.

The Rotary is a caring partner who prides itself by service to others, adhering to ethical standards, and the advancement of international understanding and goodwill. The work which the Rotary Club of Nassau Sunrise has done and continues to do has greatly improved our communities. Of special note is the Annual Reading Fair, which is held annually during the month of March for children from Nassau Street and in the surrounding areas. This positive step of

reading to the children and donating books and school bags will certainly assist in the fight to eradicate illiteracy in The Bahamas.

The Rotary is also applauded for its humanitarian services to our local orphanages, senior citizens homes, reform schools, and hospitals. Efforts such as these will go a long way in improving our quality of life. Author, Alex Noble once said, ***“If I have been of service, if I have glimpsed more of the nature and essence of ultimate good, if I am inspired to reach wider horizons of thought and action, if I am at peace with myself, it has been a successful day.”***

We know that many more people will benefit from the good work that you do, and we encourage you to continue to build our country in this way. We, at the Ministry of Education are aware that we do not have all the answers to all the problems that we are faced with. Therefore, we invite feedback and support from all stakeholders as we seek to develop and enhance our education system and our country.

Thank you.