



**2020/2021**  
**Budget Contribution**  
**by**  
**The Hon. Jeffrey L. Lloyd**  
**Minister of Education**  
**House of Assembly**  
**June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

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May it please, The Hon. Speaker:

The Grace, peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, love of God, fellowship of HS, be with us all.

I am grateful to the Divine essence, the Great I AM, for the privilege to serve our Bahamian people, and to present the 2020/21 Budget for the Ministry of Education – A budget that sets a blueprint for prosperity, industry, discipline and success for many years to come.

This contribution today enfleshes the magnificent work of our excellent team at the MOE, under the dynamic and indefatigable leadership of Mrs. Lorraine Armbrister, PS, and Her Team in the Ministry, and Mr. Marcellus Taylor, Director, and His Team. I am because of them, and to them, I owe every success that we have achieved.

I am forever grateful the good people of the South Beach Constituency for their matchless encouragement, inspiration and support.

Mr. Speaker, I beg your indulgence to publicly thank some people who are near and dear to me for their continued support as I serve the Bahamian people. One such individual is my wife, Mrs. Michelle Mitchell-Lloyd, whose patience is beyond measure as my duties extend from the sunrise and well after sunset. It calls for great sacrifices, but she encourages daily to live in service for our nation. To My daughters: Sanjay, Shakti, Shiva, Kendra and Aisha, and our grandchildren for their powerful source of light and love.

I again thank the good people of South who continue to open their homes and their hearts as I walk through their neighbourhoods listening to their concerns and suggestions. I do not take them for granted hence I make great attempts to balance my ministerial duties with that of being an attentive representative, and the Constituency Team led by Ms. Shirley Farrington and her executive Members.

From the beginning of my tenure as MP for SB, I made it my business to be as available as possible. That's is why every Thursday, when Im in town, Im in the Office, until the last person leaves, assisting, encouraging them, teaching them to be their own fishers of men. Giving them a fish, without also teaching them to fish, is demeaning. If the gospel ethic is to be ever believed, much less, lived, it is the truth of empowerment through God's Holy Spirit. The last promise Jesus made to His disciples in Acts Chapter 1:8 was “ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.’

Promptly Peter and the Other Apostles manifested God's resident power through the many miracles they performed in His name. The promise of that power within us is revealed throughout the New Testament. Whether in the first chapters of Colossians, Peter, Philipians or Ephesians, His word impels us into a transfigured future like the first Chapter of Ephesians which states:

***“ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will, to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”***

It is unbiblical to make someone dependent. Its an insult to their innate divinity and divine grace. Every month, there is a Constituency meeting, to which all are invited. Come, share your ideas, and hear whats going on. Every three months, there is a Town meeting – discussing topics of relevance and importance in their lives – whether its about scholarship, about Hurricane preparedness, and so on.

One of the things, we noticed in SB, was the huge number of derelict and abandoned vehicles throughout the community. Since 2017, over 317 such vehicles have been removed. Two major clean-up exercises have been conducted.

Again, this concept about teaching one how to fish. There are afternoon classes, Summer Camps, Mothers Day, Fathers Day and Christmas celebrations. In 2018,

It is on the authority of the magnificent electors of South Beach, who graciously endowed me on May 10 past with the privilege of being their Member of Parliament. I have experienced a charity, welcome, hospitality and gracious regard that exceeds my greatest deserving.

I am here today because of the trust and confidence of the electors of South Beach who Im privileged to serve, and have done so to the best of my ability.

They deserve every attention Mr. Speaker.

In the past months, the effects of Dorian and the pandemic have exposed the vulnerabilities of the residents in SB. Accordingly, our Team sprang into action by imposed ,

- Providing over 300 care packets in early May, containing food items, sanitizers and reusable shopping bags.
- On May 30th, Phoenix Supermarket partnered with the Hon. Jeffrey L. Lloyd in providing dozens more care packages for the residents of South Beach.
- On June 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>, dozens of residents were given \$50 dollar vouchers redeemable at the local food store.
- We make it a point to visit the home of bereaved families, when we are notified, as we usually are;
- In each of the last 3 years, Me and our Team have walked through every street in SB, visiting with families, hearing of their vision for a better Bahamas.

I had the opportunity to meet a gentleman, servicing his vehicle while on a walkabout on cowpen rd, we spoke about life and things he would love to achieve for about 20 minutes. On Saturday March 14th, I met a young lady, 18 years of age, in the community of Pastel Gardens, I was able to convince the young lady of the importance of college and today she is enrolled at the University of The Bahamas and got all As in her fall semester 2019/2020.

- Vibrant Social Media Platform (Jeffrey L. Lloyd on Facebook) where hundreds of South Beach residents contact him and engage him weekly and also serves as a source of inspiration for thousands of Bahamians.
- On Saturday December 14th, on the South Eastern Police Station Grounds, we held our Annual Children's Christmas Party. Approximately 400 children were in attendance for the event. There was lots of food and toys. Every child received a gift.
- Regular Town Hall meetings hosted by Hon. Jeffrey L Lloyd, one such meeting was Thursday August 8th. where hundreds of South Beach residents packed the C. V. Bethel Senior High School for a joint meeting with Golden Gates and Bamboo town on Hurricane Preparedness.
- Regular Monthly FNM South Beach Meetings
- Every Thursday, Hon. Jeffrey L. Lloyd is at the South Beach Constituency office meeting with residents
- Saturday August 31st, Hon Jeffrey L. Lloyd and team handed out hundreds school bags equipped with books and other school supplies.
- Hon. Jeffrey L. Lloyd hosted a South Beach Father's Day Luncheon at St. Gregory's Hall, Carmichael Rd, on Saturday 16th June, 2019. Fathers from throughout South Beach were honoured and recognized for their contributions to nation building. The Father of the Year was the oldest Father present, Mr. Willie John at 88.
- Hon. Jeffrey L. Lloyd hosted a magnificent 2nd Annual South Beach Mother's Day Luncheon. Joy filled the air at the St. Gregory's Hall as Mothers from throughout the South Beach Constituency were honoured on May 12th, 2019. Hon. Jeffrey L. Lloyd is pictured with the two oldest mothers at the South Beach Mother's Day Celebration.

Wish to send our sympathies to the Families of the late Mrs. Olga Rolle whose mortal remains were interred last week;

Remember fondly Mr. James Morley, a dear friend who passed last week and Mrs. Doral Louise Major Sturup of Jasmine Gardens

Eternal rest grant unto their souls, and peace and comfort to the grieving families. Our prayers are with them.

Want to congratulate Rahante Sumner, a 2019 graduate of Anatol Rodgers H.S, and student now at St. Leo's Florida. On attaining a 3.60 GPA this spring.

God praised her and her proud Mother, Shirley.

Mr. Speaker: For three years now I have had the privilege, through the good people of South Beach and the pleasure of the Prime Minister, to serve as the Minister of Education of these Bahama Islands. This is now my fourth budget contribution as minister. Including this 2020/2021 Budget, I will have presided over more than \$1 billion in expenditure on education. On an annual basis the budget of the Department of Education, the Ministry of Education and the Department of Archives represents a littler more than 12% of the entire expenditure of the Government of The Bahamas; about that much of the revenue of the Government; and a little more than 3% of our Gross Domestic Product. What have we gotten for this is a legitimate question to be asked by the Bahamian people? I intend to answer that question but before I do, I want to make a number of points to put into the context my answer.

First, I wish to say that the Department of Education commands the lion share of the budget of the Ministry of education. Of the total \$313,191,066 allocated for Education in this 2020/2021 Budget for

recurrent expenditure, the Department of Education takes \$201,104,089 or 64%. Of the \$201,104,089 of the Department of Education, \$173,873,715 or about 88% represents salaries and allowances paid to staff. I want to emphasize here, Mr. Speaker, the greater portion of education investment in our nation on an annual basis is paid in salaries and allowances to staff. This I wish you to keep in mind because I will return to it later.

Second, the Ministry of Education, will get an allocation of \$111,475,400 in this the upcoming budget. Of this expenditure, \$89,371,395 or 80% goes to support UB's operation, international scholarships, scholarships to UB, Scholarships to BTVI, scholarships to UWI, and grants to private schools. So, if we combine payment of salaries and allowances to the various grants and scholarships in education, fully, they represent \$263,245,110 or 84% of the total recurrent expenditure.

Third, while the total allocation for education from year to year has gone up or down a few percentage points, the structure of these allocations have remained the same for many years. By this I mean, more than 80% of the Department's budget goes to pay staff and 80% of the Ministry's budget to provide scholarship support. Mr. Speaker, what have we gotten for our expenditure over the last three years under this administration? We have gotten the following:

1. 65,000 of our children are educated some 9 months of the year, five days week, six hours per week by thousands of trained teachers and support staff;
2. Some 600 receive scholarships annually to attend universities abroad
3. 17m dlr\$ are spent at UB for 1200 incoming freshmen to receive free tuition;
4. 15m is spent supporting the 25k students in private schools
5. \$4m spent in giving vouchers of \$2k each for 3 & 4 years olds
6. In addition, family Island students also receive \$500 monthly housing allowance
7. Another 1200 BTVI incoming students receive free tuition
8. Some 4200 are on the lunch program
9. Thousands are bussed to and from school
10. Tens of millions of dlr\$ are spent upgrading, repairing and modernizing school campuses;
11. 14m dlr\$ so far have been spent digitizing the education system
12. 3,030 students were beneficiaries of the free tuition initiative at UB
13. 1,774 at BTVI during Fall 2019 and Spring 2020.
14. 300 were also trained in the Summer ICT Program at BTVI last summer, and 350 persons were trained at the Dept. of Corrections in conjunction with the Ministry of National Security and the Inter-American Development Bank.

Mr. Speaker, even as I highlight these results, let me say here and now, we can do better; we must do better. Pre and Post-Dorian and Covid-19, even with the best of education, success is not guaranteed. I repeat, even with the best of education, success is not guaranteed. Imagine then what faces that child who has a poor education; for such a child, failure is almost assured.

But what, Mr. Speaker, is that education that stands a child in the best stead to succeed in life? If the research, and my own observation, serves us correctly, then that education to means helping a child to have the following:

- Character, not the kind the parsons them off into some religious based moral construct, but helps him or her develop such traits as hopefulness/optimism, grit, openmindedness, kindness, respect for others, etc.;
- Strong reading, writing and mathematical skills so that they might be given to understanding, effective communication and sound logic;
- Critical thinking – the ability to reason and problem solve;
- Emotional Intelligence – the ability to deal with themselves and others wholesomely;
- Skills that have value (money making and otherwise) in a modern world, be it in the sciences, technology, mathematics or engineering, or areas of entrepreneurship, leadership, arts or administration;
- General knowledge of the world and its functioning;
- National pride and patriotism that motivate civic, community and cultural contribution;
- Continuing curiosity and learning to adapt to the demands of an ever changing world.

This is what a child needs to succeed in the world today. This is what the education policy that I seek to promote wants to produce for the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

Mr. Speaker, when people say that the education system of The Bahamas is failing, I do not and cannot agree with them, if they merely point to some illusory “D” average that becomes the subject of shallow banter when the BGCSE results come out. If, however, they mean that too many of our students do not reflect the traits above, then I wholeheartedly agree with them. **I fully agree that we must strive with all our beings to produce in all our children those traits, as nothing else will better place them to succeed in a world abundant in opportunities but also laden with challenges.**

The anomalous events of this academic year, to say the least, have tested the stamina, faith, creativity and strength of the Bahamian people. An unknown author said that “*Experience is the best teacher, and the worst experiences teach the best lessons.*” Well I can say without reservation, that our students from the youngest to the oldest have this year encountered some of the worst experiences of their lifetime; and thus have been presented with multiple choices of either resign to defeat or growth. Being mindful of the resilience of our people, I am convinced that we lean more towards the latter.

This academic year, started with a monster storm never experienced in our history. A storm that remained stationary over the northern Bahamas for more than 36 hours with reported wind gusts of 220 mph. While this monster shattered homes, schools and other physical structures it simultaneously did its best to demolish the spirits of so many. Many lives were lost and scores still unaccounted for. The people of Grand Bahama and Abaco are slowly rebuilding their lives and communities. But These past few months have shown it is not an overnight process. Even while the restoration process was underway, the Bahamas, as indeed the world, was forced to confront a new strain of virus, COVID19. This invisible enemy proved even more disruptive to the academic and emotional pulse of our students.

Mr. Speaker, as The Ministry of Education seeks to mold 21<sup>st</sup> century graduates as critical thinkers, collaborators, creators, and emotionally competent individuals, these unprecedented conditions times

are definitely a set up to draw out such attributes. It has forced us all to be resourceful, to learn new technologies, to be critical in our thinking, to forge ahead successfully.

Throughout this pandemic my Ministry has remained steadfast to the call, unmovable, unshakable in its beliefs and resolute in its mission to provide all persons in The Bahamas an opportunity to receive an education that will equip them with the necessary knowledge, skills, beliefs and attitudes required for work and life in a democratic society.

Although this school year brought with it much adversity, there is a burst of sunshine among the rain. Please permit me to highlight just a few examples:

- H.O. Nash Junior High School has recently constructed a poultry unit
- Anatol Rodgers High School recently established a new Aquaponics unit
- Ten-year old **Roy Seligmen** of the Lyford Cay International School emerged as winner of the 2020 Bahamas National Spelling Bee (BNSB) for the second consecutive year.
- 11<sup>th</sup> grader, Marissa Capron of St. Anne's High School captured 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the 2019 Florida Caribbean Cruise Line Association Poster Competition.

Because of Covid, many of our academic based and sports competitions were cancelled due to the threat of the corona virus. However, I am certain that our teachers and students are geared up and ready to reboot, for the upcoming school year.

### **EDUCATION ACT UPDATE**

While some prefer the term new normal, I submit to the interpretation of You, Mr. Speaker, that if its new, it cannot be normal. I prefer the term: The New Reality, the actuality of life with which we will have to contend in a ways that we have not had to before.

As PM Dr. Minnis stated recently in one of his national addresses:

*“Not since the outbreak of World War II over 70 years ago have we lived through such a devastating impact on our economy and the livelihoods of so many Bahamians. We are in very difficult and uncharted waters. We are facing a stark reality that the vast majority of us have never seen in our lifetimes. We must be prepared to do things differently both in the near-term and in the long-term in order for us to maintain some measure of economic stability in the near- term.”*

If any feature of national life must be at the epicenter of this transfigured future, it must be education, where every citizen is now required through the sheer force of adaptation and survival to learn and master new skills.

*Story of the Lady in the MOE Foyer.*

This New Reality, coupled with an emerging consciousness within our people over the last decades, now impel the Ministry of Education to upgrade its response to compelling aspirations of its clients – the students; By providing copious access and equity in the pursuit of their of their life’s ambitions.

It is against this backdrop that the Ministry of Education is in the final stages of revising the Education Act which was last so updated 24 years ago in 1996.

The truth is that the Act simply does not adequately address current concerns, new trends and developments in the field of Education. As the world changes rapidly, so does the need for our country to advance with those changes. The Ministry strives to propagate 21<sup>st</sup> century citizens produced in a robust education system.

The review and amendment process is led by a very competent team of officers at the Ministry who garnered the ideas thoughts, advice and suggestions of internal and external stakeholders including educators, students, Unions, Parents and useful insights from UNESCO. The consultation revealed that a complete overhaul of the Act was not necessary; That major emendation were sufficient. These included:

- (i) **The use of Technology and Innovation:** in the delivery of education, inclusive of cyber security, privacy rights and the accessibility of platforms by all users;
- (ii) **Individual & Personalized Learning, inclusive of Home-Schooling: Home Schooling (NEW)** *Although the Home-School Unit (HSU) has been established by the Ministry since 2016, there is no provision in the Education Act to specifically address this area. The Unit currently provides guidelines and regulations; however, it is necessary to govern this growing phenomenon through policy, so as to ensure quality programmes;*
- (iii) **The Devolution of Authority to Local Districts, Islands and School Boards,** so that the peculiar and unique requirements of individual communities may be addressed in a timely, adequate manner by the authorities and leadership of those communities. While the Act is quite *comprehensive regarding School Boards, there is the need to give more utility to the powers contained therein.*

Mr. Speaker, the guiding principle when it comes to education is The best interest of the Student: That is paramount. That comes first. This mirrors Section 3, of the Child Protection Act, which states:

- (1) *Whenever a determination has to be made with respect to — (a) the upbringing of a child; or (b) the administration of a child's property or the application of any income arising from it, the child's welfare shall be the paramount consideration.*

Which corresponds neatly with Article 3 of the Convention on the rights of the child, again, which states:

“ *In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.*”

This is a new thinking, Sir. Previously, education systems demanded that Its Clients – our children – adapt and submit to the prescriptions established by it. That is not the New Reality. Students want to learn what they want to learn, when they want to learn and how they want to learn, and any system worth its integrity is obliged to succumb to those demands.

Of course, the responsibility of Governments is to verify that its citizens meet certain basic intellectual, vocational, technical, moral, social and cultural skills sets, but beyond that, Sir, the Student must be allowed, and encouraged, to exercise his/her volitional authority.

And that student could be 2, 22, 52 or 92. This means that all those charged with the delivery of that educational service must at all stages and in all circumstances be held to the highest degree of accountability. That is why the committee is also considering some form of Education Inspectorate, not only to ensure where the system is, but to lend assistance for its improvement, whether it be for the struggling administrator, teacher, student, program or school.

The education team has also included these areas among others:

- Pre-Primary and Post-Secondary Education;
- Alternative/Special Education;
- Distance Education;
- Parents Rights and Responsibilities;
- Standards for Education Leaders;
- Teachers' Aides;
- Conditions of Service for Teachers; etc.

As this process of amending the Education Act is complex, the team is moving quickly to complete a final review; after which it will be sent to the Office of the Attorney General for drafting.

### **THE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES**

Mr. Speaker, as recently stated by The International Council of Archives, “**The duty to document does not cease in a crisis, it becomes more essential.**” Accordingly, during this fiscal year, The Bahamas Department of Archives amid this pandemic will continue to preserve national records of historical and administrative significance, arrange and describe them, and make them accessible to the public where possible. As the Department adapts to this COVID-19 climate, a few changes will be applied to the execution of its services.

One such adjustment Mr. Speaker is that persons wanting to conduct research will now have to make an appointment, in compliance with the protocols outlined by the Ministry of Health. Additionally, the Department has installed hand sanitizing stations throughout its office.

Mr. Speaker, these circumstances create the framework for the Department to document the policy, economic and social effects of COVID19 on communities in The Bahamas. This will provide a historical foundation for future research on pandemics.

Meanwhile the public is reminded of the dept’s significant function in our developing nation, in preserving our rich and enlightening history, while educating our youth. To that end, the department prepares BJC and BGCSE packets to assist Bahamian students preparing for national examinations.



It will also launch the programme: “A Treasure Trove of Information: Our Archives” which will highlight various historical documents and collections in the Departments’ holdings.

### **NATIONAL ACCREDITATION AND EQUIVALENCY COUNCIL OF THE BAHAMAS**

Mr. Speaker, NAECOB verifies that all operating schools or educational programs in this country are registered and eventually accredited. The Bahamian public must be assured that those offering educational services have met and are maintaining the safest, most relevant standards of efficacy and relevance possible in education today, and are led and dispensed by qualified personnel for the clients they serve.

Today that work is even more significant because we are faced with a unique demand upon our institutions, due to COVID19. Its work must now expand to certify that COVID19 safety protocols are being incorporated into the learning environment, and that the new delivery modes ranging from traditional face to face learning to hybrid and online learning adhere to a continuous quality enhancement plan that fosters an environment in which instruction, student engagement, learning, evaluation of student competencies, public service and research occur.

It has come to the attention of the Ministry that there are many so-called educational establishments that are operating in this country without the legal authority to do so. Naturally, this puts potentially the clients they serve – most often very young children – at risk for serious, if not permanent injury.

May I respectfully advise all operators of educational services or those planning to do so, to please register with NAECOB. Otherwise, You are operating outside the law, and render yourselves liable to serious penalties if found. Sadly, the MOE has had to shut down several institutions, especially those catering to young children that were a serious hazard to the children’s well-being. I, as Minister, advise parents to first check with NAECOB, investigate, carefully evaluate, and where possible, secure credible references BEFORE placing your vulnerable baby in the care of unqualified, money-seeking operators. It is not enough that someone likes children. It takes much more than that. Young impressionable minds, and developing brains that are still in the crucial formative stages can easily be wrecked by someone who does not know, though well-intentioned, what they are doing.

The impartation of information, and the invitation to awaken and refine a student’s innate potential, is a skill, grounded in science, and honed under the expert supervision of mentors. Be very careful in whom you repose confidence for the education of your child.

### **GRANT-IN-AID/SUBVENTION**

Mr. Speaker, for 150 plus years successive administrations, in accordance with Section 53 of The Education Act, have consistently provided financial assistance through the Grant-in-Aid Policy to a significant number of private schools and agencies throughout our archipelago.

We are all aware that this symbiotic relationship has greatly assisted the Ministry of Education in its attempt to provide access to quality education.

In 2019-2020 a total of \$14,725,000.00 was approved for Grant-in-Aid programme. Due to the current economic atmosphere, many parents and guardians are unable to pay private school fees; Fees which constitute the greatest portion of revenue for the private schools. As a result, many schools have approached the Ministry for assistance, which the Govt is presently reviewing. Some have reduced teachers' salaries and also laid off ancillary staff in an effort to remain buoyant.

There is an increase in this years budget to assist further. The Ministry, however, wants to bring fairness and equity to the subvention process. Thus, It has engaged a committee comprising of ministry officials and private citizens to (i) review current methods of providing assistance to private schools and (ii) recommend to the Minister an equitable and sustainable method for providing continued financial support.

It is The Ministry's intention to continue the mutually beneficial relationship with private schools and will assist to the extent of our capability.

May I, though, respectfully issue a word of caution. Too many institutions calculate their existence on the expectation of receiving a Govt's subvention. Their business plan centers around a certain sum to be received from the Govt. That plan is financially and commercially irresponsible and fool-hardy. While the Govt appreciates the private delivery of educational services in this country, it still must operate within the confines of its budget. It is, therefore, recommended that all current and potential Operators undertake a very careful analysis by trusted financial and marketing minds first before contemplating such a venture.

### **THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS UNIT/UNESCO**

Mr. Speaker, The International Relations Unit (IRU) of the Ministry of Education is responsible for the conduct of business with the international organization UNESCO, in seeking its support for key ministries' programmes, either through direct funding of projects, the provision of technical assistance or opportunities for capacity building.

One such recent activity was the application for Junkanoo to be accepted as a cultural heritage event. Thus, the Bahamas UNESCO Office in conjunction with the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, the Junkanoo Corporation of New Providence (JCNP), National Junkanoo Committee (NJC) and Mrs. Arlene Nash Ferguson, have worked since December 2019 to prepare Nomination Papers for Junkanoo to be considered by the Intangible Cultural Heritage for Urgent Safeguarding. The written component of the Nomination Papers which is almost completed and a short video presentation (costing \$1,000 to produce locally) depicting Junkanoo in The Bahamas must be submitted by the National Commission by September 2020 to be considered for inscription in 2021. Inscription on this list would allow Junkanoo to be officially internationally recognized as a Bahamian Cultural Celebration, provide protection for the Festival's continuity, and give access to funding for workshops and programmes to educate and enhance Junkanoo.

Moreover Mr. Speaker, if a hurricane or other natural disaster occurred and destroyed costumes, instruments and other items necessary for a parade to take place, inscription would allow The Bahamas to request Emergency Assistance to ensure that the parade continues due to its cultural significance.

Mr. Speaker, in December 2019 The National Commission applied for an Emergency Assistance Grant through UNESCO's Participation Programme in the amount of \$50,000 to assist with replacing equipment and supplies for schools in Abaco destroyed by Hurricane Dorian. The request was approved by UNESCO in March 2020. Once the funding is received, the equipment will be purchased and a report sent to UNESCO.

Mr. Speaker, it is my joy to announce that The Nomination Paper on Junkanoo was accepted by UNESCO for consideration for inscription of "Junkanoo" in 2021 by the ICH. This is the first nomination paper in history by The Bahamas to be accepted for consideration by the ICH. We have a few months to fill in some missing information.

The Junkanoo Committee will meet again shortly to tie up the loose ends and make adjustments as necessary. I am indeed proud of this accomplishment and I congratulate Ms. Deidre Bevans for her dogged and focused attention to detail. The Junkanoo Committee is also to be congratulated for their untiring work and contribution to this nomination. I now wish that Ms. Bevans be confirmed as Secretary General for UNESCO.

Additionally, a coordinator will be appointed for the Associated Schools Project Network (ASPNet) and will receive an annual stipend of \$6,000. ASPnet is a key initiative that focuses on youth and children in the work of UNESCO. The coordinator oversees the schools that are a part of the Network and UNESCO Clubs. ASPNet links educational institutions across the world around a common goal which is to build peace. Over 11,500 ASPnet member schools in 182 countries work in support of international understanding, intercultural dialogue, sustainable development and quality education which aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4. Five Family Islands that were previously a part of ASPnet (Abaco, San Salvador, North Andros, Exuma and Cat Island) will be visited in order to reestablish their presence on the Network and promote the establishment of UNESCO Clubs in the Family Islands. Nine thousand, seven hundred and thirty dollars (**\$9,730**) has been budgeted for this.

Mr. Speaker, I participated in a Virtual Ministerial Dialogue on COVID-19 and Open Science, on Monday, 30 March 2020 with the Director-General of UNESCO and Ministers from over 100 countries. The objective of this meeting was to provide a platform for dialogue and share experiences and lessons learnt on how science has informed decision making. Additional online ministerial meetings are planned in the upcoming months as UNESCO continues its response to COVID-19 and its effect on Education. The International Relations Unit will continue to be an integral part in bringing to fruition UNESCO's objectives.

### **UNIVERSITY OF THE BAHAMAS**

Mr. Speaker, I turn now to the University of the Bahamas.

In September, 2019, The Govt fully adopted its policy of free admission for all Bahamian students. This fulfills a major pledge of the Free National Movement and goes a long way to expanding access to tertiary education for thousands of Bahamians for whom college otherwise would be a dream.

This policy continues despite the challenges on the national purse due to hurricane Dorian and the Corona Virus. As a result the budget allocation for UB in 2020-2021 remains unchanged at \$30,745 million.

In addition to this major initiative, the UB, recognizing the climatological vulnerabilities of this country, established in late 2019 UB, its Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience Research (CCARR) Centre in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian. This unprecedented event highlighted the significant vulnerability of The Bahamas and other small island developing states face by climate change. UB hopes the Center through comprehensive research and guidance that focuses on the human dimensions of climate change will ensure climate-resilient futures for those most at risk.

### **UB Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences**

By the end of this year, UB will graduate its first cohort of students from its 5-year professional bachelors of Architecture Programme. Architecture is obviously very important to, and arguably the foundation of the physical development of any country. It is a truly an investment that will pay tremendous dividends.

UB's Architecture students were able to engage meaningful projects on Eleuthera, Grand Bahama and at the University of Miami. In early February, UB architecture students along with their counterparts in small island sustainability and the social sciences programmes had the opportunity to work with architecture, water resources and engineering students and faculty from the Netherlands as well as a multidisciplinary team of UB faculty in Grand Bahama. They worked with members of the government, private sector and the port authority. This is a part of a long term "build back better" programme in which the university will contribute to providing solutions to the social, environmental and economic challenges associated with climate change, extreme weather and flooding.

The university is also developing bachelor's degree programmes in environmental sciences and masters in marine science programmes for fall 2021.

UB is also expanding its Graduate and Research Studies in accordance with the University Strategic Plan.

This includes a Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Master's Degree or Doctoral Degree.

In the fall of 2020 UB will offer ...

1. Master of Business Administration (MBA) in Accounting
2. Master of Business Administration (MBA), with concentration in Financial Decision Making; Entrepreneurship and Innovation; and Leadership
3. Master of Business Administration (MBA) in Hospitality Management (with 4 hospitality courses offered through collaboration with Florida International University).
4. Master of Business Administration (MBA) in Events Management (with 4 events courses offered through collaboration with Florida International University).
5. Graduate Cert. (GCert.)/ Graduate Dip. (GDip.) in Public Administration

Further, other programmes that are currently under the review of the various Committee at UB include:

1. Master of Science (MSc.) Reading with Inclusive Education
2. Master of Research (MRes.) in Sciences; Social Science; and Arts & Humanities
3. Doctoral of Philosophy (PhD) in Sciences; Social Science; and Arts & Humanities

Other graduate programme development that has started include the following:

1. Master of Education (MEd.) in Teacher Leadership (Cognate- Supervision)
2. Master of Education (MEd.) in Speech Language and Pathology
3. Graduate Cert (GCert), Graduate Diploma and Master of Law (LL.M) specializing in Arbitration Law; Financial Services Law; Transport and Maritime Law; and Mediation Law.
4. Masters in Science in Nursing by the Nursing & Allied Health Department.
5. Masters in Performing Arts by the Faculty of Liberal & Fine Arts.
6. Graduate Cert. and Graduate Diploma on Gender and Sexuality

Finally, Research integral to any university education. Because The Corona Virus has impacted daily life worldwide, and Having been on lockdown since March, UB increased its research related free webinars. Having met success these will continue in the Fall.

These sessions included:

1. Eight (8) Research Edge sessions and three (3) special research presentations which attracted 481 participants from UB and outside UB. The seven (7) Research Workshops attracted 187 faculty/ staff.
2. From May to end-June, ten (10) more research workshops are organized remotely to provide the fundamental knowledge in carrying out research and structuring a good academic article. The promotion of UB's graduate programme is emphasized in these programme.
3. In partnership with Tourism Development Corporation (TDC), UB organized series of panel sessions (3 sessions to-date) that focus on transforming the tourism industry post COVID-19. These sessions have attracted more than 200 participants from all over the world consistently.
4. And from mid-June onwards, a weekly Research Rapid Talk Session will be held to allow UB faculty/researcher to present a quick 15-minute impactful presentation on their research that can contribute towards national or regional development.

Ultimately Mr. Speaker the government is pleased with the progress being made by the University of the Bahamas.

### **(BTVI)**

Technical education contributes substantially to the Socio Economic development of the country as a whole. The development sustenance of the industrial sector is entirely dependent upon the availability of trained manpower to perform the multidimensional activities needed to keep the wheel of industry running.

UNESCO states that "As Member States scale up their efforts to advance progress on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, there is an urgent need to develop the knowledge, skills and competencies to meet professional and societal demands.

The strengthening of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is an important strategy to contribute to equitable, inclusive and sustainable economies and societies.

From the beginning of this administration, particular emphasis has been placed upon the expansion of technical and vocational education and training. Another major pledge by this FNM Administration.

Sand it has paid off very handsomely. BTVI serves approximately 5,000 students annually, with campuses in Nassau, Freeport, Andros and Abaco, and has been offering online course delivery for the past three years.

With the onset of COVID19 and its social distancing protocols, BTVI was able to seamlessly transition onto a distance learning platform – The Premier tertiary education institution offering career ready training, was ready.

Mr. Speaker, BTVI is charting a course to continue to grow its brand both regionally and internationally. Courses are not only offered at the associate degree and certificate level, but customized training and professional development courses are available with Enrollments of learners from 16-75 all looking to learn a skill to earn a living.

Dual Enrolment Students: Now total 850 total -- A 25% growth in last two years

The goal this year is to hit 1500 including family islands for the first time

Globally, there has been a transition to online education which has accelerated dramatically with the COVID-19 pandemic. In response, BTVI moved almost all classes to an online format. In Freeport, for example, 98% of classes were transitioned quickly to online using the Moodle platform. These courses were supplemented with case studies, simulations, videos, and zoom classes. Although some classes in the trades are particularly difficult to accommodate, currently more than 85% of classes across the system are continuing online. In addition, for the trade related courses alternatives to ensure student success for all students are being made available.

As a recently certified Cisco Academy and CompTIA award winning institution, BTVI has established an online center of excellence designed to expand career relevant training to Bahamians in this difficult period.

In keeping with its expansion and upgrade objectives, the government secured a \$5m loan with the Caribbean Development Bank to deliver world class education and training.

These CDB loan funds will be used to upgrade the skills required by instructors, critical to the proficient delivery of all programmes. Additionally, All courses now at BTVI are industry certified courses. Which means that upon completion of every course, students are eligible to become certified by an international accrediting agency and body for worldwide use. Amazing achievement.

In fact, Sir, with the increased use of City and Guilds and Cisco certifications and certifications available through the National Center for Construction Education and Research. Mr. Speaker, currently, approximately 60% of all BTVI graduates have completed at least one industry certification. That up from just 30% three years. By the end of the year this will increase to approximately 100%.

To augment its credit capacity, BTVI has established partnerships with int'l academic institutions, including most recently Valencia College in Orlando, FL; and, Athabasca University in Edmonton, AB. Articulation agreements with both allow students to take their BTVI credits to either of these schools to easily and in an affordable manner complete an undergraduate degree. These articulation agreements speak to the quality of BTVI course offerings.

Mr. Speaker, all faculty members are completing occupational health and safety training; and, technology training to improve their digital skills. Training related to online education was initiated through a grant from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) (22 faculty members along with a member of staff from the Ministry of Education are participating in this training. Additionally, five

faculty members have been identified to complete a programme to be certified as a lead online instructor.

An outcome of this COL project is the creation of five blended courses (Information Technology, Numeracy, Literacy, Entrepreneurship and Student Success) that will be rolled out this fall primarily for dual enrollment purposes throughout The Bahamas.

Mr. Speaker, one of the unique creations of BTVI is the soon-to-be launched accelerated technology training program slated for a start this. The government has allocated scholarship monies to fund this accelerated program, which will be aimed at quickly developing a trained workforce to address the national skills gap, as identified in the draft national development plan. This programme will provide focused, concentrated training specific to the trades including courses in carpentry, plumbing, electrical and masonry over a focused period of 12 weeks.

Mr. Speaker, we want to make sure that our citizenry are equipped to quickly make a contribution in rebuilding our country, particularly in the wake of Hurricane Dorian. The intent is to work in cooperation with the Bahamas Contractors Association to initially and immediately assist in the rebuilding efforts required in Abaco and Grand Bahama.

This key program includes professional certifications, to ensure that our graduates meet industry standards, including safety standards that have become even more critical in the midst of COVID19. Indeed, the construction industry mandates that BTVI supports and elevates the applicable training to ensure workplace safety.

The development of the trade areas will assist in reducing unemployment and having more Bahamians certified and in a position to contribute to the economy in a tangible way, particularly as rebuilding efforts take place. The intent is to have these courses certified by the National Center for Construction Education and Research, an educational foundation for professional craft certification, to further certify programme quality.

Mr. Speaker, in an effort to provide workforce relevant skills to meet the demands of 21st century employers, BTVI has developed a series of short, largely self-paced, industry certificated courses. These low cost programs will launch in June and will cover areas such as basic introduction to computers, e commerce, entrepreneurship and similar courses.

Mr. Speaker, BTVI is aware that student satisfaction is necessary, particularly as a means to ensure a high retention rate among students. To assist with this, BTVI conducts a regular student satisfaction survey. The most recent survey included responses from 294 students and noted that approximately 90 % of students stated that their experiences at BTVI were “good”.

BTVI’s summer program to encourage digitalization among high school students in Freeport and Nassau enrolled almost 500 students who completed a total of 15 courses, most of which were industry certified. As they graduate from high school they will have a BTVI certificate and numerous industry certifications that they can transfer into college programs or allow them to seamlessly move directly into entry level positions in the workforce. It is anticipated that this program will be made more widely available, while adhering to COVID19 protocols.

Mr. Speaker, hurricane Dorian had a very serious impact on the Freeport campus of BTVI. In response to this, BTVI partnered with St George’s High School to utilize the high school facilities, and as a

result BTVI was able to reopen within weeks. There remains a significant amount to accomplish in rebuilding the campus. Completing this work is a priority of my government.

Mr. Speaker, overall BTVI will continue to advance relevant short, industry certified courses designed to be career relevant. There will be a renewed focus on certified trade courses that meet industry needs. Improvements are being identified to improve business processes within the institution to make it more “customer friendly.” These improvements will entail utilizing technology more effectively and the intent is to do more with less across the whole organization.

Courses will be more widely available online and as needed practical skills will be taught on the ground, utilizing COVID19 protocols to ensure a safe workplace and teaching environment.

Mr. Speaker, in the midst of the COVID19 budgetary constraints, the Government of The Bahamas is committed to ensuring we provide access to training at BTVI through the continuation of scholarships and grants. Additionally, BTVI continues to actively pursue partnerships with corporate Bahamas and other stakeholders to assist with providing assistance to help us close the national skills gap.

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

*Dylan Wiliam, University of London:*

*“If we create a culture where every teacher believes they need to improve, not because they are not good enough, but because they can even be better, there is no limit to what we can achieve.”*

The Ministry of Education recognizes the importance of investing in the development of its educators, at the classroom level as well as those directly involved in the planning the curriculum.

Ongoing professional development is integral to the successful implementation of the National Curriculum. Over the course of the year, professional development workshops have been held for teachers in all disciplines and all grade levels. Some of these include 43 webinars conducted using the virtual platform, with an average of 547 participants per session. Over 17,400 badges have been issued to those participating.

Professional Development opportunities were also afforded Curriculum Officers. In October, 2019, Officers attended a one-day conclave which focused on the successful implementation of the curriculum. That same month, Cambridge International facilitated a week- long seminar for Curriculum Development and implementation for Curriculum Officers and Subject Secretaries. There was a follow-up of this workshop in March of this year.

Over 200 hundred teachers who are a part of the Career and Technical Education Programme were exposed to content and industry best practices in an effort to aid in relevancy of classroom instruction. Among one of the most notable international industry partners for the Family & Consumer Sciences (FCSE) Unit was Air bnb, in collaboration with The Bahamas Hotel Tourism Association. This partnership provided real time reflections of the evolving role of entrepreneurial thinking and emerging industries.

Mr. Speaker, as the global pandemic, COVID-19 has altered and in some cases sparked a progression in our use of technology, this year has seen diversified technology to address the new needs of our



students. We have seen at least 50% of our teachers using and being exposed to new and innovative resource technology, to make lessons interesting and relevant. On average 70% of our teachers were engaged with students on a class based level, ensuring that learning continued beyond the walls of the institution. As we embraced the virtual learning platform, CTE was able to upload content for 19 of 32 or 59% of CTE subject offerings. Teachers have further embraced technology, using it to create, edit and upload animated video presentations for broadcast via Cable channel 295. Additionally, Technical Officers have explored and engaged in multiple virtual meetings, training sessions and lessons, in an effort to remain current and relevant.

### **TEACHERS' CAREER PATH**

Mr. Speaker, teachers are among the greatest resources in the arena of education. Therefore, we must find means by which to motivate our teachers within the public school system to stretch beyond mediocre. Cognizant of this need, the Ministry of Education has re-introduced the Career Path Section in an effort to produce educators of the highest quality. Following a prolonged period of abeyance, the government has mandated the call to again incentivize the teaching force by remunerating excellent teaching performance and fostering career development opportunities for deserving candidates to the Public Teachers Career Path System. The Ministry of Education is proud to have named to date some three hundred seventy-five Senior Teachers and two hundred fifty-six Master Teachers within the public school system. Many of these teachers have become outstanding administrators, serving as mentors within the school system.

Mr. Speaker, the Career Path Section was re-established in November, 2019, and has completed the preliminary work necessary to begin a new two year cycle that will, at its conclusion, recognize and reward outstanding educators across our archipelago. During the 2020/2021 fiscal period, the Career Path Section will use the Virtual Platforms for orientation workshops to provide information and training for teachers, administrators and other stakeholders on all islands.

A Revised Career Path Handbook is accessible for teachers via the Ministry of Education's website. Limited printed copies will be made available for teachers for distribution in Fall 2020. This handbook will guide candidates in understanding the requirements and processes that are necessary for achieving the desired posts and details qualitative information that will assist educational researchers seeking to know more about the system.

Mr. Speaker, to facilitate the launch of a new cycle, two lead assessors will be engaged to provide ongoing assessment of applicants from New Providence and the Family Islands. Prior to the pandemic lockdown, workshops and working sessions were conducted with the Bahamas Union of Teachers, Department of Education executives and Teachers whose current status is Senior and Master Teacher. During the COVID 19 pandemic, technical officers within the Career Path section continued such workshops virtually, by providing a series of webinars for teachers. To date, 1200 zoom participants representing educators from around the archipelago have been engaged with large and small group sessions. Already, these sessions have served to re-invigorate many of our exceptional teachers to remain in the classroom providing quality instruction to students and have inspired teachers to continue thinking outside of the box to provide the best in pedagogy for Bahamian students. Mindful of the need to maximize productivity in light of the constraints brought on by the COVID 19 pandemic, the

Career Path Section will use funds available to position itself to launch an efficient, effective assessment process.

### **Teacher Cadet Programme**

In April, 2020, sixty seven high school seniors from twenty two schools on ten islands across the country completed a three year course of study in the Ministry of Education's Teacher Cadet Programme. A total of one hundred eighty one (181) students were provided with in person, and later, virtual instruction in educational history, philosophy and methodology.

In February, 2020, the Teacher Cadet Programme celebrated twenty five years as one of the major vehicles for recruitment of teachers. This programme engages highly qualified seniors in the tenth through twelfth grade in meaningful pedagogical activities and experiences in order to encourage them to join the ranks of excellent educators in the Department of Education. Hundreds of teachers currently providing instruction in public and independent schools in The Bahamas were once cadets in the Teacher Cadet Programme. The 2020/ 2021 budget provides for the continuation of this dynamic programme. To accommodate this streamlined budget, the programme will offer virtual lessons and training to high school seniors, virtual BGCSE classes in Mathematics and English Language, training in best practices for digital education and opportunities for cadets to engage in supervised virtual tutoring for younger students in their local communities. Additionally, the 2020/ 2021 academic year will provide opportunities for cadets to produce original digital educational resources. While funds are limited, the emphasis will be placed on maintaining strong connections with incoming seniors on the verge of the exit from high school and matriculation into the school of education at the University of The Bahamas. It is anticipated that the adjusted programme and curriculum will continue to inspire this new generation of educators.

### **Career and Technical Education**

Mr. Speaker, this section of the Ministry manages in excess of 30 programme offerings in 40 plus schools throughout the country, with a cadre of professionals exceeding 300, impacting thousands of students across the length and breadth of The Bahamas. Students are exposed to a variety of subject areas which fall under Business Studies, Family and Consumer Sciences, and Technical Studies.

As I have repeatedly articulated, this area of education is undeniably a critical need in our country. This is supported by the fact that on average, 70 percent of our graduates do not pursue a tertiary education; rather they are thrust into the workforce which requires a substantive level of requisite skills. And as I've alluded to on many occasions, skillful hands have the capacity to generate great wealth. Therefore, in an effort to increase opportunities, awareness and to attract diversified stakeholders, CTE was deliberate in seeking public, private sector partnerships to promote its education and training. Local and international stakeholders were engaged contributing their knowledge, skills and funding.

Mr. Speaker, I implore all under the sound of my voice, to rise above the current circumstances. Let's show the world that we are not only a resilient people, but united in our cause to be globally prepared and self-sufficient. Stay the course. I leave you with words uttered by inventor Thomas Edison: "Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try.

## **HUMAN RESOURCES**

Mr. Speaker, as we sought to advance the Ministry by increasing its capacity to function, during the 2019/2020 Budget year, one hundred and twenty-seven (127) trained teachers and thirty-five (35) assistant teachers, teachers' aides and craft instructors were appointed between September 2019 and March 2020.

Additionally, approval was granted for the extension of appointment on temporary month-to-month terms of six hundred and thirty-six (636) general service workers, teachers' aides, security officers, and custodial and janitorial workers. These persons were initially engaged on contractual terms; and it is anticipated that, pending the requisite funding, those persons who perform their duties well will be recommended to the Permanent and Pensionable Establishment, incrementally.

Further, The Human Resources Unit has submitted over five hundred (500) recommendations for re-employments, confirmations, promotions, and reassessments to the Ministry of the Public Service and National Insurance.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the Human Resources Unit continued to report for duty on a shift basis, to ensure that HR matters were processed in a timely manner and made themselves available to meet with internal and external staff as required. Their dedication is sincerely appreciated.

As we embrace 'the new reality, increased focus will be on training. Priority will be given to the training of our custodial staff as we do our endeavor best to make work spaces and all schools sanitized and safe. The Ministry of Education has liaised with Mr. Anthony Ryan, Public Analyst at the Department of Environmental Health, for all custodial staff to be trained in proper sanitization and cleaning techniques, to ensure that work spaces and schools receive continuous and effective cleaning.

Additionally, a comprehensive training plan is being developed for all staff in an effort to provide a high standard of service to all persons interacting with the Ministry of Education. Meantime, staff members will be encouraged to participate in training courses organized by the Ministry of Public Service and National Insurance.

The Ministry will continue to consider promotions and other human resources related matters with financial implications. However any resulting arrears would be remunerated at a future date. In this vein, the Ministry of Education will endeavor to pursue the following:

- Appointment of New Teachers

It is anticipated that 200 new Trained Teachers will be appointed from the University of the Bahamas and other tertiary institutions.

- Confirmation

Recommendations for the confirmation in appointment of new teachers and administrators in acting appointments to test one's suitability for promotion, will be forwarded to the Ministry of Public Service and National Insurance.

- Career Path of Guidance Counselors and Security Officers

A review of the career path of guidance counselors and security officers is currently being conducted. At the conclusion, appropriate recommendations for the advancement of qualified and suitable officers within these areas will be forwarded to the Ministry of Public Service and National Insurance.

- Review of status of Library staff

A review will be conducted of all staff in the Library system to identify the current employment status and determine the need for regularization.

### **EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME**

Mr. Speaker, during periods of bizarre crisis, the needs of people are not limited to basic shelter, food, and physical health relief. Often times the psychosocial needs are overlooked. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies opines that “the emotional wounds may be less visible than the destruction of homes, but it often takes far longer to recover from emotional impact than to overcome material losses.”

In light of this, the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) addresses the needs of the employees to support the preservation of their physical and emotional health, which improves employee productivity in the workplace. The tumultuous events surrounding Hurricane Dorian in 2019 and the current COVID19 Pandemic resulted in an increase in the use of EAP services.

The Employee Assistance Program has responded to the challenges by providing virtual support to our employees. Officers were able to continue counselling services to address individual needs, and, follow-up and monitor cases to support the employee/client and ensure implementation.

The Unit will continue to provide Training and professional development via distance learning to assist with the recovery of the impact of Hurricane Dorian and COVID-19. Services such as critical incident response requires an ongoing intervention by the EAP and Crisis Response Team to address the needs of the employees and to provide support in the wake of loss. As we have entered another hurricane season, it is paramount that psychosocial support is continuous and available to all employees in all islands.

The EAP has partnered with IsraAID in the wake of Hurricane Dorian and subsequently, COVID19. However, in order for the EAP to maintain its critical services, there is a need for more manpower.

### **BUSSING**

Mr. Speaker in accordance with Section 34 of the Education Act, it is the responsibility of the Minister of Education to, “make suitable arrangements for the provision of transport as he considers practicable and necessary for the purpose of facilitating the attendance of pupils at schools and other establishments maintained by him, and any transport provided in pursuance of such arrangements shall be provided free of charge.”

With a current budget of \$6.9 million dollars, provisions have been made to safely transport students to and from school on (16) islands and cays throughout the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

Contracts awarded August 2015 will expire June 2020. A tendering process will be undertaken for contracts in the following islands:

- New Providence
- Cat Island
- San Salvador
- Exuma
- Long Island
- Mayaguana
- Crooked Island
- Acklins
- Andros

Mr. Speaker, it is our intention to make this bidding process as transparent and fair as possible.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry is fully aware of the necessary safety and health protocols which must be adhered to as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and I would like to take this opportunity to advise operators to ensure that they are in full compliance with the regulations.

In addition to safety measures already enforced by the Ministry of Health, the following new procedures are being considered:

Operators must:

- Attend training session to be informed of new policies and procedures to effectively clean their mode of transportation
- Check students temperature before boarding
- Provide assigned seating
- Be equipped with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and each vehicle must have a First Aid Kit

Students will be required to:

- Wear a face mask
- Sanitize hands upon entry

Mr. Speaker, we believe that if total compliance is given to the recommended protocols, there will be greater assurance for the safety of all.

#### NATIONAL SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMME

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to The National School Feeding Unit which was developed to address the nutritional needs of students in our public education system. This unit includes the Lunch Vendor Unit and the National School Lunch Programme.

The National School Lunch Programme was envisioned as a safety net for Bahamian students, who can be assured of receiving a free, healthy meal during their time on our campuses. The programme has five thousand three hundred & fifty one (5351) students enrolled. There are two thousand five hundred & fifty one (2551) students on the family islands and two thousand eight hundred (2800) students in New Providence.

The programme provides assistance on the following islands:

- Abaco
- Acklins
- Cat Island
- Crooked Island
- Eleuthera
- Grand Bahama
- Inagua
- Long Island
- Mayaguana
- North/Central Andros
- The Berry Island
- San Salvador
- South Andros
- New Providence

As a result of Hurricane Dorian and the COVID 19 pandemic, the unit realizes that there is a need for a review of the programme, we must revisit eligibility and assessment of families and students who benefit from the programme. Concerted efforts will be made during the 2020 – 2021 fiscal period to address these matters.

Mr. Speaker, monitoring and evaluation is a key aspect of the coordination of the National School Lunch Programme. The programme offers employment opportunities for one hundred and fifty seven (157) qualified Bahamians who serve as lunch vendors or Food Handlers. The challenges of COVID19 demand that health protocols must be followed by all Food Handlers. In this regard, assessments will be conducted quarterly, while the practice of monitoring will be continuous.

Monitoring and assessments will cover food presentation, hygiene, nutritive value checks, health and safety standards and the sanitary conditions under which food items are prepared.

Mr. Speaker, an electronic assessment platform was developed and piloted in collaboration with the Planning & Research Unit, to record and collate the assessment data. Full implementation of this instrument is expected to commence September 2020.

Mr. Speaker, during the national student registration drive for displaced students, there was a distribution of lunch vouchers. This also occurred after the closure of schools, in response to the COVID – 19 pandemic. Both of these processes made us aware of the need to revisit the procedure for registering students in the National School Lunch Programme to ensure the system is fair and equitable.

This is one of the challenges that inspired the development of the electronic registration system, which was made possible through collaboration with the Ministry of Education's Technology Unit. It is anticipated that this along with the electronic assessment platform, will enhance expeditious accuracy and access to data.

Mr. Speaker, in keeping with Ministry of Health's healthy initiatives for a healthy lifestyle, the sale of all sugar sweetened beverages was discontinued from school tuck shops. During this exercise, healthy snacks were also recommended for use on the campuses. Several meetings were held with

manufacturers and merchants, of a variety of products, to seek out alternative products or how to reduce the sugar content in existing products.

Mr. Speaker, in an effort to bring relief to participants of the programme during COVID19, meal and food store vouchers were distributed in three phases.

Phase I	Phase II	Phase III
\$233,955.00	\$317,550.00	\$322,000.00

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry was able to bring financial relief to the unemployed Food Handlers, by paying them during their time of unemployment, as this budget line was already provided for in the 2019 – 2020 budget. This Food Handlers stimulus package commenced on the 16th March, 2020, when a total of \$381, 600.00 was distributed. This decision also helped to lessen the pressure on the amount of persons having to seek assistance from the National Insurance Board.

Mr. Speaker, in keeping with the Ministry of Education’s mandate to provide professional development activities for caterers and vendors, the National School Feeding Unit will sponsor the 2nd National School Feeding Symposium. The first symposium was held at the Choices Training Restaurant, University of the Bahamas from the 17th – 20th June, 2019. During that forum, in excess of 170 Food Handlers were instructed by chefs from the School of Hospitality. This four (4) day symposium taught both theory and practical components in the culinary arts.

Mr. Speaker, this year, due to the COVID19 crisis, training of Food Handlers will continue virtually. Courses will include topics to prepare our Food Handlers to provide healthy lunches. Additionally, the Food Handlers will be introduced to back yard gardening and the benefits of food processing in this Covid19 era. Administrators and Guidance Counselors will also be provided with a course on the supervision and assessment of Food Handlers.

Mr. Speaker, already we have started to introduce our food handlers to international certification in food safety and sanitation. The National Restaurant Association facilitated the first course from the 27th – 31st May, 2020, During this course (20) twenty Food Handlers, from the National School Lunch programme, made up the first cohort of participants to obtain this ServSafe certification. Additionally, the National School Feeding Coordinator sought and participated in a forum on COVID – 19 Precautions for Food Handlers.

The National School Feeding Unit will continue to develop and enhance relationships with other Government agencies, inclusive of Social Services, Urban Renewal and NGO’s, such as Hands for Hunger and the Bahamas Feeding Network. These NGO’s continue to support the efforts of the National School Feeding Unit.

#### STUDENT SERVICES SECTION

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the units within the Special Services Section of the Ministry of Education. This unit includes the following critical areas:

- Speech Therapy
- Guidance & Counselling
- Attendance

- School Psychology
- Special Education

These departments have all played an integral role in the registration and support of students who were displaced by Hurricane Dorian.

Additionally, counseling sessions were provided for teachers and students and the Ministry is appreciative of the additional specialized training, by humanitarian aid agency IsraAID, in psycho/Social Welfare. This training was provided to the unit's technical officers in New Providence, Grand Bahama, Abaco, Eleuthera and Exuma.

Armed with this additional specialized training, these officers then reached out to students and teachers impacted by the hurricane and provided a much needed coping mechanism to our students.

Mr. Speaker, more recently, as a response to COVID-19, the unit has been actively carrying out an Employee Assistance Programme, which has been offering virtual wellness sessions for staff members of the Ministry of Education.

This unit has produced public service announcements, in conjunction with the Ministry's Communication's section, for students and parents of children with Special Needs, to ensure our parents that assistance is still available to them.

We wanted to ensure that we are not only meeting our student's academic needs, during this virus lockdown, but that they are also receiving emotional and psychological support. Our team of school psychologists, speech therapists, guidance counsellors, school attendance officers and special education specialists have remained available via phone, and online through social media.

Mr. Speaker, we want to encourage our parents to reach out to our Special Services Section as they continue to offer a steady flow of quality, psycho-educational & behavioral assessment of school aged children. We are ensuring that we provide the support our students and staff need to overcome and cope with a variety of challenging psychosocial, emotional or behavioural difficulties.

### **SCHOLARSHIP & EDUCATIONAL LOAN DIVISION**

Mr. Speaker, The Ministry of Education's Scholarship and Educational Loan Division is ensuring that we do our part to encourage higher education and develop our greatest resource, human capital, by providing Bahamian students with access to scholarship opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, the public has been able to access the Scholarship Division via various social platforms. By logging onto its website: *[scholarshipsbahamas.com](http://scholarshipsbahamas.com)*, applicants and awardees are able to navigate the site for information and learn about opportunities. SELD's online live chat, also allows stakeholders to communicate with officers after hours. This medium proved particularly valuable during this Covid 19 pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, during this budgetary period, 2019/2020, the government has provided avenues to higher education for 1,780 Bahamian recipients, totaling \$15,112,568.00 toward post-secondary educational



attainment. The ripple effect of this investment in young Bahamians touches many homes and communities spanning every inhabited island of this great nation. The Ministry of Education continues working toward a “College Ready” nation.

Despite the progress, however, challenges remain. One glaring challenge is the fact that there are NEVER ENOUGH scholarships for all who apply – I dare say Mr. Speaker, never enough for all who are DESERVING.

As we all know the country is rebuilding from hurricane Dorian, coupled with that the Covid 19 pandemic brought the economy to a virtual standstill. A double whammy resulting in a mandate to cut budgets by twenty percent. There will be a deficit in funding – and because of this, the Scholarship Division will continue to make a concerted effort to focus more on granting scholarships that align with the government’s career and national developmental goals. Consequently, new applicants are encouraged to take advantage of the free tuition at the University of The Bahamas (UB) and the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI) in addition to degree, certificate and online programs that are available here at home which are approved by The National Accreditation and Equivalency Council (NAECOB). Free Tuition at these tertiary institutions is the realization of a major plank in the Free National Movement's 2017 manifesto.

Mr. Speaker, turning to the other side of the equation of granting scholarships for study outside of the Bahamas is the challenge of providing opportunities and incentives to attract our students to return home upon completion of their degrees. This is a collective national challenge we face to mitigate the “brain drain,”

To encourage qualified Bahamian talent, it is recommended that the bonding of students awarded government scholarships, be re-introduced for individuals receiving the awards. As these awards do not cover the full cost of studies, it is suggested that bond service represents six months for each year of the award. Nonetheless Mr. Speaker, despite our challenges, the Scholarship Division is working assiduously to fulfill the government's mandate of improving our nation’s human capital by increasing the quality and quantity of our educational investment.

Over the years Bahamians have demonstrated that they are among the best and brightest in the world. Scholarship recipients such as Shannon Butler, former All Bahamas Merit Scholar, is arguably one of the brightest minds who is helping to contribute to his country by addressing the global health pandemic. Shannon never thought he would address a global health pandemic for a Master’s degree dissertation. His original placements and dissertations were scrapped in the face of COVID-19. He was given new topics and current dissertations, which are now entirely literature based and centered on the Corona virus, as he completes a year- long study toward a Master’s of Philosophy in therapeutic sciences at Christ College, University of Cambridge.

There are hundreds of other Bahamians whom the government has invested in with scholarships. It is our hope that many return home to continue the onward march in building the Bahamas as these, our best and brightest are our leaders of the tomorrow.

## **PRE-PRIMARY**

Mr. Speaker, the vision of the Ministry of Education is that all young children in The Bahamas have access to a high quality early childhood care and pre-primary education. The United Nations 2030 Development Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal 4 is that of ensuring quality inclusive and equitable education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Target 4.2 further states that by 2030 all children should have access to quality early childhood programmes before formal learning begins. The Ministry of Education has commitment to ensuring that all girls and boys have access to quality early education development, care and pre- primary education by 2022.

Mr. Speaker, the World Bank in a Report on Education for Global Development indicates that:

*“The life and the future of a child is marked by brain development in the early years. Learning and stimulation during the early years is a key building block to help young children reach their full potential. Early Childhood Education (ECE) can improve cognitive skills, reduce repetition and drop-out rates, increase school retention, and help develop social, emotional and life skills, and the ability to learn that children need to succeed as adults in a world that might be very different from the one we live in today”.*

It is under this mandate and proven conclusions, that the Ministry of Education has introduced and executed a number of successful initiatives to improve access, equity and the quality of early childhood/pre-primary education in The Bahamas.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education launched The Universal Pre Primary Education Initiative in 2018 with the goal of increasing the number of 3 and 4 year olds enrolled in a pre-primary programme. This would be achieved by increasing the number of free spaces available for parents in public and private preschools. Through the Public Private Preschool Voucher Programme students who cannot be accommodated in the public preschool in their residential area are provided with a voucher to attend a Ministry of Education approved private preschool.

This year the Ministry of Education provided fifteen hundred (1,500) vouchers for children to attend preschool. These vouchers were distributed to families in need of financial assistance. Moreover, they ensure that the child attends a preschool where he or she can develop the literacy, numeracy and social skills necessary for first grade and to build a strong foundation for school success.

To date over 2,000 vouchers have been provided for students in New Providence, Andros and Grand Bahama to attend one of the 86 Private Preschool Partners.

There is an ongoing revision of the Pre-Primary Curriculum. The newly revised components of the curriculum inclusive of Language Development, Physical Development and Cognitive Development (Mathematics, (Science, Technology and Engineering) will place emphasis on 21st century learning skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, technology literacy, and social emotional development which according to Partnership for 21 century are skills not only necessary for when entering school but also for life. The Early Childhood Education Section of the Department of

Education will launch components of the revised preschool curriculum during the 2020-2021 academic year.

Mr. Speaker, the curriculum will identify the expected learning outcomes as well as aid early childhood pre-service and in-service teachers, practitioners, and other stakeholders involved in the delivery of Pre-primary education with developmentally appropriate strategies and approaches to support the holistic development of children ages 3-5 years.

Training and implementation of the newly revised curriculum will begin as early as this summer and throughout the year using a variety of modalities such as small group sessions, virtual workshops and prerecorded training videos. All stakeholders will have an opportunity to review the document and the expectations for pre-primary students.

Early childhood officers along with other local stakeholders from government and non- government agencies, are collaborating with their CARICOM colleagues, to Revise the Learning Outcomes of the Caribbean Handbook. This too is in light of the 21st century requirements and SDG Goal 4.

The Resource Guide will be particularly useful to early childhood curriculum developers and caregivers/ teachers and parents who desire to uphold appropriate practices in the care, nurture and education of young children in the Caribbean.

This handbook provides the framework that will cover development of children from birth - 7 years old and will focus on six learning outcomes; Wellness, Effective Communication, Valuing Culture, Intellectual Empowerment, Respect for Self and Others and Resilience.

Mr. Speaker, there will be an intentional focus on the integration of STEM based courses in our pre-primary curriculum. STEM It UP Fridays will be launched into the public preprimary programme in the upcoming academic year. During this time, an intentional focus will be placed on science, technology, engineering and mathematics courses.

A group of five (5) early childhood officers and teachers attended a training in STEM education in Early Childhood in Lima Peru. Following the internship, the team designed a programme to provide an intentional focus on the integration of engineering and technology into the preschool through engaging and interactive activities. The group along with Jamaica and Barbados developed an online resource to support teachers in this area of STEM Education.

The capacity of the early childhood sector has been enhanced through the hiring of three education officers and four inspectors in New Providence and Grand Bahama. These individuals bring knowledge and experience which will assist greatly in the human resources at the section and the management and inspection of preschool and daycare centers.

Mr. Speaker, during this challenging and unexpected time of COVID 19, our pre-primary students have received instruction on the Ministry of Education's Virtual Learning site and Webinars. The Preschool tab provides students with recorded live lessons, indigenous instructional digital resources and teaching videos.

Officers engaged in meetings and training sessions with preschool teachers and teacher's aides throughout the family islands using Microsoft 365. This provided an opportunity for collaboration, dissemination of information and planning.

Mr. Speaker, responses in a parent survey reveal that parents who use the online learning platform are pleased and grateful for the resources and congratulated the Ministry of Education for the opportunity to continue learning during the closure of school facilities. In addition, many teachers engaged in regular communication and video conferencing with their students and families.

A National Play Date initiative was held in collaboration with the Department of Education and The Organization of Responsible Governance. The purpose of this activity was to bring together young children and their parents to foster communities of mutual support, give informative resources for early childhood development and parenting, and provide a safe space for parents and children to have fun together (ORG, 2020). The first playdate was held on Edmund Moxey Park and future playdates are planned.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend and thank our corporate partners, who partnered with The Early Childhood Education Section to distribute preschool learning packets to students who are unable to use the online learning platforms.

These packets are to ensure that students continue to learn during the closure of school facilities. Parents of pre-primary age children were invited to collect the learning packets from schools and businesses in the community. The goal is to ensure that every child is reached and given access to the opportunity to continue to learn and develop during this time.

### **CURRICULUM REFORM**

Mr. Speaker I believe that the way a curriculum is designed is essentially a plan to develop society. So the question is: What do we want our society to look like?

With a renewed focus on curriculum reform, officers in the Curriculum Division have been working at various stages on the Curriculum Development Cycle which was conceptualized at the Ministry of Education's conclave held in April, 2018. Using the curriculum cycle, the following curriculum guides were launched in January of this year: Physics, Mathematics at the junior and senior high level; Accounts, Commerce and Physical Education at the primary school level. Other subjects are at varying stages of the curriculum cycle and we anticipate a launch of these subjects early in the new 2020-2021 school year. These new guides, underpinned with an emphasis on the four C's (Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Communication and Creativity) are designed to create problem solvers, critical thinkers and independent learners.

There are six primary curriculum documents currently in the Design and Revise stage: Religious Studies, Science, Language Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics and Performing Arts. Language Arts and Social Studies documents should be available for September 2020. The remaining documents should be ready for September 2021.

In January of this year the Curriculum Instruction Website was created to facilitate access to the new curriculum guides and current syllabi.

Mr. Speaker in the aftermath of Hurricane Dorian and in the midst of the COVID-19, Curriculum Officers and their teams of teachers worked assiduously to ensure that curriculum implementation and instruction for students was not interrupted. Using the Ministry of Education's Virtual School's platform and more recently, Cable Bahamas' Channels 295 and 296, curriculum officers guided teachers through the process of preparing and teaching virtual lessons covering all grade levels from pre-school to 12th grade. With BJC and BGCSE national examinations now set to begin on July 13<sup>th</sup>, virtual classes are specifically geared for students of grades nine and twelve.

To date, 4,373 virtual lessons and resources have been created by Curriculum Officers and their teams of teachers.

In January, 2020, the Curriculum Division welcomed ten new Curriculum Officers to its team, filling positions which had been vacant for a while. Some of these included Modern Languages, Visual Arts, Technical Studies, Physical Education and the Sciences (High School). To ensure a smooth transition from the classroom, the Curriculum Division hosted a two-day orientation seminar for the new Curriculum Officers.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

If there is one critical ingredient in the transformation of education on this planet, including the Bahamas, It must be the implementation and effective use of advanced technological modalities -- from state of the art equipment to expansive 5<sup>th</sup> generation internet power. There can be no successful educational system in the world today without. It is as simple as that.

The World Economic Forum estimates that 65% of children entering primary school today will find themselves in occupations that today do not exist. To prepare the talent needed for the digital economy, education must adapt as fast as the demand for IT skills is growing and evolving.

It continued that: “ Insights into the influence of psychological, social, cultural and environmental factors on how we learn are emerging from “the new science of learning”. This approach to understanding education argues that in our complex and rapidly evolving world today, academic models based on interdisciplinary research are necessary to create effective teaching and learning environments. Learning science is uncovering new approaches to education. Research by Professor R. Keith Sawyer, a leading scientific expert on creativity and learning, emphasizes the power of technology to influence and enhance academia by providing experiences that lead to deep learning. These include allowing students to learn collaboratively, test out and redesign models, and articulate their knowledge both visually and verbally.

Imagine, He says, a classroom infrastructure that includes wireless technologies, remotely accessible switches and routers, and collaboration tools to create an “intelligent” environment for the invention of real-world Internet of Things (IoT) products, services, and experiences by students.

This is the world of today, Mr. Speaker, not tomorrow. There is hardly a household in the Bahamas or a students for that matter whose life has not been touched directly by technology. All the way from the phone in their hands to the augmented reality, artificial. Intelligence and more with which they engage every single day.

We have no choice to digitize our educational system, as fast as we could.

That is why in January, 2018, the MOE initiated an aggressive digitization project with a view to creat a smart educational system. Another signature p[ledge of the FNM Government. On September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, after months of preparation and planning, the Bahamas launched its first ever Virtual School, among the first, if not the first, in the CARICOM region.

One day later, our country received a most unwelcomed guest – Dorian – that completely wiped out the Ministry’s budget for Technology, because funds, then, had to be used for school repairs.

Despite the setback the following milestones were accomplished:

Before September last year, hundreds of students in the remote FI lacked instructional leaders n specialty courses - especially Maths, Science and Technology. The ends was desperate to provide the same equity and access to these students as all others were benefitting from in other islands. This must be the central objective of any education system – equity and access. Initially, there were some 500 students enrolled on the VS. As a result of Dorian, that number jumped to 1750.

Mr. Speaker, most recently as a result of COVID 19, the entire educational community had to resort to virtual instruction. Again, the Virtual School was expanded with the partnership of 1 on 1 and BTC, Cable Bahamas and Aliv for all students in The Bahamas, both public and private, to have access to a virtual education.

During this process we experienced challenges along the way. Some students did not have devices and or internet connectivity. The Ministry of Education sought to resolve the issue by partnering with Cable Bahamas and Aliv to procure five thousand tablets with Wi-Fi access at a cost of **\$500,000.00**. These devices will be distributed in the first instance to students who, through no fault of their own, do not have the means to purchase these devices. We initially targeted those students who are currently receiving some form of assistance from the government. Our objective is to purchase an additional five thousand tablets at a total cost of **1 million dollars**.

Mr. Speaker let me draw your attention to a visual which depicts a substantial increase in the participation of students on the Ministry’s Virtual Network between March and the present day.

**(SHOW VIRTUAL SCHOOL VISUAL)**

Prior to COVID19, the Department of Education had started to distribute tablets to our lower primary students in grades K – 3, and this process continues. To date 9,000 of the 12,000 devices were distributed.

Mr. Speaker, here are some islands where students have not received tablets because of the disruptions of Hurricane Dorian and COVID-19. In this new budget period, we will continue with the procurement

exercise with the view to provide a tablet for every student and a laptop for every teacher during this academic year in our primary schools. This will cost **3 million dollars**.

Mr. Speaker, through partnership with vendors our schools are being enhanced to become smart schools. That is to say, schools are being upgraded from DSL to Fiber, access points are being installed to provide Wi-Fi access in our schools. Our goal is to improve the technical infrastructure linking all districts, public schools, and all satellite offices with the Ministry of Education. This creating a WAN (**a Wide Area Network**).

Mr. Speaker, there is an outstanding balance of 8.7 million dollars which the Ministry of Finance has made provisions for.

**PROGRESS REPORT ON INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADE**

	<b>ISLAND</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE COMPLETED</b>
<b>1</b>	Eleuthera	<b>98 %</b>
<b>2</b>	Grand Bahamas	<b>100 %</b>
<b>3</b>	New Providence	<b>95 %</b>

We have completed **64%** of the entire project. The remaining **36%** of schools that need to be upgraded would undergo the tendering process and the upgrade is scheduled to commence thereafter. To date, we would have spent **12 million dollars** thus far on this upgrade. To complete the remaining **36%** is expected to cost an additional **6-8 million dollars** factoring in the cost to travel and accommodations to these remote islands.

**REMAINING LOCATIONS TO BE UPGRADED**

Island	Schools
North & Central Andros	14??
South Andros	7
Long Island	7 ??
Exuma Cays	12
Cat Island	6??
Acklins	4 ??
Crooked Island	2??
Mayaguana	2??

Ragged Island	1
San Salvador	2
Rum Cay	1
Inagua	1 ??
Bimini	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	61

Additionally, a Technology Task Force has been commissioned and tasked with the responsibility of the implementation of a comprehensive EMIS (**Education Management Information System**) and LMS (**Learning Management System**).

Mr. Speaker, Hurricane Dorian and now COVID -19 has shown us that an EMIS and LMS are of critical importance.

The EMIS (**Education Management Information System**) is used to create indicators that monitor the performance of an education system and to manage the distribution and allocation of educational resources and services. It includes data collection, data processing, data analysis, and data reporting. EMIS platforms vary in size, scope, and capability most systems include the following standard modules: schools /institutions, students /pupils, teachers /staff, classes and grades, enrollments and graduates, buildings and infrastructure, textbooks and resources, and finances.

The LMS (**Learning Management System**) is a software application for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting, automation, and delivery of educational courses, training programs, or learning and development programs. The learning management system concept emerged directly from e-Learning. **The estimated cost for the EMIS/LMS and training is 3-5 million dollars.**

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to School Management. Hurricane Dorian displaced students and teachers from Abaco and Grand Bahama were posted temporarily throughout schools within the Bahamas. The majority of the students and teachers remain at these schools to date.

Schools Management was unable to recruit this year in Cuba as a result of COVID -19. This will leave a void as we were expecting to get about sixty specialist teachers from Cuba. The Ministry will seek to hire 200 hundred teachers to replace teachers that have retired or left the system. This will consist of our Bahamian grown teachers by way of the University of the Bahamas. This will come in at a cost of approximately **5 million dollars.**

To survive in a COVID 19 era, the Ministry of Education will facilitate a blended learning environment. If social distancing is still being enforced, then schools would have to be on a rotation system where one group of students receive face-to-face instruction, while the other group of students



receives instruction virtually. To ensure that we can achieve this we would have to supply each student and teacher, if they do not have, a device and internet capability.

### **BAHAMAS HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA**

As is often stated, the Ministry of Education's goal is to increase the graduation rate from 50 to 85% by 2030. We are vigorously working toward that goal. Although we are not where we want to be at this point, thankfully, for the past three years we have seen an upward trend in the number of public high school graduates nationally. This amid the recent adjustments in criteria for Bahamas High School Diploma recipients.

### **(SHOW VISUAL OF UPWARD TREND)**

JUNE 2019 – 59% of students graduated

JUNE 2018 – 53% of students graduated

JUNE 2017 – 47% of students graduated

Mr. Speaker, let me state emphatically, that the Ministry and Department of Education's aim is to provide as many opportunities as possible for every single student to succeed within their calling. Consequently, we recently embarked on a Second Chance Intervention Programme. This programme was designed for students who failed to meet the requirements of graduation, to receive another opportunity to earn their diploma. The two-week process during the summer permits students to receive intervention in areas of deficiency, and thus potentially qualify for the diploma. In July 2019, 101 of 125 qualifying students took advantage of the programme, and satisfied the criteria for the diploma.

Let me reiterate this point Mr. Speaker: cultivating the 21st century graduate is a community responsibility. Our students need the support of their parents, church and social club leaders, the police force, corporate partners; indeed, everyone they come into contact with.

### **EXAMINATION AND ASSESSMENT**

Mr. Speaker, the National Examinations are the gauge by which our students' academic performances are measured locally and internationally. In light of this, last school year saw another successful execution of the Grade Level Assessment Tests (GLAT), Bahamas Junior Certificate (BJC) and Bahamas General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) Examinations. I am most pleased to report that the number of students receiving 5As or more in the BJC Examination increased by 114%; moving from twenty-two (22) in 2018 to forty-seven (47) in 2019.

As is customary, students' outstanding performances in the BJC and BJC examinations were celebrated nationally on February 3rd of this year.

Allow me to highlight the following students for receiving top awards in the BJC examinations.

RIO R. GREENE of H. O. Nash Jr. High School captured the Government School Male candidate with Overall Best BJC Results: 8As, 2Bs

SIERRA TURNQUEST of N. G. M. Major High School, Long Island was awarded Government School Candidate with Best Overall BJC Results: 9As, 1B

ARIANNE DOUCET of Forest Heights Academy, Abaco-Independent School Candidate and Candidate with Overall Best BJC Results in The Commonwealth of The Bahamas: 10As, 1B

The following students received outstanding awards in the BGCSE Examination:

CARMETTA BARRY of C. R. WALKER SR. High School received THE MARJORIE DAVIS AWARD for Best Overall Performance in BGCSE Examination in Government Schools: 8As, 2Bs, 2Cs

ISHA RAMAN of QUEEN'S COLLEGE received the CAROL HANNA AWARD for Best Overall BGCSE Performance in Independent Schools and the PAUL L. ADDERLEY AWARD for Best Overall Performance in The Commonwealth of The Bahamas: 10As, 1B

Following the passage of Hurricane Dorian, candidates who would have lost personal possessions during the storm were presented with copies of their examination documents at no cost.

Mr. Speaker, during the upcoming 2020/2021 fiscal period, the Examination and Assessment Division hopes to address some of the challenges which have plagued the division for several years.

Firstly, there is a need for a stand-by generator to service the needs especially during the summer months and the hurricane season.

- A complete maintenance overhaul of the facility is needed. Specifically, the individual AC units frequently malfunction and there is insufficient ventilation. Additionally, the building is in need of plumbing upgrades.

- The Division intends to collaborate with the Human Resources Department to develop a Career Path for Technical officers. The current structure accommodates only THREE senior positions. This is highly unacceptable, and should be revamped to allow for more promotions.

- The Division recently welcomed the addition of four (4) Subject Secretaries to the staff compliment. There is still a need for additional General Service Workers who will be able to physically assist with the movement of materials especially during the examination season. Despite the staff shortages, the work of the Division was not severely impacted; as staff continued to exhibit a high level of commitment.

### **COVID 19's IMPACT ON NATIONAL EXAMINATIONS**

Mr. Speaker, the issue of the 2020 National Exit Exams continues to be a contentious point of national discussion. Unfortunately, the pandemic which has adversely gripped the world, has seriously impacted the operations of the Examination and Assessment Division. Currently, ten thousand six hundred fifty nine (10,659) candidates are registered to write the BAHAMAS JUNIOR CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION (BJC's) and five thousand, nine hundred ninety-six (5,996) candidates are registered to write the BAHAMAS GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION EXAMINATION (BGCSE's). Examinations were scheduled to begin on March 30th. However, the COVID19 crisis brought the administration of the examinations to a halt.

As unprecedented times call for unprecedented measures, the 2020 Grade Level Assessment Tests (GLAT) have been cancelled. However, after careful analysis and collaboration with local and international stakeholders in education, weighing the pros and cons, the Ministry has decided that it would be in the best interest of our Bahamian high school students to sit their BJC's and BGCSE's beginning on July 13th, 2020. Accordingly, the Ministry of Education, through the staff of the Examination and Assessment Division will endeavor to do its best to ensure that every single student in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas who is registered to sit the 2020 BJC and BGCSE examinations have the opportunity to do so. We realize that it is a right that should not be denied. Doing so will not come without challenges but the examinations SHOULD be administered in the best interest of our students.

While we are aware that this was a particularly demanding year for many, the decision to conduct the said hold the BJC and BGCSE examinations is grounded in the following factors: a number of factors which include the following:

- The country has now moved into Phase 4 of The Bahamas Government's measured approach to reopening the economy and society. The Government's Plan indicates that national examinations could have been held as early as Phase 3.
- Our obligation is always to provide a service for which clients have paid and have a reasonable expectation to receive.
- Students require credentials which they can use to compete for places in the labour market or further their educational pursuits; institutions.
- Our operational capacity, especially the physical distancing requirement, makes it near impossible to hold the examinations during the first term of the upcoming school year without creating major disruptions to the instructional programmes.

The Examination and Assessment Division will issue revised BJC and BGCSE Timetables to examination centres on, beginning Monday 15th June.

As a policy for summer employment in the Public service, compensation is based on qualifications. Such as \$125 – No BJC; Incrementally increased based on exams results, up to \$175.

College students – 200 pw

The new deadline for the submission of Coursework is Friday 24th July. Schools or Private Candidates that are now ready to submit Coursework may be asked to contact the Examination and Assessment Division at telephone number 604-3800 or email – [test.ed@batelnet.bs](mailto:test.ed@batelnet.bs).

The examination dates are:

BJC	Monday 13th July – Wednesday 5th August, 2020
BGCSE	Monday 13th July – Friday 14th August, 2020

New Individual Timetables will be issued to ALL candidates by 1st July, 2020. Students can will be able to collect their timetables from their respective schools. Private/Unattached Candidates can will be able to collect their timetables from the following locations:

New Providence – Examination and Assessment Division, Tonique Darling Highway

Grand Bahama – Ministry of Education, C.A. Smith Complex

Family Islands – District Superintendent's Office

Students are encouraged to continue to prepare for the examinations, The Ministry is committed to offering as much assistance as possible through The Virtual Learning Platform which will provide review content for both the BJC and BGCSE examinations, beginning Monday 15th June 2020.

Additionally, the One-On-One (the Learning Management System for the Virtual School) pre-tests for skills in the subject areas is also available to students. The results of the pre-tests at the BJC and BGCSE levels will show students the areas of their strengths and weaknesses, and will help teachers identify the areas they need to emphasize as they review with students. Teachers who are willing to work with students face-to-face are invited to indicate their availability to their respective Principals as soon as possible so that interested students may access the help they need. Interested students can contact the schools who will arrange appropriate review times. Safety protocols of physical distancing will be enforced during these face-to-face sessions.

Mr. Speaker Ministry of Education officials have also observed with some concern the emphasis of many persons, including we assume some of our Public School parents, who are insistent on cancelling the National Examinations for their children who are prepared to take them, regardless of the challenges which these children have faced since the onset of the COVID 19 Pandemic. In this regard, we note that some parents have reacted with outrage that the MOE would even consider going ahead with these exams, and 8,000 persons have reportedly signed an online petition against the holding of the exams. We believe that the Ministry would deprive students of a vital opportunity, were we to accede to this request. Mr. Speaker, in some instances there has been much venom and outrage directed at the MOE, which has caused some of us to wonder about the sense of outrage which has been notably lacking in some other critical issues. Firstly, where was the sense of outrage when some Teachers walked out on their students preparing for their BJC exams for two months last year over an alleged "mold crisis" at CH Reeves School, when in fact the Environmental Monitoring and Risk Assessment Division of the Department of Environmental Health Services determined that there was no such issue which would necessitate the walk out. Where was the sense of outrage when primary school students preparing for their GLAT exams at Carlton Francis Primary School were deprived of their instruction because some teachers had an issue with the principal? In case we forgot, it was only a Court ordered injunction which led teachers from both schools to return to their posts.

The temptation is always to blame the MOE, or the Government for these problems. And so I ask this question, parents what more can you do to encourage your children to achieve their full potential? To assist you in your contemplation, let me share with you what is happening in the remainder of the Caribbean. Following the original outbreak of COVID 19 in the region in March of this year, the vast majority of Caribbean governments, in an almost knee jerk reaction, cancelled the regional CXC exams. There was immediately so much outrage from the citizenry in these countries, that these Governments were forced to reinstate the exams.

Mr. Speaker, are we so different in The Bahamas? Is it that we put so little value in Education, or is it that we have so little confidence in our children? Yes, our students have been through a lot, and yes, they must reach inside themselves and muster up the confidence and discipline to buckle down and take their exams, just as many students must do the world over. There are many in this country who have endured hardships over the years, without pandemics or hurricanes, yet they emerge as top performers in their schools. Could it be that adversity, discipline and determination count for

something ? These are the real questions to be asked by all of us interested in the well being of our students.

Mr. Speaker, let me state also that petitions are important aspects of democracy, but for us in the Ministry of Education, the access of students to the writing of the BGCSE and BJC exams is fundamentally an issue of social justice and fair play, and we firmly believe that we are operating in the best interest of our children. Our students stand on the cusp of opportunity, and we refuse to deny them. We have provided numerous opportunities for them to be well prepared, more opportunities than have been provided to any other group of students before them. So we say to all of our BJC and BGCSE students with the greatest degree of affection and confidence "Carpe Diem" - "Seize the Day". This is your moment to shine, and do not be deterred by the naysayers. We believe in You.

### **CAPITAL WORKS & SCHOOL REPAIRS**

Mr. Speaker, the safety of our students is undoubtedly of paramount importance. We understand the significance of providing a physical environment conducive to educational growth. To this end, we have embarked on several ongoing capital works projects, in which a number of schools are being renovated and repaired accordingly. Work is currently underway on the following schools and completion is forecasted between January and September 2021:

Holmes Rock Junior High School, Lowe Sound Primary School, Staniel Cay All-Age School, and Eva Hilton Primary Sporting Complex.

In June of last year, four (4) additional preschool classrooms were constructed at the Thelma Gibson Primary School.

### **CRITICAL STRUCTURAL SUMMER REPAIRS**

During the summer of 2019, critical repairs were carried out and completed at nine (9) public schools in New Providence with the exception of one school, C. R. Walker Senior High School. Repairs are currently being done at the school, and are projected to be completed in time for the reopening of this upcoming school year. Schools which were completed during the summer of 2019 include:

D.W. Davis Junior High, H.O. Nash Junior High, C.W. Sawyer Primary School, Government High, S.C. McPherson, C.I. Gibson Senior High, and C.H. Reeves Junior High.

#### **(VISUAL 3)**

Meantime Mr. Speaker, this year, summer school repairs on **New Providence** are projected at an estimated cost of \$12 million. This will include works on **49** primary and high schools and 11 libraries.

#### **(VISUAL 4)**

Summer repairs on the **Family Islands** are estimated at 4 million 850 thousand dollars. This includes **97** primary, high and all-age schools.

Recent expansions were completed at 7 schools including C.H. Reeves Junior High, North Eleuthera High, Claridge Primary, Eva Hilton Primary, A. F. Adderley Junior High School, North Andros High, and Adelaide Primary Preschool. Among the expansions were new classrooms, art rooms, computer, and science labs.

## **HURRICANE DORIAN REPAIRS**

Mr. Speaker, as we all know, Hurricane Dorian, at the start of this academic year, ravaged many of our school structures on the islands of Grand Bahama and Abaco, leaving them in a state of disrepair. But as we stated during the initial stages of the horror, our spirit of resilience would propel us to conquer the odds, restore and preserve quality education.

### **(VISUAL 5)**

In this vein, repairs and reconstruction on Abaco and Grand Bahama are on-going. The total cost of work on **Abaco** is estimated to the tune of **\$12,665,096.86**. Work on **Grand Bahama** is estimated at a cost of **\$5,294,650.85**.

### **(VISUAL 6)**

#### **PROPOSED NEW SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION 2020 – 2021**

- **Abaco's Treasure Cay Primary School** which was destroyed by Hurricane Dorian will be rebuilt on its present site at a cost of **6 million dollars**.

### **(VISUAL 7)**

- **East Grand Bahama Comprehensive School** – This new structure will accommodate students from the four schools which were severely damaged by Hurricane Dorian. Those schools include: Freetown Primary, High Rock Primary, McClean's Town Junior High, and Sweeting's Cay All-Age School. This building will also be used as a hurricane shelter.

### **(VISUAL 8)**

- **INAGUA COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL** – is estimated at a cost of **\$8,300,000**.

**GEORGE TOWN PRIMARY** – is estimated at a cost of **\$8,000,000**.

The Capital expenditure of this Ministry reflects this Govt's commitment to ensure an enhanced learning environment

## **Reopening of Schools in September 2020**

Mr. Speaker, there is no question that this New Reality introduced as a result of COVID-19, will inaugurate a new way of teaching and learning when schools reopen for the new academic year.

Given our recent experience with managing generally during this pandemic, we know that many of the physical distancing practices have introduced additional layers of bureaucracy and logistics. These requirements, of necessity will have tremendous cost implications. We will have to be realistic about what it is that we would be able to do and there will have to be a clear understanding that while safety is number one, we have to also do as much as we can to manage our resource.

On the other hand, Mr. Speaker, we are also aware that many positive adaptive measures that were explored during this COVID-19 era. In the education sector, we have seen that the wide-scale use of virtual learning and ICTs offers many possibilities for significant positive change. The old adage “Necessity is the mother of invention” (and perhaps innovation) is one that we can and must embrace. In the Ministry of Education, we are confident that the ICT will enable us to improve the quality of the product that we provide and do so at reduced costs.

In preparing for the 2020-2021 academic year, the Department of Education has undertaken several key activities. First, the Department of Education has technical representation on a regional team of education planners who have been charged with preparing a framework for the reopening of schools. This team, under to sponsorship and guidance of a number of regional and global organisations including the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB); The Caribbean Community (CARICOM); United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), have developed a framework to assist countries in the development of a plan to facilitate a rational, orderly and pragmatic school reopening process.

Next, Mr. Speaker, the Department of Education, has commenced the process of developing the technical plan for the Ministry of Education. A Steering Committee, Chaired by the Director of Education and populated with senior technical officers has begun their meetings. Subcommittees, made up of specialists from across the education sector and other government agencies, will craft a technical document which will be designed to guide the reopening of schools in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. Mr. Speaker, please note that the Ministry of Education is communicating with a number of public agencies, including the Ministry of Health, the Department of Environment Health Services and the Department of Road Traffic, to ensure that there is full compliance with public health and safety rules. In fact, the Department has developed guidelines for the administration and conduct of the national examinations to be held in July and August of this year which will be made available once the Ministry of Health signs off on them.

The goal of our planning activities Mr. Speaker, is to ensure the effective continuation of Education in the COVID-19/Post COVID-19 Era Committee. Currently, three models of schooling must be considered which are as follows:

- A. Entire student enrolment attending the school campus every day all day;
- B. Part of the student enrolment attending the school campus either on shifts within a day or for a reduced number of whole days per week. If this option is chosen, it is likely that it will involve the MOE employing a blended approach to learning. They would likely require students and their families to play a more deliberate role in the learning process; and
- C. Entire student enrolment not attending the school campus and receiving instruction virtually, which would be similar to what we have done over the last three months.

For each of these options, the technical team will assess the possible impact that would be exerted on the management of schools, the curriculum and the instructional process (including special education), the integration of technology, the preparation of buildings, health and safety, social assistance and wellbeing of students and staff and the engagement of stakeholders. Again, regional frameworks and guidelines are being used which address both the health and educational factors that will be important to creating such a plan. Of course, once the plan has been drafted, a range of stakeholders will be consulted and concerns and suggestions given full consideration before implementation.

### **Amalgamation of Schools**

Mr. Speaker, in this period of fiscal responsibility, the Ministry of Education is looking at ways in which it can maximise the resources that it has be allocated. One such measure involves the amalgamation of schools.

As you may be aware, Mr. Speaker, school enrolment across the country is in decline. For instance, student enrolment in 2005-6 academic year, public school enrolment was 51146 which enrolment in the private schools totalled 18538. More than a decade later (2018-2019), public school enrolment equalled 45499 while 14974 were enrolled in private schools. Also, as our country experiences increasing rate of urbanisation, school enrolment in Family Island public schools are losing significant levels of enrolment.

As you may be aware, Mr. Speaker, school enrolment across the country is in decline. For instance, student enrolment in 2005-6 academic year, public school enrolment was 51,146 which enrolment in the private schools totalled 18538. More than a decade later (2018-2019), public school enrolment equalled 45,499 while 14974 were enrolled in private schools. Also, as our country experiences increasing rate of urbanisation, school enrolment in Family Island public schools are losing significant levels of enrolment.

<b>School</b>	<b>School Year 2005 - 2006</b>	<b>School Year 2019 - 2020</b>	<b>Percentage decrease in Enrolment</b>
Arthur's Town High	85	41	52%
Current Island Primary	13	Closed, no enrolment	n/a
Glinton's Primary	59	24	59%
North Long Island High	124	81	35%
Abraham's Bay High	33	17	48%
Admiral Ferguson High	39	22	44%
Central Andros High	307	170	45%
South Andros High	186	135	27%

The diminishing enrolments are coupled with the challenges faced with attracting qualified teachers generally and the added difficulty of getting teachers to work in rural areas.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, our initial efforts with Virtual Learning was actually our attempt to provide students in the smaller schools with similar opportunities to learn as our students living in our



country's urban centres. With the Virtual School, we were able to provide students with instructors, based in New Providence, who could provide instruction to students from multiple islands of the country. This enabled us to maximise the teacher resource and, at the same time, enabled us to meet the needs of students from multiple communities.

However, with the diminishing number of students and teachers, the need to keep so many school plants open for the purpose of conducting schooling become more and more difficult to justify. We are well aware, Mr. Speaker, that some find the closing of a community-based school painful as the presence of a school symbolises community vibrancy. In the Ministry of Education, we believe that schools that may be closed as a result of amalgamation do not have to be abandoned. They can be used, in the first instance to support other government activities such as the housing of government offices (as is being done in New Bight, Cat Island where the school was closed recently or in Abraham's Bay, Mayaguana where consideration is being given to converting the school site to a government complex). Or, the facility could be used by the community or a well-intentioned NGO (as is the case of the Long Island Cancer Society). Only in the most unusual and extreme situations would we permit such compounds being used for private commercial undertakings.

A committee has been established and has offered recommendations for how the Ministry of Education should proceed in this exercise. Meetings have been held with a number of communities (or community representatives) in which it is expected that school Amalgamation should take place namely, Cat Island, Mayaguana, Long Island, Acklins, and Crooked Island. Over the next several months, the process will continue.

Mr. Speaker, we wish all to know that the Ministry of Education understands the trepidation that some may have about school amalgamations. However, we are committed to providing an improved quality of education services to all of our clients. We have seen to benefits of some of the steps that have been taken to support learning in rural areas. We ask parents and communities to exercise some patience and to work with us as we seek to enhance the educational opportunities that we offer.

### **Reforming the Education Bureaucracy**

Mr. Speaker, in 2015, the Government commissioned a multi-partisan group, comprising former ministers of education and other top level officials from three political parties, to create a Shared Vision for Education 2030. In that document, a commitment was made to reform the internal operations of the Ministry of Education in order to produce an education system that is:

- fair and equitable;
- accountable and transparent;
- progressive and strategic; and
- efficient and effective.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education is aware that it must conduct a systematic review of its current operations with a view to the following:

1. developing a clear set of goals and objectives to inform the work of the Education Sector;
2. re-organising and shifting of some responsibilities within the central office and from the central office to schools;
3. implementing of a comprehensive communications strategy to ensure that the goals and objectives are clearly communicated and agreed upon by all stakeholders;
4. strengthening of the channels and levels of communication to support improved decision-making within the Ministry. In addition, comprehensive systems to support the policy-making, reporting and accountability processes must be introduced;
5. increasing the levels of effectiveness of the education sector by maximizing the resources allocated, reducing wastage, setting performance targets and properly evaluating the impact of policies and programmes implemented; and
6. increasing the level of objectivity in monitoring and evaluating the work of those in the education sector to provide assistance where needed and commendation when deserved.

The Ministry's Executive Team will commence this work as soon as we have been able to navigate ourselves through the process of conducting the National Examinations and reopen schools.

## **CONCLUSION**

Mr. Speaker, the governing principle of my life could be captured in a passage from holy writ found in the first chapter of 1st Peter:

*“ 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”*

Those who know me, know I don't squander words. Its not in my nature. These are serious times requiring an urgent and compelling introspection as to the nature of our being – individually, collectively and nationally.

That's what crisis do – they test the fibre of your being, the challenge the quality of your principles and the attitude with which you negotiate life.

My life has been scorched through the crucible of challenges and difficulties. I can speak. Which is why I can without nary a contradictory speck that this is a great, though small, country, with a talent base that far exceeds the quotient of its size.

If God is the source of life, as I believe God is, then... God is present in you, and me, and in the whole created order. And if God is the source of life, then the only way you worship God is by living. Living fully. Sharing life, giving life away, not being afraid, wandering out of the certain into the uncertain, out of known into the unknown.

We have abundant examples, even here in this honourable place, Mr. Speakers, of lives that rose from humble and by modern standards, depraved conditions – MP for Yamacraw, You, Sir, Mp for Cat Island, and myself, who through the inherited grace of God, have become who we are today. Someone believed in us, as I believe in our Bahamian people, especially our young people – teeming with limitless potential, peerless ambitions that deserve to be embraced, realized and manifested across the global stage. That's who we are. That's the mandate of this and every govt – which makes me proud to be at the executive structure to assist in making this a reality for the energetic cohort of young souls looking for a way to express themselves./

As a great mind once said: If we are not willing to risk the unusual, we have to settle for the ordinary.

These are not ordinary times. Theodore Roosevelt, one of the US's greatest presidents once said:

*"A soft, easy life is not worth living, if it impairs the fibre of brain and heart and muscle. We must dare to be great; and we must realize that greatness is the fruit of toil and sacrifice and high courage... For us is the life of action, of strenuous performance of duty; let us live in the harness, striving mightily; let us rather run the risk of wearing out than rusting out."*

We will conquer, Mr. Speaker.

Our students will do excellently in their exams, in the name of Jesus. They will Make us proud as they always. They are looking to us adults to be their inspiration, not to be the douse of their hopeful flames.

That we shall do, because we owe irt to them to give them the same chance God gave is through our Mentors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

God Bless our young people.

God bless the COB