



Government of Bermuda
Ministry of Education

To the House of Assembly
By

The Hon. E. Wayne Scott, JP, MP
Minister of Education

Ministerial Statement
Parental Involvement Update

Date: Friday June 10th, 2016

Mr. Speaker,

Parental involvement in our children's education is without doubt a key contributing element to the quality of our education system.

Whether it takes the form of setting high expectations, reading to kids, providing support to their schools or advocating for positive change, we value parents and recognize the importance of their involvement.

We know that parental involvement makes a difference in improving our children's achievement, bettering our schools and strengthening our entire public education system.

I therefore believe that it is in Bermuda's best interests to promote and support parental involvement. The path, however, hasn't been easy, with intervening events and changes of course that have taken place along the way.

In 2012 a landmark Supreme Court ruling was made, "the Ming Decision" which focused on parental involvement. It required the Department of Education to consult with PTAs of maintained schools before teachers or principals could be transferred. It also had broader implications and left open a number of questions about the role of PTAs in school governance, and raised concerns about the possibility of having to treat PTAs as boards of governors.

After a great deal of review and reflection, our main takeaway from the “Ming Decision” was that the Ministry and Department of Education needed to finally resolve the question of what parental involvement should look like for our public education system. For too long, this had been an unanswered question which has led to a great deal of uncertainty and frustration on the part of many parents, principals, teachers and Department staff.

Resolving this question was no easy feat. Our system is comprehensive and as diverse as Bermuda itself. There is no “one way” for parents to be involved. There was no consensus on what parental involvement should look like or what course it should take. And although our focus was on parental involvement, we also had to consider the valuable input of educators and support staff who are responsible for involving parents on a daily basis.

The Ministry consulted broadly so that our stakeholders – parents, principals, teachers, and other school staff, as well as community organisations and members - had significant input into addressing this question.

We listened, and listened and listened. This is evident from some of the changes in course that were taken and by the legislative framework that was created. Again, there was no consensus, but the eventual changes struck a balance between the broad aspirations of many parents for improved access, influence and communication, the views of staff and the practicalities of running a complex public education system.

Mr. Speaker,

In March 2015, Parliament changed the Education Act 1996 to introduce a framework for parental involvement. It is no secret that these changes were in part a response to the Ming Decision, but more than that the framework was designed to provide a strong foundation for ongoing improvements to parental involvement.

This legislative framework introduced three pillars to support parental involvement, those being:

- i. The introduction of parent councils for maintained primary and middle schools;

- ii. The establishment of a parental involvement committee for the Bermuda Public School System; and
- iii. The development of a parental involvement strategy for the Bermuda Public School System.

The changes to the Education Act also removed in legislation boards of governors for maintained preschools, primary schools and middle schools. This change reflected the reality, that except for CedarBridge Academy, there were in fact no operating boards for any maintained school. This meant that following the removal of boards of governors for maintained schools, PTAs should not be treated as boards of governors, and therefore would not have the right to be consulted on principal and teacher transfers.

Mr. Speaker,

I committed to legislative changes, but also to do more to grow and support improved parental involvement.

Our introduction and support of parent councils has resulted in more opportunities for information-sharing and better communication with parents, which has been an ongoing concern for many. This year the Ministry:

- Held orientation sessions for parent council members;
- Provided greater information on school budgets and the budget process;
- Modernized and engaged parents in the school improvement process;
- Held an open question and answer session with parent councils; and
- Recently held an information session on the Cambridge Curriculum and Examinations for parent councils, and PTA leaders were also invited and participated.

This first year for parent councils has been one of growth and learning. Parent council members, including principals are regularly solicited for feedback. This information will be used to strengthen our support of parent councils.

Looking forward, the Parental Involvement Committee, which is a new advisory body made up of parents will be introduced for the next school year. Its role will be to work with the Commissioner of Education to improve parental involvement.

This is an opportunity for parents to be represented at a system-level and to show the Commissioner and the broader Department how to improve and sustain parental involvement across all schools.

Through a short selection and appointment process, parents interested in making a difference at a system-level can apply to be considered. We hope to attract a broad-cross section of applicants so that the Parental Involvement Committee is representative of the diversity of parents across the public school system. As this will be the inaugural Committee, the parents selected will have a great deal of autonomy to shape its direction. For example, some of their work will focus on what support should be provided to PTAs and parent councils; and working with the Commissioner of Education to develop a parental involvement and community engagement strategy.

The strategy will set the bar for improving parental involvement practices and lay out the Department and school's commitment to engaging and involving parents in their children's education.

While new for the Ministry, our approach to parental involvement reflects not only considerable feedback from our stakeholders, but is also adapted from a number of jurisdictions like Ontario, Scotland and others that have taken a comprehensive approach to parental involvement.

Mr. Speaker,

These changes and how they are being implemented have opened up important space for growing progressive and meaningful parental involvement. They have been designed to give parents more information, better communication and more say in what their involvement should look like.

I would like to thank the parents and school staff who are involved and engaged and would like to encourage more parents to get involved to help improve our system in a collaborative fashion.

Our efforts to improve the education system will only be bolstered by increased parental support and participation. - **Thank you !**