



Ministerial Statement

To The House of Assembly

By

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Minister of Education

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Tabling of a Bill entitled 'Education Amendment Act 2021'

Friday March 5th, 2021

Mr. Speaker,

Bermuda's economy continues to be dominated by international business and tourism. Additionally, we know that over the years the trades have also undergirded steady growth in the economy. There are a variety of career paths in these sectors and our responsibility as a Government, as educators and as a community is to equip our children with the tools to choose those careers that drive and sustain this economy. Honourable Members and the public will note that the Bill to be tabled today is specific in setting out some of the areas of instruction which our children will receive.

Mr. Speaker,

The cornerstone of this aspect of education reform will be to provide, for the first time, instruction for our children that directly correlates to the very careers that drive the economy in their country. We are determined that our children will not be spectators to the success of others but will have the fighting chance to join top level tertiary institutions and technical and vocational schools, where they will arrive already familiar with the careers and studies in these areas.

Mr. Speaker,

Before coming into power, this Government made an earnest promise to Bermuda and her people. This was to "*Reform public education by phasing out middle schools and introducing signature schools at the secondary level . . .*". Also, in the 2020 Speech to the Throne, the Government indicated that it would advance a Bill to give effect to the necessary changes to the public school system. While these changes will eventually see our system move from a 3-tier to a 2-tier system, the ultimate objectives go far beyond the structural changes that we need. We will dramatically improve and transform the quality of public education and lifetime opportunities for each and every young person in Bermuda.

Therefore, **Mr. Speaker,**

It will be my greatest privilege as Minister of Education to table the Education Amendment Act 2021 later today. The Bill brings to this House, for the consideration of its members, the first legislative step in delivering the Government's commitment to phase out middle schools, introduce signature schools and move from a 3-tier to a 2-tier public education system. In advance of the future debate on the Bill, there are 3 main points that I would like to emphasize for the Legislature.

Point 1 - This Government is serious about transforming public school education.

This is demonstrated not by our commitments, but by the delivery of those commitments – delivery with clarity, quality, fidelity and perseverance.

Point 2 - We are serious about education because we value young people and Bermuda. As a country, we have failed our young people, and have done so for generations. This failure precedes the advent of middle schools. It is as old as the provision of education on this Island.

It *was* not and *is* not good enough to provide quality education to some, but not to all – this is inequity. It was not good enough to label some schools as elite and some students as bright. It was not good enough to make decisions that would send students on a path of no return based on results of a test taken at 11 years of age, or to say that a child can *only do this* or *only do that* based on our misperceptions of their abilities and potential.

It was not good enough to undermine the success of students and schools who beat all expectations of them. And it was not good enough to pretend that there was ever a thing such as 'separate, but equal.' Because we have *never* had true equity across education in Bermuda. *Never.*

and, **Mr. Speaker,**

Point 3 - The changes we are making are absolutely what we need in Bermuda, for our young people, their families, our economy and our entire society. We know that the world continues to change, but the pace and complexity of that change is only accelerating; and, education hasn't kept up. Our parents and grandparents likely got a job at a young age and kept that job or stayed in a particular industry for their entire career.

Many of us may have changed jobs a few times, and some of us have made major career changes. But this has not been the norm. Young people are not going to have the one or two jobs that our parents had; or the few jobs that we had. They will have multiple jobs over their lifetimes, not only by choice, but by necessity.

Mr. Speaker,

It is our obligation as a Government to prepare our young people for the jobs of today and tomorrow. This requires us to teach and develop the body of skills and knowledge that are transferrable across occupations going into the future. We will not only develop knowledge, but ‘real world’ applicability of knowledge and skills. We will not just focus on employment, but employability; and, we will do this for each and every senior school student.

Therefore, beginning in September 2022, we will introduce the first two signature schools. Each senior school will have one or more ‘signatures,’ referred to in the Bill as “signature learning programmes.” The selection, design and future delivery of signatures will be based on global social, economic and environmental trends that are shaping the workforce internationally, and right here in Bermuda.

These signatures will reflect career pathways for students and be based on sectors of the economy with potential growth and sustainability; and, clusters of skills essential to developing graduates with competencies that are, and will be in demand in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker,

We have already identified in the Bill, sectors of the economy upon which certain signatures will be based. These are *tourism, finance, insurance, and trades* - pillars of our economy and community. These signatures reflect our past and present, and more critically, as evidenced by research and analysis, they are our future. Examples of signatures that are skills-based include STEAM and entrepreneurialism.

It is important to emphasize and make clear that while signatures are career focused, this focus includes foundational skills, such as creativity, communications, collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking, digital fluency, and social emotional learning. This isn’t only about creating employability, but recognizes that the skills and attributes of the graduates that we want to develop are the same as the kinds of young people and citizens we want to thrive and shape Bermuda’s future.

Mr. Speaker,

Although we have already determined four signatures, we will engage and consult our community in modern, progressive and meaningful ways before decisions are made on additional signatures. Engagement has already occurred with the Department of Workforce Development, the Learning First Design Teams, and others. It will continue throughout this process, and into the future. And in time, signatures will change and evolve as Bermuda and the world changes and evolves. In addition to introducing signature schools, and signature education, the Bill also begins phasing out of middle schools. It does this by moving M3 level to S1, through a simple change in the age ranges for middle and senior school. This change will be effective for the introduction of signature schools in September 2022.

Mr. Speaker,

I would also like to give reassurance to Members of the House, students and parents that there will be a choice of signatures. I have mentioned many times before, that Education Reform will be conducted in phases, and that we will inform, communicate, listen and consider, as we make necessary changes for our education system.

We understand and value the importance of executing a sound transition process for staff and students as these changes are implemented. Therefore, a transition plan will be developed and communicated well in advance of these changes.

Mr. Speaker,

Today is a momentous day for Bermuda. As a collective body of representatives for the people of Bermuda, we are delivering not only on our promise to reform public education in Bermuda, but we are providing a springboard for the collective aspirations for ALL young people in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker,

We will continue to be relentless in our focus and efforts to ensure that we not only talk of change, but deliver change as a moral, economic and social imperative for the future of our young people, and the future of Bermuda.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker.**