



BRIEF REMARKS

by

**THE HONOURABLE T. DESMOND BANNISTER, M.P.,
MINISTER OF EDUCATION**

on the occasion of:

*The Minister of Education's Literacy & Numeracy
Awards Ceremony
at*

**Church of God of Prophecy
East Street
Nassau, The Bahamas
10:30 a.m.**

20th, May 2010

Salutations:

- (1) Mrs. Elma Garraway – Permanent Secretary
- (2) Mr. Lionel Sand – Director of Education

- (3) Ms. Leanora Archer & Mrs. Patricia Collins - Deputy Directors of Education

- (4) Mrs. Ida Poitier – Special Projects Manager

- (5) Other Senior Education Officials
- (6) Other Officers from the MOE
- (7) Principals & Teachers
- (8) Honourees
- (9) Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning!

“Literacy is not a luxury, it is a right and a responsibility. If our world is to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century, we must harness the energy and creativity of all our citizens.” These are the words of former President of the United States of America, Bill Clinton.

Ladies and gentlemen, if we value our country, if we want it to continue to grow, develop and thrive economically, if we want to remain competitive with other countries, if we want to provide a good standard of living for all, then we must begin with our children. We must work steadfastly to raise the literacy levels in our schools and country. In short, we must raise the literacy levels of our citizenry. I invite each person here to join the Ministry of Education in this endeavour, as the well being of our nation is the responsibility of all of us.

Since assuming the portfolio of Minister of Education, this is the first opportunity that I have had to participate in the **Minister of Education’s Literacy & Numeracy Awards Ceremony**. I am indeed delighted to be in the presence of such exceptional students and to extend a special welcome to the students from our Family Islands which include: Abaco, MICAL District, Andros, Cat Island, Rum Cay and

San Salvador District, Exuma, Long Island, Bimini & Cays, Ragged Island, Eleuthera, Berry Islands, and Grand Bahama. It is important to note that even though in some instances your resources may be limited, you have still been able to meet and exceed the required standards of excellence in literacy and numeracy thus allowing you to be seated where you are at this moment.

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.”

I am certain that each of you is aware that the Ministry of Education is on a mission to transform our educational system by putting renewed emphasis on the basics which comprise: The **3 –“R’s”** of *Reading, Writing and Arithmetic*. We feel that concentration in these areas will help to improve student learning and achievement levels. For this reason we

decided to focus on Government Primary Schools, and to evaluate students in grades two (2), four (4) and five (5) by adopting the **Rigby Reads Diagnostic Assessment** and the **Iowa Mathematics Test**. The results from these tests assist educators and other stakeholders in ascertaining students' progress to date, and gives them some idea as to the direction that should be taken as far as the instructional programmes are concerned.

The **Rigby Reads Diagnostic Assessment** is divided into seven (7) main areas which cover: Visual Discrimination, Auditory Discrimination, Letter Recognition, Sounds-Letter Consonants Vocabulary, Comprehension, Functional Reading Levels, and Fluency Rate. Results of this Assessment for:

Grade Two

- show that the majority of students (62.5%) are reading at grade level. 11.2% are reading at Kindergarten Level, and 9.1% are reading at Grade 1 Level. 17.2% are reading at 2-5 Plus;
- females performed better than males in all areas by five (5) percentage points.

Grade Four

- the majority of students are reading at Grade 2 Level (16.5%). 13.0% are reading at Grade 3, while 4.2% are reading above grade level.

Grade Five

- 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.
- Females performed better than the males in all areas.

We note with pride that the highest overall averages attained were in the following Districts: Grade 2 - Cat Island, Rum Cay and San Salvador; Grade 4 – Grand Bahama Cays, and Grade 5 - Long Island.

The **Iowa Mathematics Test** which determines the numeracy levels of the students is divided into three (3) sections which comprise: Math Concepts, Math

Computation, and Math Problem Solving. I understand that overall three thousand, seven hundred and ninety –nine candidates from grades two (2), four (4), and five (5) have been assessed . Results for:

Grade Two

In **Math Concepts**, *Geometry* was the strongest area with an average of 72%. The strongest area for **Math Computation** was *Adding with Whole Numbers*. In **Math Problem Solving**: *Problem Solving Approaches* and *Procedures* was the strongest area with 56%. The test for second graders proved to be of average difficulty. I must congratulate the North Andros District for attaining the highest overall average at the Grade Two level.

Grade Four

The strongest area for students at this level in **Math Concepts**, was *Algebraic Concepts* with an average of 59%. In **Math Computation**, *Adding with Whole Numbers* proved strongest, and in **Math Problem Solving**, *Problem Solving (Single Step/Multiple Step)* was the strongest area for students. The test proved to be difficult for students overall.

I congratulate the Exuma District for attaining the highest overall average at the Grade Four level.

Grade Five

Algebraic Concepts proved to be the strongest area in **Math Concepts** with an average of 52%. The students did well in Adding with Whole Numbers in the area of **Math Computation**, and *Problem Solving Approaches* and *Procedures* in the area of **Math Problem Solving** proved to be the strongest. This test proved to be difficult overall for the students at this level, however, we congratulate Long Island for being the best performing District.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you can see, our collective responsibility in meeting the needs of our many stakeholders, and in remaining abreast of worldwide changes in education is quite a mammoth task. The transformation of our educational system remains a work in progress, but as you can see we have taken definite steps in determining where our weaknesses and strengths lie. In addition to reworking our national curriculum, several programmes have been launched such as the:

- (1) **“Read to Lead Bahamas Mentoring Programme”** in 2008 which is a joint effort between the Ministry of Education and the United States Embassy, Nassau that encourages students to read more by having volunteers read to them;
- (2) Hiring of **Literacy and Numeracy Assistants** to support teachers in our schools;
- (3) **“Literacy for Life”** television programme which teaches adults how to read in the comfort of their own homes;
- (4) **“Literacy Handbook”** which was a collaboration of the Ministry of Education, the Organization of America States (OAS), and the College of The Bahamas. The book is geared toward equipping teachers with strategies to assist them in improving students’ performance in the areas of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension;
- (5) **Grandfathering Programme**; an initiative between **the** Government of The Bahamas, and the Ministry of Education in collaboration with its Inter- Development Bank (IDB) partners designed to ensure high quality early childhood programmes, for our students,

through the training of Daycare and Pre-School providers.

No doubt the *Rigby Reads Diagnostic Assessment* and the *Iowa Mathematics Test* will go a long way in assisting us with the enhancement of our literacy and numeracy levels.

Boys and girls, we are proud to honour you for your outstanding accomplishments in these areas. The high scores you have attained in these assessments have set you above your peers, which make you great role models for them. We know that getting to this point was probably not easy, but through perseverance, diligence, sacrifice, and steadfast focus, you were able to rise to this level of success. I am very proud of you, and I ask everyone in the room to give these wonderful students a round of applause.

Your task now must be to improve your scores as you move to the next grade level. If your focus, dedication and determination remain the same, you can rest assured that you would have done more than half of the work required to pass all of your upcoming exams. Students, being literate and numerate are critical to your ability to access opportunities both now, and in your future. We expect all of

you to continue on to the junior and senior high school levels, and to pursue tertiary level education. You have a way to go before you can think seriously about this, but always keep at the back of your mind that you are our most precious asset, and that one day you will be in the positions of leadership. You have already made a wonderful start and I encourage you to in addition to developing your intellect, to also enhance your character by adding the values of *respect* and *responsibility*. This will make you a well rounded person and propel you even farther.

It is important to recognize also, our administrators and teachers who work tirelessly with our students to help them to shine. Usually they are behind the scenes and do not get the recognition that is due them. Educators, this evening we applaud you, and know that this occasion will spark renewed commitment in you not only for your own development but for your students as well. *Parents*, that are here, I thank each of you because it shows that you are taking the responsibility of being actively involved in the educational lives of your children quite seriously. Please continue to support their growth and development and also that of our

schools. Students, I now ask you to give everyone who has supported you along this journey, a round of applause.

To the organizers of this event, your efforts are surely appreciated, and I commend you for doing such a great job in bringing this event to fruition. Let us keep these awards going because in so doing we enhance our country through creating literate citizens.

Students, we all have very high hopes for you and challenge you to *achieve your dreams through excellence in education*. Maintain this path of success by continuing to read, write, speak, compute and communicate, and the world will be yours. Once again, congratulations on your success and best wishes for the future.

Thank you.