



**Government of Bermuda
Ministry of Education**

To the House of Assembly

By

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Minister of Education

Ministerial Statement

The Bermuda Public School System – Education Reform Update

Friday, December 11th, 2020

Mr. Speaker

This morning I rise to provide my Honourable colleagues with an update on the Government's commitment to reform the Bermuda Public School System.

Mr. Speaker,

The overarching drive to the Government's 2020 election commitment to reform education, is developing and ensuring high-quality and equitable education for all of Bermuda's children. This must be the priority of everyone. We must put in place a revived, recalibrated, and repurposed education system having a foundation that can bear the tests of time for future generations. That is, for our children, our children's children, and their children in that all students no matter how they learn, they are educated to lead personally and professionally, compete locally and contribute globally. Our children must be positioned for success.

Mr. Speaker,

The current education system is not serving our children or our educators at the highest level of excellence which they deserve. Our public schools must be places where students are put first, and educators are valued. Our schools must be places where students not only learn, but they also feel safe to express themselves, to take risks, to pursue their interests, and maximize their potential. Our students must be challenged to be innovative, dynamic, critical thinkers, entrepreneurs, and intellectuals. Our educators must be equipped with ample teaching tools, to help them deliver an education curriculum with creativity, with passion, and create a positive learning environment.

Mr. Speaker,

I am sure my Honourable colleagues in the House this morning will agree with me that a shift is needed in our public education system. We must do things differently for our children and the future of this Island. We cannot continue to do the same thing over and over and expect a different result as we know where that leads to. That is not the direction we will travel. The time is now **Mr. Speaker**. Change is inevitable and change is forthcoming for our public-school system.

Mr. Speaker,

With this in mind, the work needed to help bring this kind of change to fruition for the benefit of our students and our educators will be both impactful and wide-reaching. So this morning, I am providing my Honourable colleagues with an update on four initiatives of Education Reform change, that are either in train or about to start:

1. The development of an Education Authority;
2. The implementation of the Learning First Program;
3. The phasing out of middle schools and introduction of signature schools; and,
4. A consultation process on the introduction of parish primary schools.

Mr. Speaker,

Let me start with the Education Authority development and what has happened to date. A committee consisting of the Chairman and Deputy Chair of the Board of Education, Members from the Bermuda First Education Committee and our Education Consultant, Innovation Unit have been hard at work on this initiative. As outlined in the 2020 election platform, in keeping with a recommendation from Bermuda First, and with the support of the Bermuda Union of Teachers and the Bermuda Public Services Union, an Authority for public education, which will strengthen the performance management of all schools and persons at the administrative, classroom and student support levels within the Department of Education is being developed. This team has been working diligently, looking at several options and will continue to work on the Authority to ensure that our schools in the new system will run efficiently, effectively and to the highest standards possible.

Mr. Speaker,

Next, I will discuss the implementation of the Learning First Program. I remind this Honourable House that one of the Government's 2020 Platform initiatives for Education Reform is implementing the Learning First Programme which involves a wide range of stakeholders, that is educators, school leaders, parents, business persons, unions, cultural and community partners collaboratively working together to design an improved learning environment for public schools.

In preparation for launching this programme, the Learning First website, www.learningfirstbda.com was established in August to gauge interest from our educators, give them some insight of what the programme entailed and encourage their participation. During mid-October, the Learning First Governance Team released advertisements via the print media, email and social media platforms inviting the general public to visit the website and complete an expression of interest to become a part of a school design team. The application process was intentional to secure persons who not only had an interest in public school education, but who could also contribute at a high level and lend value to the design of improved learning.

Mr. Speaker,

There is a genuine hunger in our community to see change in public school education. The response to the advertisement to participate in this programme was overwhelming, with 175 expressions of interests received and just under 90 applications sent in. From this we now have a Design team of close to 60 persons with a diversity of knowledge, skills and technical abilities working on the new vision for public school learning. Due to the overwhelming response, follow up with the remaining applicants was undertaken to advise them there will be several opportunities forthcoming where they can participate in the Learning First Programme.

Mr. Speaker,

The execution of the Learning First Programme Design Team members officially commenced the week of October 19th steered by the Ministry of Education's Governance Team and a team of four Education Consultants from Innovation Unit who were on Island. **Mr. Speaker,** I remind my Honourable colleagues and the general public that in March this year I announced that the Ministry had contracted with the consulting firm Innovation Unit Ltd, that had a proven track record of more than 15 years' experience co-designing processes and methodologies for Education Systems. At the same time, I also shared we will be taking ownership of transforming our public-school system and the future education system will be designed by Bermudians via consultation with local stakeholder groups. The Consultants were hired to guide us through this change management process based on their extensive experience in designing education systems.

Mr. Speaker,

As shared earlier, the Learning First programme now comprises a Design team of 54 persons with a diversity of knowledge, skills and technical abilities working on the new vision for public school learning. They will be steered by the Ministry's technical officers on the Governance team and guided by the consultants as we navigate change in public education. The Design team has been busy at work during the past two months engaged in meetings that included: an introduction to digital reporting processes; identifying national and core educational priorities; understanding and building on the public school case for change; understanding what is design thinking; changing mindsets to design new solutions for redesigning the public school system; how to deliver better outcomes for learners, and using research to inform the school redesign process. The objective of the work is to prepare support for effective delivery of new learning experiences for our students.

Mr. Speaker,

Change is forthcoming. The Design Team members will ultimately be the Mentors and Champions for the design of learning in the public-school system.

Mr. Speaker,

During the month of November, the Design Team undertook a 360-degree assessment of the public-school system from the perspective of relevant stakeholders and community members, that is, those who know it best. The team members conducted surveys of students, teachers, principals, school leaders and businesses. This research was critical to gather key data about their experiences with public school education such as what is working well, challenges encountered, improvements needed for the System, parental engagement, community and business engagement, most significant learning experiences, and more. This data will drive the required mindset for informed decision-making during the design of system learning.

Mr. Speaker,

All of our stakeholders have been kept abreast of the objectives and specific work of the Learning First programme from the very start. Two half-day professional development sessions were held with our teachers on October 27th at the 37th Annual Conference of the BUT. The first session focused on Learning First – Glimpses of the Future, where examples were shared of schools and systems around the world tackling similar challenges as our public-school system. The second session covered Learning First – Think Like a Designer, which entailed an introduction to innovation mindsets, user research, prototyping and the importance of designing for authentic learning. I am happy to announce that the first monthly newsletter

from Learning First will be sent later today and I urge the public to visit their web site at www.learningfirstbda.com to sign up by hitting the subscribe button.

Mr. Speaker,

A stream of information meetings about Learning First were held with the Department of Education staff, School Principals, the Board of Education Executive, Directors of the National Education Institute, and the Career Development team in the Department of Workforce Development; and various other organizations, businesses and partners to underscore the national importance of Education Reform, and the role that they play.

Mr. Speaker,

I will now speak to the initiative of Education Reform change. In 2017 and again in 2020, the Government election platform pledged to phase out middle schools and introduce a two-tier system of education that will have primary schools and signature schools at the secondary level. The signature schools will focus on the learning styles and interests of our children, including academic and technical subjects, trades, business, sports, arts and special needs education.

Mr. Speaker,

Let me first say that as stated in the 2020 Speech from the Throne, the Government will bring forth a Bill to amend the Education Act to support the decision to phase out middle schools, introduce signature schools and move from a 3-tier to a 2-tier public education system. The legislation will phase out middle school education; amend the age range for primary school education to 12 years which includes the current M1 and M2 years; introduce senior level signature school education and amend the age to start at age 13 years to include the current M3 year; and, establish exceptionalities and alternative education for students. Therefore, Primary School education will extend from P1 to P8 and Senior School education will be from S1 to S5.

Mr. Speaker,

It was anticipated the first two signature schools would be implemented in September 2021. However, we recognize that more time is needed to collect the data to determine the right signatures. The Learning First programme continues to undertake this research work. Upon completion of gathering the data there will be a need to do consultation on the signature foci. The intention to consult and engage has been further delayed due to COVID-19 unfortunately, as officers were needed to deal with the COVID-19 matters that arose in schools.

Mr. Speaker,

Changing a decades old school system does not happen overnight. We intend to reform education equitably and methodically to ensure success for all. We will take our time, measure once, twice, or as many times as needed to get this right. Therefore, to lay the firm foundations and enable the widest possible consultation and engagement with teachers, parents, young people and the wider public, ensuring a smooth transition, we will start phasing out Middle Schools and opening Signature Schools in September 2022.

Mr. Speaker,

Change is forthcoming but it is important not to rush this change and to get it right the first time. It is critical that we trial, test and refine what Signature Schools will look like and focus on,

with input from educators, students, families and the public. In early 2021, the Ministry will undertake a separate consultation process regarding the specializations for each signature school. This is to ensure that interested and affected persons have the opportunity to share their views on the signature opportunities. The signatures will be proposed on the basis of local and international research, including local and global trends, currently being undertaken by the Learning First Design Team. From September 2021, the school design teams will design key features of their signature schools which will provide sufficient lead time to September 2022 to carefully implement these new signatures, and for teachers to have the necessary professional learning to deliver the signatures to a high and consistent quality. As signature schools open, middle schools will be phased out.

Mr. Speaker,

Lastly, the initiative of Education Reform that will involve the Structural Realignment that is necessary for our system, is the launch of a consultation process on the proposals for parish primary schools. Redesigned public primary schools will expand courses and programme offerings to provide students with the range of educational experiences and services that meet international standards.

Mr. Speaker,

The vision is that each primary school will become the hub of its parish; with parents, surrounding neighborhoods and community organizations rallying around schools supporting educational programmes and initiatives. This will create strong authentic partnerships to help schools transform into places that are relevant to the needs of 21st Century learners. We are confident, and research shows that when families, community groups, businesses and schools band together to support learning, students achieve more in school and they enjoy their educational experience. The parish school model will facilitate a stronger and more resilient connection amongst students, families and communities.

Mr. Speaker,

During the consultation process, the Government will propose 10 Primary Schools, one per parish with two schools in Pembroke Parish. The maximum enrollment for each primary school will be 300 students, with the intended class size of 15 students per class. We intend to continue to co-locate preschools into primary school sites and will consider eventually merging preschools into primary schools. The class size for preschool will remain the same at 10 students per class.

Mr. Speaker,

Let me emphasize that the fewer number of primary schools will facilitate the Government delivering 21st Century Real World and Authentic Learning Facilities that are modern and which support transformative teaching and learning practices. We envision our primary schools to have instructional classrooms that are open spaces and adaptable for any type of learning style with appropriate air quality and lighting systems. These include:

- Purpose built labs/rooms for ICT, Family Studies, STEAM Education and Foreign Languages;
- Art, Music, Dance and Drama rooms;
- Parent resource rooms, Library resource center; and,
- cafeteria and mini auditorium

Mr. Speaker,

Our children deserve these type of 21st Century Learning facilities. With a smaller number of primary schools, capital funds can be better utilized and reinvested for modernising and refurbishing specific buildings that can support the delivery of 21st Century education.

Mr. Speaker,

I have presented a broad overview of the school consultation process. We understand that change will be difficult. However, the Ministry is committed to engage all of our stakeholders and the general public to provide them with the opportunity to inform the change that is needed in our public school system. The consultation document will be launched in the coming days and placed on the Ministry website for public access. The dates of the public consultation meetings will be shared in the New Year.

Mr. Speaker,

Let me close by saying that the change for public education in Bermuda is long overdue. The transformative work started with the execution of several strategies in the strategic plan for public school education – Plan 2022; that the public desired for the System. We commit to continuing the transformative work. We recognize that all of us can be challenged with change, especially change to a system that has been in place for decades. However, I strongly believe that we should remain focused on the why of the change – the vision. We want to position our children for generations to come, to lead personally and professionally, and to compete both locally and contribute globally. They are our future leaders of Bermuda and we are dedicated to seeing them achieve all of their educational needs.

Thank you **Mr. Speaker.**