

**Statement to the Legislative Assembly
2nd Meeting 2011/2012**

By the Honourable Rolston Anglin, JP

Minister of Education, Training and Employment

Government High School Examination Results

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**MINISTRY OF
EDUCATION, TRAINING,
& EMPLOYMENT
CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT**

Madame Speaker, I wish to draw the attention of this House to the achievements of students from government high schools in their recent public examinations.

For over 20 years now we have measured the success of students leaving our government schools on the basis of their accumulated results by the end of year 12, when they are usually 16 or 17 years of age. The international benchmark for achievement, and progression to further study, is a threshold of five (5) Level Two (2) passes – also known as “High level passes” or “O Levels”. Within government schools these Level 2 passes are achievable at grades 1-3 in the Caribbean Secondary Examinations accredited by CXC, A*-C in GCSE or IGCSE examinations, or at Level 2 in BTEC or IMI. I wish the house to recognise here that these examinations are all internationally recognised qualifications, and as such are taken by many thousands of students worldwide. As such we are measuring our students and our system against externally verified and quality assured criteria, applied internationally, so that there can be no question of the ability of our students to compete on a level playing field.

I am very pleased to report to the House that for the first time our schools have recorded a national figure for all government school Year 12 students of over 40% for 5 Level 2 passes, the final official national pass rate for government schools reaching 45% overall. This represents a pass rate of 43% by the 310 students in Grand Cayman and 67% by the 32 students on Cayman Brac.

In other words, this means that 154 students left our school system this year having achieved that benchmark of success. In 2006, the equivalent figure was 84 students. That means 70 more students who earned the opportunities which school success can bring.

Among our highest achievers, we recognize 76 Honours students who achieved at least 7, but in some cases as many as 14 Level 2 passes. It is worth noting that one student Katherine Lazzari from Cayman Brac not only achieved 12 passes with 11 at Grade 1 or A/A*, but also received the top mark in the Caribbean for CXC Integrated Science exam when she was in Year 11. Again and again, we are proving that our government school graduates are able to successfully compete with their peers, not only at home, but globally.

To put this in perspective, only 10 years ago both high schools were recording pass rates in the low 20 percent range using this benchmark. John Gray High School averaged only 25% from 2001-2008, with a high of 29% in the post Ivan year, when many students were not included due to not being on island, or in regular school, after the storm.

The House should also note that the figures that we have used for the past 4 years recognise and record all the students who are registered for school at the beginning of the year, no matter whether they attend regular school or are in alternative settings such as Eagle House or the Young Parent Programme. This is important in as much that some systems, and some schools, inflate their figures by excluding challenging students from the statistics. We have ensured that our figures reflect all our students at year 12 regardless of age, ability or background.

Madame Speaker, I would hope that all of us can recognise the level of effort required to bring about this improvement in standards. This is of course a reflection of the work and ability of our students, but it also has involved considerable work by the Ministry, the Department of Education Services, the school administration and the teachers. We do not, for one minute, consider the job to have been completed. We continue to strive for excellence and recognise that many other education systems are still outperforming ours. We therefore commit to further improvements in the results next year and beyond. However, it is only right and fair to commend and encourage those who are involved in this process when improvements have been achieved.

Madame Speaker, these results are not just the product of greater effort alone, but also represent the outcome of a strategic approach by the Ministry, DES and schools to raising standards, which will now be brought in to even sharper focus still by our newly appointed Senior School Improvement Officers. From the ESAU reports of our High Schools – CBHS as it was then - in 2004, and JGHS in 2006, clear recommendations for school improvements were identified. For example, in JGHS students were not being entered for examinations at the appropriate level in many subjects. Indeed the average over the 2001-2008 was only 4.6 CXC or GCSE subjects entered per student. Clearly we were going to struggle to achieve the international benchmark of 5 or more subjects at Level 2 with such low levels of expectation, and for this reason all students in mainstream high schools are now entered for an average of at least 7 examination subjects at the appropriate level.

This decision was not plucked out of thin air, but was based on clear data from cognitive testing which showed that all of the students in our high schools have the ability to achieve grades at either Level 1 or Level 2 in CXC or GCSE papers. Indeed this has subsequently proven because for the past 3 years we have been able to celebrate 99% of high school students leaving school with such grades, compared with a range of 75-87% in the past. The handful of students who do not achieve a GCSE or CXC grade are almost invariably those who, for various reasons, do not show up for the exams at all.

A significant part of the new strategic approach has been to work with the schools to select examination courses that are most relevant and appropriate to the interests and aspirations of our students. This process has also involved representatives from the business community being consulted on exam selection, and feeding back their opinions on what is most relevant and appropriate to their needs. Madame Speaker the 3 R's of Relevance, Rigour and Relationships sit hand in hand with the traditional understanding of these terms. Relevant courses engage our students and encourage them strive for excellence because they can personally see the importance and application of their studies.

In terms therefore of rigour, in the past it is fair to say that too much of the responsibility for exam preparation in some subject areas was left to the students. Whilst we encourage independent learning, there is a big difference between being independent and being left to work everything out alone. Our schools on Grand Cayman have taken the lead from best practice overseas, and from their colleagues on Cayman Brac and in private schools, in providing much greater structure in terms of examination preparation. Classes are now allocated for school based assessment, rather than requiring students to work on the tasks at home. Much greater emphasis is placed on the use of past papers and examination questions – and from the very outset of the course rather than leaving it to the end. Targets are now set for departments to strive to achieve based on the students prior performance and predicted outcomes. In addition, revision classes, revision guides and online study sites are being used more extensively to support the students' revision practice.

Madame Speaker these approaches are being employed for the benefit of our students and represent a far more rigorous, professional approach to examination courses than previously.

Madame Speaker, relationships are also a key factor in successful outcomes for students – most notably relationships between student and students, students and staff, staff and parents – and not least students and their parents. The outcomes of all our students, is all our responsibility. As a consequence much work is being undertaken to involve all stakeholders in the education of our children, and to improve the interactions between them, for example all secondary school staff have received training de-escalation and non-confrontational methods of conflict resolution. This training is part of the ‘Behaviour for Learning’ strategy which has substantially reduced the number of serious disciplinary incidents in school and hence the number of suspensions, so in turn the reducing the negative impact of poor behaviour on students’ outcomes.

Madame Speaker, in celebrating the success of today, inevitably I am drawn to reflect on the potential for further achievement in the future. This government strives for higher standards still, and is confident that these are attainable. Again, this confidence is not groundless, but is based on sound data.

The model for secondary education on Grand Cayman was transformed last year, from the previous 3 year middle school plus 3 year high school structure to an “all through” 5 year high school plus 1 year further education structure. As previously, exams are reported on the accumulated results of the 6 years of study. We therefore have a baseline figure on Grand Cayman for results achieved at the end of Year 11. I am pleased to announce that these have also significantly improved.

Indeed 30% of students have achieved the 5+ Level 2 passes threshold already and it is worth noting that this alone would have been a national record only 4 years ago. Many more students will add the extra grades they require over the course of this coming year. On Cayman Brac the figures are also encouraging for passes achieved by Year 11, and they too are on track for sustained high quality outcomes.

Madame Speaker, we also need to recognise the success of The Cayman Island Further Education Centre, which is effectively our first vocational school. Over 200 students studied vocational courses last year in subjects such as: Information Technology, Health Care, Travel and Tourism, Business and Creative Media and received good grades. Indeed 69% completed their courses and many students achieved 4 additional passes at the very highest grades at Level 2. We have expanded the provision this year at CIFEC and built on our experience last year. It is expected that the pass rates at BTEC will significantly improve for 2012.

On a more fundamental note, we continue to strive, within Early Years and Primary schooling to improve on the foundations of knowledge and understanding. The Literacy strategy continues to build on success, an early years strategy has been implemented this year, and a new, comprehensive national numeracy strategy, which bridges primary and secondary education, is under construction. Our results for testing at the end of primary education show an increase in attainment level for both Mathematics and English over the past year which again gives us the confidence to predict further gains in Level 2 passes going forward.

Madame Speaker, I would hope that both sides of this house would join me in commending our educators for the work that they do for the students of the Cayman Islands. I think we all recognise what a demanding job it can be at times and equally we also note what a significant impact education has for the continued success of this country. I am pleased to celebrate the successes outlined today and exhort you to join with me in supporting our educators, our students, our parents and our communities as our education system continues to strive for excellence.

Madame Speaker I thank you