

Statement to the Legislative Assembly
by the
Minister for Education, Training, Employment, Youth
Sports and Culture
Hon. Alden M. McLaughlin JP
November 19th 2007

On

Update on the Transformation Process in the education sector

Madam Speaker, Members of this Honourable house, though I have said it many times before, I cannot stress highly enough how the transformation of the education service is a journey that we must take *together* as an entire community - united in purpose and belief, and ever-cognizant of its imperative nature. Underpinning the transformation process is the notion that every child is important and deserves to be afforded the opportunity to fulfil their own unique potential.

Madam Speaker, we have come a long way since the education conference of 2005, and a great deal has been delivered thus far on each of the 10 strategies, in order to provide a world-class education system for this, and future generations of Cayman's youth.

Today, I lay before the House a mere snapshot of all that has been achieved with respect to the ongoing evolution of education.

Governance Model

Madam Speaker, whilst all those present are well aware of the introduction of the new Governance model for education in September 2007, what has *not* been reported is the immediate impact it has had on schools in every part of the Cayman Islands, in providing instant support and additional services to schools, and in turn

students. This Learning Community based support includes such aspects as Leadership and Management and teaching and learning, along with dedicated Special Needs, Facilities and ICT support.

National Curriculum

The new first ever National Curriculum will begin transitioning to schools from January 2008, with formal roll-out taking place in September of the same year. Extensive consultation at every stage of its development has maximised the support of all stakeholders, with the last consultation period finishing just last week. In preparation for this implementation, teachers are receiving a range of professional development. All primary school teachers on Cayman Brac and Little Cayman recently participated in professional development sessions on assessment in the new National Curriculum, using a method which compares students' work against the published curriculum attainment targets or levels. This session took place on Friday, November 9th and was repeated for primary school teachers in Grand Cayman on Tuesday November 13th.

These sessions take participants through a series of practical exercises using actual students' work, and comparing it against the various levels for Mathematics and English. The work is then assigned a level that indicates where the student is with respect to their capability in particular areas, such as writing, reading or numeracy.

The new curriculum, which as I have stated, will be fully rolled out in schools in September 2008, was developed in collaboration with a variety of stakeholders in education and its adoption will be mandatory for all public schools.

Early Childhood Services

Madam Speaker, the Early Childhood Services unit, formed as a result of the National Consensus document, now has 5 full time specialists on staff, and is now properly

positioned within the Department of Education Services. The team is working extremely hard on inspecting Early Childhood settings, and providing extensive professional development, guidance and coaching, as well as working in close collaboration with such agencies as Children and Family Services, and the National Parenting Programme. The Early Intervention Team has been integrated into this team, providing support for children with special educational needs at home and in other settings. Additionally, early childhood legislation is being prepared and will be laid before this honourable house during the course of the coming year.

Human Resources

Madam Speaker, the methods of recruiting teachers into the government school system has been streamlined and systemized, and a structured recruitment drive now takes place in ample time for the start of the school year. In fact, the first tranche of advertisements appear this week – months ahead of last year. What this does is maximize opportunities to secure higher quality applicants, and better ensures that new teachers entering the Cayman education system have the skills to deliver the new curriculum within 21st Century facilities. For the first time all teachers interviewed last year had to demonstrate their familiarity with ICT as part of the interview process. This proved to be very successful and is now a standard part of our recruitment process.

Going forward, because the new paradigm of teaching and learning is vastly different from the traditional 4 walls and a door model often referred to as 'cells and bells', teacher recruitment will focus on a range of skills that are able to compliment both the new teaching styles and new learning spaces.

Additionally, the orientation process for teachers is placing greater emphasis on sensitizing them to better understand Caymanian culture and lifestyle.

Careers education and guidance / scholarship secretariat

Madam Speaker,

In the two years since I have taken office huge strides have been made in the tertiary education sector, especially in the area of Technical / Vocational courses.

190 new overseas scholarships have been granted – 110 of them awarded during the past year - this is the first time ever that more than 100 scholarships have been awarded in any single year. Also for the first time ever, 4 doctoral scholarships have been granted.

Enrolment figures at the University College of the Cayman Islands show a staggering growth rate from 650 when I took office in 2005 to more than 3,600 at the start of this school year - and 95% of these students are Caymanian.

This sharp increase, in both the provision and take up of Technical and vocational programmes at tertiary level are right now providing much-needed opportunities for students, whose strengths lie outside of standard academic subject areas.

Core Business processes within the Department of Education Services

The Department of Education Services has been transformed and staff are in place to provide direct support to schools. Where necessary, service provision to students has also been markedly increased, to afford all children an opportunity to reach their full potential. For example, the area of special education had received little or no attention over several years and as a consequence of being deficient, was incapable of reaching out to those who required these types of special services the most.

Since I assumed office, steps have been taken to redress the inadequacy of the system and I am pleased to report that the number of:

- Reading Specialists has almost doubled, from 8 in 2005 to 15 in 2007
- Support assistants has risen from 29 to 70 – an increase of 41 assistants
- The number of Educational Psychologist posts has increased from 2 in 2005 to 6 this year.
- A gifted and talented teacher and a clinical psychologist have been engaged – neither of these positions existed before

- The number of Speech Pathologists has doubled
- The number of Occupational therapists has doubled
- There has been an increase in the number of Early intervention teachers
- And Madam Speaker, for the first time in this Islands history, provision has been made for specialist staff, such as an Educational Psychologist and Speech and Language Therapist to be based full time on Cayman Brac

The benefit to parents and students of having specialist services available in virtually every community is incalculable when one considers the difference it can make to a child's life. Due to these increases, interventions and assessments now take place much earlier and are based on the needs of the individual.

Educational Statistics and Data (SIMS)

Madam Speaker, there are many 'firsts' taking place as a result of the education transformation process, and many more are on the way. Schools' Management software is being introduced starting this month that will allow the tracking of every student in the system from Kindergarten to Year 12 and on into tertiary education. This tried and tested programme will allow comprehensive support for school management and generate data in almost any form regarding student performance, students progress, their results, as well as be used to write reports and monitor their attendance, special education needs and disciplinary record. It will also allow clear communication of data between all government schools and the Department of Education Services.

This data will enable parents and teachers to make informed decisions based on accurate information and provides yet another method for ensuring students are given every opportunity to achieve their full potential. Additionally, having a consistent system will improve management of schools and effect full integration between primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

Teacher Training and professional Development

Madam Speaker, to facilitate the ongoing professional development of teachers, the Ministry is supporting UCCI in the creation of a faculty of education. In September of this year, UCCI began offering a post graduate diploma in Education specifically for teachers, and we expect this to be only the first of such courses.

Information Communication Technology

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is most concerned that our students and teachers have access to, and total familiarity with, high level ICT resources. There is no doubt that the integration of ICT throughout the curriculum plays a significant part in helping students work and raising standards. ICT cannot be an “add on” – students these days expect to use it. To support this, each school is trialling the use of a range of ICT software and hardware which they will evaluate during the course of the year. This information will help guide us in ensuring we equip our schools with resources that work for our students in the Cayman Islands.

We have also introduced a common email platform for all staff in government schools which is already supporting better communication and keeping all staff up to date.

Even in the Ministry we have embraced this technology – our website routinely receives 5,000 “hits” a month and the relatively new education blog; “Building Caymans Future” has been viewed by 42 countries in the last month.

Closing

Madam Speaker, as you are aware, over the course of the past 10 days, public meetings have taken place in every District, including Cayman Brac, and I have spoken at length about what has been achieved since the process of transforming education in the Cayman Islands began.

Clearly, judging by the questions, comments and discussions that took place, there is tremendous support across the Cayman Islands in respect of the new school

facilities. I would like to thank everyone who came out to the meetings for their support, and I am pleased to share brochures outlining the work that is currently underway with this honourable house.

Madam Speaker, in opening this presentation, I stated that the transformation of the education service is a journey that we must take *together as* an entire community, united in purpose and belief, and ever-cognizant of its imperative nature. I end with those same thoughts and add that transforming education to benefit our children and our communities is not optional.... It is our obligation.