



MID – TERM BUDGET 2021

REPORT

BY

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MINISTER OF EDUCATION

Monday, March 8, 2021

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Speaker, last week, the Government of the Bahamas hosted the Meetings of the Technical Advisory Committees (TACs) of The University of the West Indies, (17) seventeen contributing governments.

The purpose of these meetings was to provide a forum for participating Government representatives to discuss UWI's bi annual operating budget.

Like everywhere and everything else, Covid19 has also impacted higher education across the globe.

Some universities have reduced staff, reduced work hours or eliminated disciplines because of Covid. Despite our country's own budgetary constraints, The Govt decided that reduced funding to The University of The Bahamas or to UWI, our regional flagship university, is not an option. Funding in the amount of \$2,125,800.00

and \$15,755,719.00 has been paid to UWI and UB respectively for subvention payments up to fiscal year 2020/2021 mid-term.

Additionally funding for Tertiary Grants in the amount of \$7,303,458.00 and Capital funding of \$139,152.55 were provided to UB.

We have never reneged on our subventions and have fully supported our Bahamian students who are attending the University of The Bahamas and the University of The West Indies.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Education further recognizes that much of our success is undergirded by the strength of the partnerships we have forged over the years. Partners, like the University of The Bahamas and The Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute, have played an integral role in the success of our initiatives.

We rely on the University of The Bahamas to provide the majority of our new teachers. This year, because of COVID-19, the teaching practice sessions with our students and the Internal Moderation and

assessment of these well trained pre-service teachers, had to be conducted virtually. Curriculum Officers who conducted the Internal Moderation assessment commended these pre-service teachers for the excellent execution of their well-planned lessons, their beautiful electronic portfolios, their professionalism and the ease at which they handled the virtual environment.

Mr. Speaker we are also especially pleased with our partnership with the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI), which has allowed 18 of our more challenged students, in our Student Development's Re-Focus Programme, to participate in the National Center for Construction Education Research (NCCER) Certification classes, 11 of whom received certification at the core level. Subvention payments to BTVI up to fiscal year 2020/2021 mid-term amount to \$3,051,556.50.

BTVI

We know that the Draft Natl Dev Plan of 2016 identified a national skills gap as one of the more serious challenges facing the Bahamas.

In 2019, BTVI, with the Min of Labour and ORG, conducted a skills gap survey was conducted revealing that some 60% of Bahamian employers have concerns about the skill sets and quality of prospective employees. These skills included both soft and hard skills

In response, BTVI immediately revised Its curriculum to create:

Short, flexible, stackable and certified courses

Virtual opportunities country wide

Dual enrollments with high schools

Emphasis on application of skills (practical)

Global certifications (CompTIA, Cisco, NCCER, City and Guilds, Microsoft, etc.)

Additionally, BTVI also developed and delivered ICT college level courses with industry certification to 400 grades 10-12 high schools students, who have completed or are about to complete 12 BTVI courses, will at the completion receive a BTVI diploma, and between 10 and 12 industry recognized certifications.

Many are reporting early acceptance at tier one US universities based in part on these certifications and this fully sponsored government program

2. Partnered with RBC to generate funds for retention of students
3. Adopted software systems to improve math and reading scores
4. Secured a partnership with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to train 30 faculty members on developing and delivering online classes
5. Hosted a US Fulbright Scholar with teaching and online expertise

As mentioned, the National Center for Construction Education and Research provides as an initiation course offering, 80 hours core (general) virtual; which could lead to 240 hours master craftsman (carpentry, electrical, plumbing). The Credits are certified and accepted by industry universities/college. Example, Valencia College, Orlando, Fla., is our supporting partner as we seek center status. To date approximately 100 trainers in the Bahamas trained and certified BTVI also celebrates the 90 students who completed NCCER core certifications from Moore's Island/Nassau (including

OTH)/GB/Exuma; There will be a Graduation this Tuesday. Another 200 is in the program now with plans to have 600 complete NCCER basic offering August 2021; 1,000 by December 2021.

Mr. Speaker, the Plan is that by December, 2021, some 200 Bahamian Students fully certified as master craftsman, going a very long way in closing the skills gap in this country.

I am delighted also to inform the City & Guilds Assured Benchmark Standards have approved a 6-month Certificate in Global Hospitality Programme, which starts in the summer 2021, to include:

BTVI Assured Certificate Introduction to Hospitality

BTVI Assured Certificate Introduction to Hospitality Management

BTVI Assured Certificate Introduction to Tourism Marketing

BTVI Assured Certificate in Introduction to Strategic Tourism Marketing

BTVI is working on dual enrollment options for students in private high schools

Educators parents and students see value in completing some industry certifications as these provide them options as they complete their high school education.

BTVI is proud to offer two (2) short, blended (online and face-to-face) certificate programs, namely (i) a certificate in Construction Workforce Readiness; and (ii) a certificate in Computers and Technology. The programs are supported by scholarship assistance provided by the Government of the Bahamas. The only cost to participants is the application fee (\$25.00). These programs can be completed in approximately Ten (10) weeks. **Certifications are over**

80%

BTVI is looking to introduce dual enrolment program in the Family Islands for Grades 11 and 12. These would be a five course certificate in workforce preparation, prepared with the Commonwealth of Learning. They include three certificates: City & Guilds and 2 Cisco.

BTVI: Accelerated Skills Training

One of the most exciting programs to be starting soon is the training and upskill of 1500 students by end of summer. In fact 50 are completing NCCER today in Grand Bahama. Finally the

Commonwealth of Learning is working with BTVI on creating a train the trainer certificated training available for this who provide training to our youth. It will be virtual and available to the family islands. Projected start date September 2021.

The Caribbean Development Bank Enhancement Project is progressing but there have been delays due to Covid19 and changing priorities. For instance:

- a). The HR and Compensation Study is nearing completion.
- b). The Crime Prevention and Security Study is underway - it started a couple of weeks ago.
- c). The Labs Upgrade and Maintenance Consultancy is delayed – because the initial proposal was cancelled as it was not cost effective and as BTVI has adopted the Valencia Model for Labs , Tools &Equipment, there is no need to hire a Consultant to identify the type of Labs and Equipment. In light of this the Terms of Reference is being redone.

d). The Consultant for the Strategic Plan has completed his work but the CDB has requested a few changes. Further, Management would have to finalize an execution plan for the Strategic Plan to be rolled out to staff.

e). In addition to the above, due to the financial challenges that are facing the country, consideration is being given to restructuring the Loan so that funding can be used to complete repairs to the Freeport Campus as compared to carrying out some of the additional studies.

Major repairs are still required at the Freeport Campus but funding is needed.

Despite the pandemic, BTVI enrolment has jumped from 5700 to 6000

UB

At the University of The Bahamas, I am exceedingly proud of Dr. Rodney Smith and his team and the speed at which they were able to pivot from 100% face to face classes, to 90% virtual classes because of the pandemic. In addition to classes, the Administrative Services and Business Office have also adjusted how they serve students to ensure

safety during the pandemic. A Covid-19 Task Force was quickly established, Co-Chaired by Dr. Marcella Elliott-Ferguson, Vice President, Administrative Services, and Mr. Ronnie Stevenson, Vice President, Operations, to ensure that every aspect of UB's operations during this pandemic adheres to the Emergency Orders, and allows for safe operations on campus for those who must be on campus. This task force has been instrumental in keeping the institution operational through the many changes over the last year.

For Fall 2020, there was a decrease in enrolment by 2.06%. Unique enrolled students increased by 3.59% to 5,254. We did not retain this number because there were two major deregistration cycles.

The University's yield rate for new admitted students rose to 62.08% from 61.67% last year. Pre-de-registration, this figure stood at 72.72%. There were 2,252 new student applicants of which 1,598 were admitted. The norm for admitted first-year students in the fall is around 1,200.

Govt Grant last Semester was 3,520. 2021 Semester is 3,590

For Spring 2021, as of December 3, 2020, 4,011 students were registered. Registration continued through December 31, 2020. Until the last day for deregistration (January 29) the University's Enrollment stood at 4,770. However, as a result of deregistration, 479 students were deregistered from classes reducing the number to 4,291.

Communications

The University's Communications team responded by setting up a webpage called COVID-19 Response and Updates where constituents can find information about the University's response to the pandemic, policies, government updates, and other resources.

This webpage has become an archive of most information distributed to University constituents, as much of it was distributed via email and social media as well.

Academic Developments

During this pandemic, both academic freedom and shared governance have been essential in UB's ability to pivot and remain a functioning tertiary level institution. Essential to all of UB's success is the faculty

and staff who took on so many other duties and responsibilities. They have been innovative in the use of technology, working enthusiastically with students, making sure that the high quality education for which UB is renowned, is delivered timely and accurately.

Currently, UB is in its second full semester of teaching using 90% online modalities. 10% of classes are taught face to face, with strict Covid-19 protocols in place.

These include classes in Culinary Arts and Tourism Studies; Physical Education classes; and Nursing practicums. For comparison, approximately 7% of courses were online prior to the pandemic.

The University's Academic Senate, led by Dr. Faith Butler, has reviewed and approved several new and/or expanded degree programmes, including a series of new graduate programmes. • A Master of Business Administration with concentrations in: Accounting; Leadership, Financial Decision Making, Entrepreneurship and Innovation; Hospitality Management; and Events Management.

- A Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma in Public

Administration

- A BA in Liberal Arts at the UB-North campus
- The Academic Senate also approved the Pre-Pharmacy programme.

In addition, I believe we will be hearing very soon about the University's first doctorate degree programme.

Strategic Plan

A few months before the pandemic affected UB, in October 2019, the Board of Trustees approved its first five-year strategic plan.

The plan has ensured that UB stays on track with their plans and can measure their success. With the addition of an Executive Vice President, Dr. Sarim Al-Zubaidy, UB is well on its way to achieving all of the goals for this academic year.

Research

A comprehensive case study, The Response of University of The Bahamas to the Covid-19 Pandemic, has also been drafted to scientifically look at all of the changes that have happened over the last

year. While the study examines all aspects of university operations, of particular interest is the impact of online teaching on student success. I look forward to seeing the final case study.

In addition, UB has been diligently applying for, and has been awarded research grants. There are currently approximately 12 ongoing grants totaling some \$1,236,537.28 in revenue for the University.

Awards/Commendations

During the pandemic, University of The Bahamas was one of six tertiary institutions, globally, to have won the Ellucian 2020 Impact Award this past September. Ellucian Banner is the world's most advanced data management system and is used by colleges and universities in over 50 countries around the world.

Gradual Re-Opening

Just this past week the University released a communication regarding the gradual return to campus, adhering to strict Covid-19 protocols. Over the next several weeks more offices will be manned, using shifts,

thus allowing for a limited degree of face-to face services. Already the Business Office, Administrative Services – records, admissions, etc., and several computer labs are open for student use.

The University will continue the rest of the spring 2021 semester in an Emergency Remote Teaching Mode. However, there will be increased use of campus facilities, under strict protocols and only with prior approval.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Mr. Speaker, tuition is free at the University of The Bahamas and the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institution, for qualified Bahamian students. However, one of COVID-19's unfortunate effects was the fact that the Ministry was forced to make a tough decision to place a moratorium on all new international scholarships for the 2020/2021 scholarship cycle. That moratorium has now been lifted for the 2021/22 school year. Nevertheless, I am pleased to report that approval was granted by Cabinet to award funding for new awards to local tertiary institutions.

To this end, sixty five (65) students qualified for Tuition Assistance to attend those local tertiary institutions, certified by the National Accreditation and Equivalency Council of The Bahamas (NAECOB), and are pursuing studies in keeping with the country's national development goals.

With regard to existing students, scholarship funding is fixed and determined based on the contracts of the students.

All students who met the requirements for renewal received funding for the continuation of their studies. To date, One Thousand One Hundred Twenty One (1121) students have been processed totaling Nine Million Nine Thousand Five Hundred Fifty One Dollars and Fifty Four Cents (\$9,009,551.54).

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Education has five (5) key priority focus areas, these include:

- Universal Pre Primary Education;
- Third Grade Literacy;
- The Bahamas High School Diploma;
- School Modernization; and

- Digital Evolution

Let me begin with the Pre-School Program; or what is termed today, as Pre-Primary.

PRE-SCHOOL

Mr. Speaker, a 2014 Publication of the Inter-American Development bank (IDB) states:

“ Development in early childhood casts a long shadow. Long-term panels show that the benefits of early investments can be seen all the way into adulthood. In one study from Jamaica, children who benefited from a parenting intervention in the first two years of their life earned wages in adulthood that were 25 percent higher than comparable children who had not participated. Children who had received the parenting intervention were also less likely to be engaged in criminal activities in early adulthood. Credible evidence from a number of sources reveals that children with deficits in nutrition, cognition, language, motor, and socioemotional development early on are less likely to learn in school; are more likely to engage in risky behaviors that result in early pregnancy, school dropout, and violence in adolescence; and are less likely to become productive adults.”

One of the major initiatives of the Ministry of education and the government is to achieve universal pre-school educational opportunities for 3-4 year olds by 2025.

According to the last census, there were 12,000+ children in that category. In 2017, only 1780 were enrolled in a government sponsored, government operated pre-school program.

Like the IDB's Report stated, development in early childhood casts a long shadow. It impacts a child's readiness for regular school, their likelihood of graduation; and their longterm success.

The Pre-school and Day-Care Centre Council since the inspection of Covid-19 partnered on a daily basis to date with all concerned government agencies, civic organizations and with the gift of virtual platforms, all owners and operators of Daycare and Preschool Centres throughout the Bahamas pertaining to the care and education for very young children.

As a result, the following activities were achieved and in some cases are being continued: -

(1) Regular meetings with Daycare/Preschool Operators to explain and abreast them, of Emergency Orders.

- (2) Training sessions for operators with Environmental Health and Public Health pertaining Protocol Rules.
- (3) Collaboration with the Permanent Secretary, the Ministry of Education's team and NAECOB pertaining the reopening of Preschools, Primary and High Schools.
- (4) Assisted private preschools with registration procedures to enable face to face learning.
- (5) Partnered with private sector and the Ministry of Education's Early Childhood Section, to enable underprivileged preschool aged children to become beneficiaries of the Public Private Preschool (Voucher) Programme.
- (6) Partnered with the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit and the Small Business Development Centre to identify operators of daycare and preschool centres who were duly registered to receive funding of twenty-five thousand dollars to aid upgrading their centres.

(7) Produced policy documents for the reopening of preschools in collaboration with Environmental Health Departments and Public Health Department.

(8) Presently partnering with the Prime Minister's Unit and the Ministry of Education's Preschool Early Childhood Section, in the initiative for access to Crown Land for Daycare and Preschool Owners.

Mr. Speaker, despite the challenges brought on by the pandemic, we are forging ahead with ensuring that there is equity in our learning environment. In order to facilitate this among our children, back in November of 2020, my Government through the Access Accelerator Small Business Development Centre (SBDC), presented monetary grants to qualified pre-school owners.

The goal of the grants was to increase the number of privately-owned pre-schools, and by extension, increase the amount of seats available for preschoolers to enable the Government to meet its targets of universal pre-school education.

Operators can use the funds to open a new preschool, expand existing ones, or improve the standards at an existing preschool facility, particularly in neighborhoods where there are fast growing populations

Mr. Speaker, one million dollars was earmarked for this preschool grant project and back in November we distributed \$796,050 of the funds to 36 preschools. The maximum grant funding is \$25,000 per school, and grants distributed ranged from \$12,500 to \$25,000.

Mr. Speaker, through the efforts of the Pre-School Council, under the leadership of Mrs. Agatha Archer and her Team, the Ministry's Universal Pre Primary Education voucher programme, launched in 2018, has resulted in a consistent increase in the amount of 3 and 4 year olds enrolled in a pre-primary programme.

This programme is allowing students who could not be accommodated in a public preschool in their residential area to receive a voucher to attend a Ministry of Education approved private preschool.

Mr. Speaker, there are now 1,500 additional vouchers, and of that amount, we have already distributed, between July 2020 to December 2020, 929 vouchers to 59 privately owned preschools, These 929 vouchers are valued at approximately \$929,000. The balance of the vouchers – 571 – will also be distributed to registered privately owned preschools who make application, have been vetted and have met the qualifications, as outlined by the relevant regulatory bodies.

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to the hard working officers at the Department of Education who continued to carry out the enrollment process, in the midst of the challenges of the pandemic. Mrs. Leja Burrows and Her Team. On June, 29th 2020 and ending July 5th, 2020, all private pre-schools and day-care centres, registered under the Act, were permitted to open for the purpose of sanitation.

Also in July, the Ministry released new guidelines for pre-school operation, inclusive of measures provided by the Public Health Authorities and the Environmental Health Sanitation Department.

Private pre-schools and day-care centers, registered under the Act, were permitted to start with the registration of students during this time.

These guidelines for the re-opening of private independent pre-schools and day care centres were also posted on the Ministry's website and Facebook page.

Mr. Speaker, Being the formal learning foundation that it, and with the accelerated pace of knowledge creation in the world today, the MOE recognizes the need for an ongoing revision of all its Curricula, especially the Pre-Primary Curriculum. The newly revised components of the curriculum places emphasis on developmentally appropriate lessons, which are necessary to prepare children to enter grade.

TECHNOLOGY

TECHNOLOGY

Digitization has been very dominant in our education system, due to the arrival of this pandemic and its ensuing impact.

Mr. Speaker, while this invisible enemy called COVID-19 has halted activity globally, it has failed to stop our efforts to continue educating our youth. The Ministry, from the onset of the pandemic, has sought innovative avenues to create multiple streams of learning and instructional environments.

Leading this charge is the technology division, with a mandate to implement and upgrade technologies in our schools. Technology is now not only an option, or mere enhancement in instruction, but it has become a necessity in the process of education.

This technological evolution ensures an equitable, inclusive, and quality education for all, while promoting lifelong learning opportunities for students to reach their maximum potential.

Despite the forceful impact of Hurricane Dorian and the pandemic, thus resulting in a fiscal restructure, the Ministry of Education was still able to make significant achievements.

Mr. Speaker, during the past year, the Department of Education's Virtual School has expanded to accommodate more teachers. To this end, work was completed to accommodate a March 1st, 2021 occupancy.

As you are aware, in 2020, a company called One on One, an affiliate of BTC, was engaged to provide an interim Learning Management System (LMS), for students and teachers who are engaged in a virtual learning environment.

Later in 2020, Cable Bahamas Channels 295 & 296 were launched to aid in the teaching and learning process. This meant that students who were not privy to internet access and connectivity were afforded opportunities to receive daily lessons. Additionally, the channels also provided content for students who were preparing for national examinations.

Mr. Speaker, as the pandemic grew on, it became patently clear that students without devices or internet were going to suffer possible irreparable educational harm. Consequently, in mid, 2020, the Ministry purchased 10,880 Devices at a cost of over \$1.3m primarily for students on the lunch programme, those with disabilities or those from low-income families.

The Department of Education already had been distributing Tablets for the Primary School Students, which it continued during the Pandemic. In September 2020 we continued with the procurement exercise, with the view to provide a tablet for every primary school student and a laptop for every teacher during this academic year at a cost of 2.8 million dollars. All primary districts in New Providence have received their devices; and distribution continues to the Family Island schools.

At the start of the 2020/21 school year, the Ministry pledged that no child will be left behind, and committed, with help of its stakeholders

and partners to ensure that every public school student who needed one will be given a device.

Mr. Speaker, in September of 2020, a partnership was forged between Leno and Corporate Bahamas to assist the Ministry of Education in providing tablets and internet connectivity for our students.

I am happy to report that the response to this initiative has been overwhelming, The corporate community has proven to be genuine partners in the advancement of education in our country. The drive has raised over \$500,000 in donations, including devices, and internet connectivity. With their assistance, the Ministry has now been able to put a Device in the hands of over 90% of our public school students. To date, the combined total of outstanding devices is 3,800.

These devices Mr. Speaker were given to students as a one-time offer to assist in the facilitation of their learning.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry's goal is to digitize the entire public educational system, linking, all districts, public schools, and all satellite offices with the Ministry of Education.

Thus creating a WAN (a Wide Area Network). The 21st century demands of educational instruction, learning and management demands it. It is simply not an option.

We have completed all schools and satellite offices on the island of New Providence, Eleuthera, and Grand Bahama. The remaining islands will be upgraded shortly pending requisite approvals and the availability of funding. To date, 12 million dollars have been spent, with Another 10.3 million dollars needed to complete the remaining islands.

During October 2020 bandwidth at all schools was doubled to accommodate all students and teachers. Additionally, the bandwidth to the network was increased to 10G to accommodate all users.

In 2020 we engaged Cloud Carib in an Active Directory (AD at a cost of **\$93,977.36**). The Active Directory helps organize the user and computers on the network. It will be used to organize the Ministry's

hierarchy.

Additionally, A Technology Task Force was commissioned with the responsibility of the implementation of a comprehensive EMIS (Education Management Information System) and LMS (Learning Management System). Hurricane Dorian and now Covid -19 has shown us that an EMIS and LMS are critical. Unfortunately, the execution of this initiative has been placed on hold due to financial constraints. In the interim One-on-One is continuing to provide an interim solution (at a cost of **\$450,667.84**).

SCHOOLS MANAGEMENT

Mr. Speaker, in the 2020-2021 fiscal year, Schools Management saw a reduction in the number of teachers available for the start of the school year.

Hurricane Dorian displaced students and teachers from Abaco and Grand Bahama, who were initially posted temporarily in other schools, were returned to Abaco and Grand Bahama, as the

opportunities arose.

Prior to the pandemic, the Ministry anticipated recruiting about 60 Cuban specialist teachers. Due to financial constraints, this could not be accommodated. Consequently, this left a void in these subject areas.

However, Cuban teachers whose contracts expired in August 2020 were granted a one-year extension.

NATIONAL EXAMS

Mr. Speaker, the pandemic has caused a delay and postponement in our 2020 national examinations. The completion of the 2020

Bahamas Junior Certificate (**BJC**) and Bahamas General Certificate of Secondary Education Examination (**BGCSE**) Examination cycle in

October was a major accomplishment. Despite the challenges of

COVID-19, the Division was able to complete the marking, grading and release of results by the first week in December, 2020.

The number of grades awarded was **31,878**, a decrease of **21.68%** when compared to 2019. It is pleasing to note that **140** candidates

received five (**5**) or more As. Of the one hundred forty (**140**) candidates, thirty eight (**38**) received eight (8) or more As.

Mr. Speaker, there was a decrease in candidature; with many candidates opting **not** to sit all of their subjects because some chose not to write the examination and others had already entered tertiary institutions here and abroad. While some in the media sought make an issue of this, it is not unusual. Each year, hundred of students, previously registered to sit the exams, never show up. That is not unique to the Bahamas; it is the situation elsewhere as well.

The number of awarded grades decreased significantly when compared to 2019. There were **15,119** grades awarded this year. This number represents a decrease of 36.50% over 2019. Of the total number of candidates who wrote the examination thirty eight (**38**) candidates received five (**5**) or more As. Of the thirty eight (**38**) candidates, ten (**10**) received eight (**8**) or more As.

It should be noted that the events of 2020 will affect performances of candidates in the 2021 and 2022 Examinations and even beyond because of circumstances beyond their control.

However, the Ministry of Education is doing all that it can to mitigate any negative fallout from the Covid19 virus.

As announced, the Exams are scheduled to start April 13th. But with most students just returning to face to face on February 23rd, it is possible that that schedule may be adjusted to give our students more time, if we find it necessary, to prepare.

Therefore, the Ministry asks Parents and Students to remain alert for future announcements about the start of exams.

In the meantime, students, please take this time to prepare as earnestly as you can. The exams are coming, barring any unforeseen circumstances.

CURRICULUM

Mr. Speaker, the Officers in the Curriculum Division, ensured that curriculum implementation and instruction for students were not interrupted despite the pandemic.

While the pandemic did not necessitate change to the curriculum's content, it did require us to be innovative in the way the national curriculum was implemented.

This school year, Curriculum Officers, working along with District Superintendents and teachers, developed National Pacing Guides for all grade levels in all disciplines. These guides outlined both the topics to be taught in a given term and the length of time that ought to be dedicated to each concept or content matter taught. The goal was to ensure greater standardization across the archipelago, no matter the instructional model that schools were using.

Mr. Speaker, this school year, the Ministry fully launched its Learning Management System and just as they had done in the months prior with the Virtual platform, Curriculum Officers guided teachers through the

preparation and uploading of Digital Instructional Kits designed to enhance instruction from pre-primary to 12th grade.

We are pleased to report that more than 2,000 digital kits, with lesson plans, videos, power point presentations and activity sheets, have been uploaded to the LMS and are being successfully utilized by teachers across The Bahamas.

To date, more than 40,000 live lesson sessions have been held virtually, reaching on approximately 60% of students registered in our public schools. Unfortunately, not all of our students were able to access instruction virtually, either due to lack of devices, connectivity, electrical power or other reasons. Therefore, the Curriculum Division mobilized its Officers to produce hard copy instruction kits, across all grade levels and disciplines. As such, more than 3,000 kits were distributed to our schools throughout The Bahamas during term one and in term two, Curriculum Officers prepared and uploaded additional kits so that school administrators would access and download information for students as was needed.

GLAT: Grade Level Assessment Test

Mr. Speaker, in an ongoing effort to close achievement gaps, we are still executing strategies to reach our target of 65% of students passing Language Arts GLAT by 2021. The Reading Block training for new teachers has been completed. Sessions were also held for teachers who had less than 50% of their students achieving grades A-D on the 2019 GLAT Exam.

Mr. Speaker, despite the pandemic, the Ministry has been able to continue curriculum enhancement activities, such as the National School Debates, Spelling Bee, essay and speech competitions.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry recognizes that innovation is necessary to successfully implement the curricula. In order to facilitate innovative ideas and concepts, teachers and Curriculum Officers have been engaging in ongoing professional development. In August, 2020, The Curriculum Division spearheaded the first annual Virtual Teacher Conference, offering 175 best practices sessions to educators across the country.

Additionally, over the course of several months, forty webinars have been offered by the facilitators of the Virtual School. These webinars, have all been uploaded to the Ministry of Education's website for easy and continued access.

Ongoing curriculum reform saw Officers in the Curriculum Division still working at various stages on the curriculum development cycle. We are pleased to report that by July 2021, we anticipate newly revised curricula in more than 10 disciplines including: Language Arts, Social Studies, Science and Computer Studies at the Primary level. At the secondary level: Business Studies, General Science, Biology, Chemistry Computer Studies, Carpentry, Construction and Performing Arts.

Mr. Speaker we can all appreciate that the transition from the traditional face -to-face instruction to a virtual instructional model has not been easy for some of our officers, teachers, students and our parents...

Cognizant of this reality, the Special Services Section, has been providing psycho-social support through telephone counseling sessions and via social media platforms to help make the transition a little easier. Additionally, a town hall meeting was held emphasizing topics such as “Coping Skills during COVID-19,” “Internet SafetyCyber Bullying” and “Spiritual Wellness.”

HUMAN RESOURCES

Mr. Speaker, in order for any organization to function optimally, it must be comprised of efficient and competent human resources. Accordingly, though the Department of Education was given approval to appoint two hundred and forty-nine (249) persons to serve as teachers, craft instructors and other school based staff, at a cost of \$5,473,650.00). Thus far only 119 have been appointed at a cost \$2,890,000.00, due to the financial constraints. These appointments include trained teachers, technical teachers, assistant teachers, guidance counselors, a school psychologist, and craft instructors.

These individuals have been appointed and posted to schools throughout the country.

It is anticipated that the balance of the funding required for the remaining teachers and school based professional staff to be appointed during this second half of the budgetary period, particularly as we were unable to proceed with the engagement of specialty teachers from Cuba due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

It should also be noted that the Recruitment area of the Human Resources Unit, in collaboration with the Schools Management Unit have commenced preliminary initiatives with regard to the appointment of teachers for the 2021/2022 school year.

As mentioned in last year's midterm report, approval was granted for the extension of appointment on temporary month-to-month terms of six hundred and thirty-six (636) General Service Workers, Teacher's Aides, Security Officers, Custodial and Janitorial workers; and pending funding those persons who performed their duties well, maintained acceptable punctuality and attendance levels, and have a positive

security vetting, would be recommended to the Permanent and Pensionable Establishment.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to advise that this regularization exercise is underway. The Ministry's hardworking Human Resources team, with the support of the Registry staff, are working in collaboration with the Ministry of the Public Service, to have these recommendations processed, as quickly as possible.

So amid the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the work of the Human Resources Unit continued with the submissions of recommendations to the Ministry of the Public Service, including matters such as re-employments, confirmations, promotions, and other related exercises.

Efforts will be made to further the regularization exercise to include persons appointed on temporary weekly terms, as well as those persons employed in the Library system and those hired as School Board personnel, for a total some 1248 persons.

Janitorial staff members have participated in a Train-the trainer course on proper sanitization and cleaning techniques, organized by the Ministry's Safety & Disaster Risk Reduction Unit and conducted by Mr. Anthony Ryan, Public Analyst, at the Department of Environmental Health. It is envisioned that such training will be ongoing, as we ensure that work spaces and schools receive continuous and effective cleaning.

Another notable exercise being undertaken is the confirmation of school administrators. Such persons were recently appointed to act in administrative level positions such as senior Mistresses/Masters, Principals, Assistant Directors of Education.

Additionally, the review of the career paths of Guidance Counselors and Security Officers is complete. Consequently, the necessary approval and funding to recommend the advancement of such persons will be sought.

DEPT of ARCHIVES

Mr. Speaker, the arrival of the COVID 19 pandemic in The Bahamas in March 2020 severely impacted staff working hours and expenditure at the Department of Archives. In preparing for the staff to return to work and to re-open to the Public in the post COVID 19 environment, the Archives expended \$15,958.72 cents during the period June 2020 – January 2021.

This included the installation of plexi glass plus six hand sanitizing stations throughout the foyer and work areas and one standalone station positioned at entrance of the building.

A surplus of cleaning supplies was purchased at the end of the last budgetary period resulting in a decrease in spending for these items for the period under review. With most staff working remotely, expenditure on items including air-conditioning servicing, grounds maintenance, travel, printing & duplication service, office supplies & stationary and other contractual services decreased compared to the 2019/2020 fiscal year.

Expenditure was incurred as the Archives had to purchase much needed archival materials essential to its daily operations and fund an ongoing vital project with Iron Mountain Digital Studios in California. Funds were secured from the Expansion of Archives Operation item.

COMMUNICATION

Mr. Speaker, Covid19 has resulted in a need for my Ministry to place a greater emphasis on Communications in order to ensure that relevant information is being disseminated about the Ministry's instructional process.

Further, in order for the Ministry and Department of Education to effectively execute its mandate of providing a quality and equitable education for all, communication and engagement with various stakeholders is crucial. It is for this reason the Communications Section of the Ministry intensified its efforts to inform the public of timely and necessary updates and advice surrounding education and the delivery of education throughout our country. To this end, in August 2020, the Ministry's programming initiative was expanded

providing more options for our stakeholders to be informed through television, radio and social media platforms. We saw the genesis of a variety of public service announcements and programmes being aired on ZNS, Our TV, and on the Bahamas Learning Channel.

Included in this programming repertoire is Ed Talk, Ed Up, Ed Master Class 101, Ed Tidbits, and Ed Table Talk: Unplugged.

These programmes inform the public of MOE's directives, initiatives, its progress and successes, while showcasing the work and impact of school staff, and reinforcing curriculum content for all students.

Meanwhile communications in the MOE recently received a boost with the launch of free text notification update blasts. This initiative allows education stakeholders throughout the country to receive frequent updates from the Ministry of Education.

Mr. Speaker, expenditure on these messaging products is approximated at \$34,000.

Equipment Upgrades

Additionally, expansion efforts also involved industry standard production equipment upgrades inclusive of hardware and software, to the tune of approximately \$75,000. The upgrade in equipment resulted in an enhanced messaging product by which the Ministry can effectively promote its goal toward educating our nation.

Expanded Human Resources

In pursuit of optimum performance, the Communications unit sought to expand its human resources and welcomed two new skilled members to the production staff.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Speaker the onset of the Corona Virus has radically affected the demands placed upon our physical plant. Companies have been contracted to deep clean schools and offices, including our headquarters on University Boulevard. Plexiglass sneeze barriers along with

additional signage had to be installed throughout our schools and satellite offices.

These improvements coupled with our annual school repairs had to be carried out in the midst of emergency orders, lockdowns and the observation of safety protocols, as stipulated by the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Speaker, due to Covid19, the annual inspection of schools by the Ministry of Works for the development of Scopes of Works were delayed, which resulted in a domino effect in terms of scopes being prepared, contractors being selected and contractors being mobilized.

The lockdowns were especially restrictive as contractors were only able to work a limited number of hours during the week. A shortage of funds for mobilizations further delayed projects, some of which are only now being started.

Mr. Speaker, the majority of Family Island school repair projects were carried out as usual, with the exception of those islands which may have seen a spike in their Covid 19 numbers, which resulted in some

restrictive measures being implemented and subsequent delays occurring.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that post Dorian repairs at all schools in Grand Bahama are now complete. In Abaco, most post Dorian school repairs are either complete or are nearing completion. This includes the Patrick Bethel High School and the Central Abaco Primary School. The Hope Town and Amy Roberts schools, which were devastated, by hurricane Dorian will be completed in time for the opening of the 2021-2022 school year.

Mr. Speaker, the pandemic's effect on the economy cannot be understated here. With the global slowdown resulting in tourism, our main economic driver virtually coming to a trickle, this too has resulted in a trickledown effect on the disbursement of funds from the Ministry of Finance.

In order to offset this, repair projects were prioritized so that schools would be able to open and function as much as possible this school

year 2020-2021. This included projects essential to campus operations...roof works, electrical and plumbing works as well as air conditioning works were fast tracked.

Mr. Speaker, our 2020 capital projects budget totaled \$25, 371,942.64, and I am pleased to report that despite awaiting second payments totaling \$9,704,863.42 from the Ministry of Finance, school repairs and works progressed to the point where schools are once again able to safely open, and welcome the majority of our students throughout the country.

Regarding the sanitization of the physical plant at the Ministry of Education headquarters, schools and satellite offices, \$76,476.02 was paid out to companies to deep clean these spaces.

The Ministry of Education is satisfied that the monies was well spent to make our schools and workplaces safe while following the Ministry of Health protocols for our staff and students. To this end, the Ministry has developed and published a strategy plan for the safe reopening of school.

Mr. Speaker, this plan has been made available to all education stakeholders and is posted on the Ministry' website. It gives a comprehensive and detailed blueprint which has allowed us to return to face to face via a hybrid method, and further speaks to the opportunities to allow flexibility in the delivery of instruction in varying circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, nothing in this covid19 environment is certain. This pandemic dictates that we must be prepared to seamlessly as possible transition from online learning to hybrid to fully face to face, or return to online learning if our health conditions deem it necessary. The Ministry's strategy plan provides a solid pathway to ensure that we are able to continue with the business of education, in every situation.

Mr. Speaker, the business of education has never stopped and will not stop; yet we remain guided by our motto "Safety first, education always."

EXPENDITURE

Mr. Speaker, overall, a comparison of expenditure for fiscal year 2019/2020 verses 2020/21 reveals the following:

- Expenditure for the Ministry of Education at mid-year 2020/2021 increased by \$195,679.00 from \$55,211,679.00 in 2019/2020 to \$55,407,358.00 in 2020/2021.
- Expenditure for the Department of Education at mid-year 2020/2021 decreased by \$13,236,834.00 from \$99,038,201.00 in 2019/2020 to \$85,801,367.00 in 2020/2021.
- Expenditure for the Department of Archives at mid-year 2020/2021 decreased by \$22,233.00 from \$309,843.00 in 2019/2020 to \$287,610.00 in 2020/2021.
- Revenue intake for the Ministry of Education at mid-year 2020/2021 decreased by \$191,877.32 (from \$258,211.96 to \$66,334.64)

- Revenue intake for the Department of Archives at mid-year 2020/2021 decreased by \$4,986.44 (from \$7,404.89 to \$2,418.45)
- Capital Expenditure for the Ministry of Education at mid-year 2020/2021 decreased by \$11,363,178.00.00 from \$35,257,215.00 in 2019/2020 to \$23,894,037.00 in 2020/2021.

It should be noted, that the decrease in expenditure is due mainly to the COVID 19 pandemic and the subsequent relative reduction in goods and services required as a consequence of shuttering of our brick and mortar campuses to face to face instruction.

Additionally, the use of the virtual school and reduced hours of work has significantly reduced payments for expenditures such as coaching allowances, post of responsibility, after-school programmes and Supply Teachers were reduced in the Personal Emoluments and Allowances blocks. Only essential travel was allowed.

There was reduced purchases in supplies items with the exception of an increase in Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), cleaning and

disinfecting products which included: hand sanitizing machines, liquids and gels, masks, gloves, concentrated disinfectant liquids and sprays. Capital expenditure was incurred for the installation of plexi glass at a cost of \$ 224,575.36.

RE-START OF FACE TO FACE – NP, ABACO, ELEUTHERA,

EXUMA:

Mr. Speaker on February 23rd, thousands of public school students on Eleuthera, Abaco, Exuma, and NP, returned to face to face instructions.

Before that, schools on the remaining Family Islands, including GB had already been an in-person mode.

From the beginning of this pandemic, the Government and the Ministry of education made it clear that the in-person instructions of our students and the operations of our schools will be instructed and guided by the Ministry of Health officials.

I stand here today to share our deepest appreciation and respect for the extraordinary guidance, direction, help and support the Ministry offered, especially the constant help and interventions of Dr. Philip Swann and His team to our Ministry.

In furtherance of the GOB's emphasis on safety as a pre-eminent condition for the resumption of in person classes, the DOE published a "Strategic Plan for the Safe Reopening of Schools", with the motto, "Safety First, Education Always". In pursuit of this objective, and in recognition of the role played by the MOH in determining acceptable standards for the resumption of classes, the MOH has been extremely dedicated in working with the MOE to ensure that the necessary guidelines/mandates are clear and are in place in schools for the resumption of in person classes. We wish to express our great appreciation to the CMO and staff of the MOH for their unswerving dedication to our efforts, and we wish to acknowledge particularly the contribution of Dr. Phillip Swann in the preparation of a joint MOH/MOE document which outlines in specificity the standards to be complied with, and which empowers individual schools to develop the

plans which are necessary for campus specific compliance. At this time, the MOH is permitting only 50% of the student enrollment to be in attendance on each campus per day on the affected islands.

AS WE CONTINUE TO EMPHASIZE, SAFETY FIRST.

In this regard, it is essential for parents and guardians to cooperate with the MOE in ensuring that when their children leave the school campus each day, that they continue to practice the legally mandated protocols, so that children do not return to schools and infect their fellow students and others on campus. We do not wish our schools to become "Super Spreader Sites".

The joint MOE/MOH document has been widely distributed, is available on the MOE's Facebook Page and Website, and will be published in the newspapers.

Is 43: 1: O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.

For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour:
