



Budget Contribution

for

Hon. Glenys Hanna Martin

Minister of Education and Technical and

Vocational Training

in the

House of Assembly

15th June 2023

Madam Speaker

I rise with a heart full of gratitude and in a spirit of humility to proffer this my 22nd contribution to the National Budget Debate in this Honourable House.

My gratitude is accorded first to an almighty God who sees and knows all things and a God that has been full of Grace and mercy for all the days of my life.

My gratitude also lies with the people of Englerston who in every electoral battle over the last 22 years have seen fit to send me back to this Honourable House.

They have entrusted me to stand on their behalf, to represent them at the table in governmental affairs and on the other side of the Floor in Opposition politics.

Finally, I would wish to express my gratitude to my family - my children in particular who are now all adults but who were young children when I started this journey and who have withstood and weathered the rigors of politics in this country over these many years- not always an easy thing.

And to my late parents - a father who was my hero as an uncompromising political warrior who insisted that our people were great and able to build this country with our own hands, who understood the meaning of service and reminded his political colleagues that their collective work was not done until every tear was wiped from every eye.

And my mother, my best friend, who was kind and compassionate but fierce in her advocacy for equity and justice for all.

I am grateful to all from the bottom of my heart because it is through God's Grace and because of the resiliency and support of my familial circle and the fine example of my late parents and the loyal and unstinting support of the people of Englerston that I have prevailed these many years and been able to give public service.

It is because of these forces and influences that I have been sustained in this political journey which has become my life.

I have sought throughout these years to be faithful and despite all of the imperfections associated with my service I pray that I will never let them down.

I must also thank the member for Cat Island, Rum Cay and San Salvador for permitting me to contribute at the national level in the critical portfolio that he has assigned to me and at this juncture in our nation's history.

I pray daily for Gods guidance in this sacred endeavour

I am also very fortunate to work with an incredible technical team at the Ministry of Education led by the Permanent Secretary and the Acting Director and further supported by a very dedicated team of officers.

They are hardworking and committed and passionate about this work, and it is an honour to work with them shoulder to shoulder in this important undertaking.

We have committed to probing with honest eyes the current state of our educational system and to fearlessly attack all vulnerabilities and deficiencies on all fronts and we understand in this there can be no compromise.

We are prepared to do so because it is understood that education at the individual level is a process of self-development and self-realization, and that the absence of this engendering process lends itself to a life of misery and exposure to risk factors which negatively impact quality of life.

Education is also critical to the quality of our national development: to how well we are able to produce strong and productive people which allows for the building of capacity in all areas, and which inure to a thriving future and positions our nation as globally competitive - this is an important premise. We therefore require all manner of skilled and trained persons to move the country forward, to turn the engines of our economy and to lead and inspire new generations of young people.

This encompasses the full range of trades and professions - from lawyers, doctors, accountants, engineers to plumbers, air conditioning specialists to road pavers, to musicians and artists, to farmers and skilled laborers, to pastors and artisans and on and on and on.

Our educational system cannot pretend that we are living in a one-dimensional reality and the delivery of instruction cannot seek to produce such young people because we will fail. Our young people are diverse, differently able, talented in their own right, uniquely passionate.

The educational experience should produce young people who are literate, numerate, self-confident and grounded. They should be critical thinkers, creative, innovative and able to think out of the box. But our young people do not exist in a box, they are not shaped by a universal cookie cutter, there is no prototype, they are each unique and the educational experience must be sufficiently crafted so that each child is able to reach his or her own potential and able to pursue their talents and passions whatever they shall be.

In the Ministry of Education, we have said – Every child counts – this is the prevailing credo that must guide policy and action. This includes our children with special needs who should each be able to reach their full potential as human beings and thrive in an educational system that is inclusive and appropriately resourced.

This is all easier said than done. It requires skillful adaptations and progressive strategies embracing the whole range of the educational experience to stimulate and develop the strengths in our children. Additionally, there are many external competing

and cumulative social and economic dynamics impacting many of our young people. There is the competing force of social media and its negative impacts.

There are the very difficult and challenging circumstances including severe poverty conditions that many of our children face daily where access to the necessities of life, including food, is constricted. Many come from dysfunctional family circumstances, many are subject to exploitation of all forms including that of the so-called gang leaders who seek to recruit and prey on young people and use them as pawns.

And then there has been the catastrophic consequences of Covid 19 on education - the social isolation caused by the lockdowns, the loss of learning on the brain, the psychological effects brought on by loss of normalcy caused by the school closures, the grief and uncertainty associated with loss of loved ones.

Add to all of this, the fact that research is now showing that the brains of young people do not fully develop until way into his or her 20's and these impacts emotional responses in many instances. This compound mix is poured onto school campuses throughout the nation.

On the frontline in these extraordinary times are our teachers who spend many hours in almost every day of the week in their respective classrooms face to face with our nation's young people.

Madam Speaker, our teachers are incredibly committed, they give freely of themselves and their resources. They are motivated by love and are amongst the most important movers and shakers in our national life. We recently conducted a teacher morale survey nationally of public-school teachers to learn of their concerns and to understand how to improve the terms and conditions of their work.

An Implementation committee has convened to begin to respond to those concerns. We must agree to accord terms and conditions for our teachers which are commensurate with their important role and function in our national life.

I invite the nation at the next Teachers Appreciation Day to express gratitude to the teachers of this nation.

The work they do directly impacts the prospects of the students who populate their classrooms but also directly benefits the entire country and our short-, medium- and long-term prospects as a people.

Despite the many challenges, our administrators and teachers and professional support staff have shown incredible resiliency, tremendous sacrifice and shining and ingenuity. We as a nation owe them a debt of gratitude.

But in the midst of all of these dramatic shifts that our young people, are experiencing - global economies are also changing and there is a greater emphasis on digitalization, ICT and the growing importance of technical and vocational training.

It is therefore incumbent upon us as policymakers to prepare our young people for the new economy, to equip them with the necessary skills and ethical grounding in a world that can be confusing.

Included amongst these new issues is the looming threat of climate change, the emergence of artificial intelligence and all other emerging trends all in the backdrop of the severe and debilitating impact of Covid 19 on education.

It is therefore more important than ever that steps are taken to remediate the impacts of the severe disruptions on our young people and to ensure that our children are fully prepared for the realities of the world as best as possible. We do not simply want the young people of our nation to “survive” – we want them to thrive and prosper, to live happy and productive lives with dignity and hope.

In the Ministry of Education, we have embarked simultaneously to address through policy, the multitude of issues that are today faced in our national and global reality so as to assure that our young people are equipped to overcome all odds and leave the school environment strong, confident, capable and qualified.

Madam Speaker, I have sought to describe the setting in which education is placed in a post Covid and 21st century reality and the dilemma in which many of our young people already find themselves. It has required that the Ministry respond in a progressive, comprehensive, multifaceted and integrated fashion and to do so aggressively and with urgency.

I will now seek to give full insight into the strategies deployed since taking office in September, 2021 in seeking to meet these core objectives –
These strategies are -

- The stabilization of school campuses: -
- Addressing physical conditions of schools,
- Ensuring safety on campus,
- Providing skilled leadership on school campuses
- Making the necessary curriculum adjustments
- Engaging in research and data accumulation to ensure decisions are based upon empirical evidence
- Ensuring that at the end of the day our young people are able to experience an educational programme which embraces their gifts and talents and allows them to enter the world equipped for tertiary education or meaningful employment

In pursuance of these objectives a singular focus has been brought to bear on the necessary actions to achieve the objectives. We first sought to address physical

conditions of the school plant nationwide before campuses were reopened after 2 years of closure.

Research shows a strong correlation between physical conditions at schools and teacher morale and student performance. We must therefore accept that it is necessary to commit ourselves to the appropriate financial investment to enhance and improve the physical state of our 160 schools as an indispensable component for ensuring student performance and maintaining morale of administrators and teachers.

Extensive physical repairs have been undertaken since September 2021 and during the 2022/2023 fiscal period amounting to in excess of \$40 million dollars. These works have impacted almost every school throughout the archipelago with significant investment in particular at Government High School, TA Thompson Jr. High School, CH Reeves Jr. High School, Uriah McPhee Primary School, Palmdale Primary, DW Davis Jr. High, Sybil Strachan Primary School, San Salvador High School and works now underway at the Pompey Bay High School in Acklins.

I am pleased to now announce that this school - the Pompeybay High School will in short order be named the Loftus A Roker High School. As many know, the Hon Loftus Roker is a distinguished son of Acklins Island and a former student at that school and a great contributor to our national progress.

He was one of the original signatories at the Independence Conference in London in December 1972 and has dedicated his life to the cause of the Bahamian people. Other schools will be renamed in the ensuing months in an effort to raise up the patriarchs and matriarchs who have given much to this country and helped to pave the way for succeeding generations.

Madam Speaker, many of our schools have been in an almost dilapidated condition and in some cases painfully so. The physical state of some of the facilities has deteriorated to the point where it has become a hazard for students and teachers.

In many cases there are spalling concrete and corroded wrought iron railings. Many of our buildings are in excess of 50 years old. In this fiscal year this aggressive approach to addressing the physical plant will continue as we pledge to address as best as we are able within the competing budgetary constraints the physical state of our schools – an ongoing and costly but very necessary undertaking.

During the fiscal period 2023 to 2024 the Ministry of Education will embark upon an accelerated, construction, expansion and repair programme throughout the country. This aggressive effort will be carried out to improve and enhance the deteriorated conditions of the 160 plus educational facilities.

Capital expenditures required during the upcoming fiscal period to facilitate the corrective measures at the various facilities, construct extensions and commence the construction of three needed schools are in excess of \$37,000,000.00.

During the 2023 – 2024 fiscal year, the Ministry of Education, Technical and Vocational Training will undertake the construction of several classroom blocks at various schools. This effort is to alleviate overcrowding and replacement of structures that have deteriorated structurally. Notable among those classroom blocks are:

- Construction of a classroom block at Cooper's Town at a cost of \$3,770,408.00;
- Construction of a classroom block at Arthur's Town at a cost of \$3,919,140.00;
- Construction of a classroom block at Patrick J. Bethel high school at a cost of \$4,970,408.00;
- Construction of a classroom block at Emma Cooper primary school at a cost of \$600,000.00; and
- Construction of the Administrative block at Fox Town primary school at a cost of \$600,000.00.

Other notable projects to be undertaken during the period are:

- Construction of a covered pavilion at R. M. Bailey high school at a cost of \$2,600,000.00;
- Renovations and expansion of the Ministry of Education supplies and materials warehouse at a cost of \$4,500,000.00;
- Phase II redevelopment of the Government High School at a cost of \$3,400,000.00; and

Additionally, the upcoming fiscal year will see the commencement of the construction of the following long overdue schools:

- - George Town Primary school at an estimated cost of \$10,000,000.00;
- - San Salvador High school at an estimated cost of \$10,000,000.00; and

The following projects are expected to be completed and ready for occupancy at the start of the academic year:

- a) The construction of the Staniel Cay All-Age School, Exuma
- (b) The construction of the Holmes Rock High School, Grand Bahama.
- (c) The construction of the Lowe Sound Primary School, North Andros; and

(d) The construction of the Ragged Island Comprehensive School

We expect to undertake these works during the summer break and as soon after school closes at the end of this week. And so, repair and rejuvenation of the physical environment is a matter of priority and was prioritized before schools reopened in January 2022 after 2 years of closure.

But once the initial major works were completed our children resumed face to face classes in January 2022 and this was an important first step for the normalization of our school aged children post pandemic and after experiencing severe disruptions.

It is important to note that in communities impacted by Hurricane Dorian the disruptions were in excess of 3 years so as to understand the full impact on young students. Once children were back to face-to-face instruction, we quickly discovered that during the period of virtual instruction thousands of children at different grade levels and throughout the country had “dropped off the radar” many for the entirety of the 2-year period of closures.

At the start of the 2021-2022 School Year, it was determined that across the Bahamas there were approximately 4,512 students of the 41, 813 students enrolled in the Public Education System fully missing.

This represented some 11% of the public-school student population. Even more concerning and adding to this number were close to 8,000 students who were completely disengaged from instruction for more than 75% of the school year.

The survey disclosed a myriad of reasons but strongly suggested a major contributor was issues associated with the Ministry’s Learning Management system – the platform upon which classroom instruction was being delivered to students nationwide. These findings led to a two-pronged approach and response.

The first was of an extremely urgent nature and it was to find the children that were missing from the educational system and secondly urgent reform of the Learning Management System which I will later discuss.

The first urgent prong of finding the missing children is dubbed “Find every child.” This initiative is a **School-based, Community-based and Communication Centered approach**. The strategies for the Find Every Child Initiative included the formation of a **National Task Force** in January 2021.

This National Task Force was comprised of representatives of several government agencies, including the *Department of Social Services*, **the Royal Bahamas Police Force**, the **Office of the Attorney General**, as well as civic groups like the Church.

This group, partnering with the technical officers of the Department of Education, was mandated to determine who was missing, address challenges that kept students away from school and bring them back to learning in the shortest possible time.

The Ministry has taken this task literally i.e., we seek out every school aged child who is registered in the system to bring them back under the umbrella of the school setting. But as the work began, we soon learned that many children were “invisible” to our database and in the last 18 months children have been located who have never presented to a school in their lives and have been now brought into the school system.

The Find Every Child initiative was launched 11th January 2022 from the Uriah McPhee Primary School on Kemp Road – this walkabout included administrators, teachers, RBPF, union officials and NGO’s. It was most alarming that during that walkabout alone some 60 school-aged children were encountered who were not in school.

At that time Uriah McPhee Primary School had the highest rate of absenteeism of any school in the country but today with the considered efforts that have been deployed this school is showing an almost 95% accumulative attendance rate amongst the highest in the entire country. But this was not achieved by happenstance: it required focused and considered effort not just with this school but with schools nationwide.

You may have seen recently the Prime Minister’s visit to the SC McPherson Jr High. This was a considered visit to recognize and celebrate the tremendous success that school has made in meeting high attendance levels. The leadership of these schools are to be commended as well as the many other schools where a determined effort is made to get children back in school by reaching out to parents and community stakeholders.

This intense focus on school attendance is purposeful because the evidence and research shows that attendance is strongly linked to student success. It shows that students who have irregular attendance at school are more likely to suffer learning gaps and other psychological effects.

It is then no surprise that the Prime Minister Delivery Unit joined with the Ministry to support and enhance our efforts in increasing to at least 95% student attendance throughout the nation.

- The strategies developed were divided into four main categories, **Ministry led, School-based, Community based and community centered** **The Office of the Prime Minister** through the **Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit**, not only supports this initiative but partners with the ministry of education by providing technical support to the Ministry’s Planning Section and have developed a comprehensive database in conjunction with the Ministry using the quantitative data from the Bahamas Education Management Information System to monitor the situation on the ground and work with schools in bringing our students back to learning. Officers from the PMDU regularly meet with School

Attendance officers, School Guidance Counselors, School Administrators and Planning officers as we work on not only increasing school attendance rates, but also, ensuring persistent School Attendance.

Madame Speaker, the target attendance rate for the 2022-2023 school year is 95%. Students who missed more than 50% of the school year decreased by 94% nationwide.

National Attendance continued to increase and reached 91% between September and April 2023. Junior high school maintains the highest attendance among education levels, reaching 92.2% as at April 2023.

Our review has shown that the country has seldom, if ever in recent years seen this level of attendance and the achievement is indeed remarkable. We have also engaged close to 30 attendance officers to supplement our original team of attendance officers who are now posted in New Providence and Grand Bahama. Many of these officers have been operating from Urban Renewal Centers located in the heart of communities where thousands of students live.

These officers are on the ground, in communities, at the schools and have relied upon information and intelligence within these communities to find children who are not attending school. Additionally, virtual town meetings have been held to raise awareness of the critical importance of children being in classrooms during school hours throughout the nation. I reiterate school attendance of school aged children is critical.

Madam Speaker, while on campus we wish to assure student safety. In the reopening of school campuses in January 2022, when students returned to campuses by the thousands, many schools experienced levels of instability including numerous physical skirmishes some resulting in very serious injury.

Research shows that this type of violence has been seen globally and is linked in no small part to the psychological impact of student isolation during the shutdowns and lockdowns and the use of social media to perpetuate negative behaviours.

We have also noted that many of our young people have fallen within the range of influence of organized groups which has created tensions on campus. Other factors included issues in the home, and social problems in communities.

A decision had to be made to stabilize campuses. As a reluctant subscriber to police on school campuses a decision was made to reintroduce school policing only after a review of the empirical research of schools in this country demonstrated that schools were safer with police on campus. I submit however that this is policing with a difference.

Firstly, it was firmly understood that officers would work alongside school administrators on our campuses.

Secondly, a pilot program was launched in the Spring Term of 2022 on 9 school campuses and the success was empirically verified, the School Resource Officer (SRO) Program was thereafter officially launched in partnership with the Royal Bahamas Police Force in the Fall 2022 Semester.

At present, there are a total of 32 SROs including 16 in New Providence, 5 in Grand Bahama, 5 in Eleuthera, 3 in Abaco, 2 in Andros and 1 in Exuma.

Madam Speaker, I want to make it clear that SROs are not 'militarizing' our schools, but are serving as mentors, role models and safety related educators. The SROs are carefully selected by the Commissioner of Police and specially trained to ensure that they are suitable for the school environment.

Last June, I led a delegation to Denver Colorado, to attend the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) Annual School Safety Conference in order to be more exposed to global best practices on improved school safety. Two of our police officers were certified internationally as SROs. In August of 2022, my Ministry along with the Department of Education funded NASRO training for 30 officers of the RBPF, who were all certified as SROs in time for the 2022-23 academic year.

I am also proud to announce that after hundreds of submissions from across the globe and much deliberation, the National Association of School Resource Officers has selected one of our very own SROs in the person of Sgt. 1009 Rudy Pratt to be awarded the International Exceptional Service Award for his 'commitment to creating safer schools and safer children'.

This is the first time in the history of The Bahamas that a Bahamian will be receiving this award, and we wish to congratulate him on the work he is doing with the young people and the teaching of music at the Preston Albury School in Eleuthera!!

Madam Speaker, as the academic year draws to an end later this month, preliminary figures indicate that since SROs began their work in September 2022, there has been a significant decrease in the number of school incidents. SROs spend time in the classrooms with students and deliver regular presentations on issues that impact young people including guns, gangs, drugs, bullying and a host of other psycho-social issues.

Madam Speaker, alongside the SRO Program in terms of diversion is the second chance program - which the Hon. Prime Minister indicated during his opening remarks to this debate - will be expanded. As mentioned in the Commissioner's Policing Plan for 2023, the SRO Program will also be expanded. We seek to expand SROs to schools across all of the Family Islands. SROs will also be working with our primary school students, it is not isolated to any particular type of school. I wish to thank Chief Superintendent Chaswell Hanna who leads this programme and for his hands on oversight.

Another component introduced in the promotion of student safety is the bussing initiative which allows for the collection of students directly on the school campus as opposed to waiting on public streets for busses which has led to frequent physical altercations with students from the same school and from neighbouring schools and for a variety of reasons. Many of the students who are suspended for unacceptable behaviours are sent to suspension centers – these centers are reviewed for quality assurance to ensure students receive the appropriate intervention and counselling during the suspension period so as to get at the root of the problem.

The more serious offenders are sent to Programme Sure where counselling, literacy and technical and vocational training takes place as well as components of drill and discipline training by the RBDF.

It was the frequency of student disruptions and other negative activity and violent behaviours in the first months of school return that led to a review of the body of research of this phenomenon in other countries and the links to Covid 19 lockdowns which led the Ministry to bringing a closer focus to the psychosocial wellbeing of students.

It is clear that some students have been negatively impacted psychologically and emotionally for varying reasons including the disruptions caused by the lockdowns. This has been evidenced on many school campuses.

A committee of public and private professionals was created who focused on this issue of wellbeing of the student population. They looked at strategies including counselling sessions to cause for Resiliency, Self-awareness Self-management Suicide prevention, Cyberbullying and strategies to promote Responsible Decision making.

As a result of recommendations made The Ministry will seek to - Establish a school-based committee comprising School Guidance Counsellors, School Psychologists, an administrator, social worker, school nurse, P.T.A. member (parent), community, Civic, and/or church leader/activist, Urban Renewal representative. It is intended to implement a- Father-Figure Friday: Each homeroom will appoint an upstanding gentleman from the community as a father-figure for that homeroom. This individual will visit the homeroom at least once per month on a Friday.

Safe Drop-box: Safe drop-boxes are placed strategically throughout the school campus. Students will use these boxes to voice their concerns, comments or a note about how they are feeling, or if they are aware of someone who needs intervention-by writing it on a slip of paper and placing it in a box.

A Safe Bench: The PAHO/WHO Country Office seeks to partner with the Ministry of Education for the identification of a bench on its campus that may be designated as a safe space for students to share their support, empathy, and voices and to open up about their mental health. PAHO/WHO will provide the green paint and sign for the

bench with the taglines “Share a conversation, your story, your support” and “Have a seat. Let’s talk about it. Mental health matters.”

Gatekeepers Symposium (Crisis Centre). Gatekeeper training teaches people to identify individuals who are showing warning signs of suicide risk and help these individuals get the services they need.

GSEP (a Self-Esteem program developed by Ms. Raquel Hutchinson- School Psychologist, School Psychological Services Unit).

National Male and Female Seminar and Team Building (conducted by the Guidance Department).

Parent Seminars: parents who have a child or children entering or leaving a grade will be required to attend seminars within their school district (partner with Urban Renewal, churches (Anglican Church), Refocus, and/or Social Services).

Involve Communication Section of the Ministry of Education, Technical and Vocational Training in providing information on children, adolescents and youth Mental Health and Wellness awareness.

The last week in March, each school will hold a Mental Health and Wellness week climaxing with a Mental Health and Wellness Day.

COMPETITIONS

- A Mental Health and Wellness TikTok school competition: students will create TikTok shows to bring Mental Health and Wellness awareness to their peers using a popular platform.
- A Mental Health and Wellness Poster school competition: students will create paper or digital poster with a slogan bringing awareness to Mental Health and Wellness Awareness.
- Mental Health and Wellness Powtoons: Students will create/design powtoons which will be used to convey the message about Mental Health and Wellness.

In a visit just last week at DW Davis Jr High the first of the wellness wall was placed in a school corridor which allowed students to post positive messages.

We hope to bring into the open discussions about mental health and to provide support for students who are needing help.

Madam Speaker, one of the challenges children and young people attending school face is access to food. Many of them come to school hungry.

According to nokidhungry.org:

“Longitudinal data suggests that children’s learning outcomes suffer when they regularly experience hunger and that nearly every aspect of physical and mental function is hurt as well. Food insecurity affects concentration, memory, mood and motor skills, all of which a child needs to be successful”

This highlights the critical importance of meeting the nutrition needs of children who come to school hungry. There is currently a lunch programme which is managed by the National School Feeding Unit which is comprised of the Lunch Vendors Programme and the National School Lunch Programme. The objective of the unit is to ensure the delivery of nutritious meals to school aged children, in the Public School system currently involving some 6000 participants.

Madam Speaker, the Prime Minister announced last week that in addition to this lunch initiative an allocation has been made in the 2023/24 budget for a national breakfast programme. This is a significant initiative that will provide a first meal at the beginning of the day and meet the hunger need of children and bolster them as they seek to learn and develop their true potential.

Madam Speaker, the next issue of priority was to assess and address the learning loss that we anticipated was the result of the school shutdowns.

According to a World Bank blog titled [Mission: Recovering Education in 2021](#)

“The [COVID-19 pandemic has caused abrupt and profound changes](#) around the world. This is the worst shock to education systems in decades, with the longest school closures combined with looming recession. It will set back progress made on global development goals, particularly those focused on education. The economic crises within countries and globally will likely lead to fiscal austerity, increases in poverty, and fewer resources available for investments in public services from both domestic expenditure and development aid. All of this will lead to a [crisis in human development](#) that continues long after disease transmission has ended.

Disruptions to education systems over the past year have already driven substantial losses and inequalities in learning....

School closures and the resulting disruptions to school participation and learning are [projected](#) to amount to losses valued at \$10 trillion in terms of affected children’s future earnings. Schools also play a critical role around the world in ensuring the delivery of essential health services and nutritious meals, protection, and psycho-social support. Thus, school closures have also imperiled children’s overall wellbeing and development, not just their learning.

It's not enough for schools to simply reopen their doors after COVID-19. Students will need tailored and sustained support to help them readjust and catch-up after the pandemic. We must help schools prepare to provide that support and meet the enormous challenges of the months ahead. The time to act is now; the future of an entire generation is at stake.

Mission objective: *To enable all children to return to school and to a supportive learning environment, which also addresses their health and psychosocial well-being and other needs.”*

We strongly suspected based on the global data and the findings of our own teachers that many of our children have been adversely affected by this phenomenon of learning loss.

OUR TEACHERS understood it better than most of us and IMMEDIATELY WENT INTO RECOVERY MODE in THEIR OWN INDIVIDUAL CLASSROOM Testing AND Evaluating AND utilizing their own REMEDIATION PLANS.

IT WAS THE DETERMINATION OF THE ministry, however, that a universal testing should be devised for the purpose of acquiring collective data wholistically to measure the full impact of the shutdowns on our students and to assist in devising policy responses to remediate the fallout and recover learning loss and close the learning gap.

- The MOETVT enlisted the assistance of the Ministry of Finance in overseeing the process to identify a suitably qualified Consulting Firm to undertake a diagnostic assessment of the learning loss which has occurred and provide recommendations for accelerating learning recovery.

An RFP was published, and a committee formed to evaluate responses in conjunction with the ministry of finance. Cabinet approved the award of the Renaissance Learning Inc. consultancy, and authorized the expenditure of \$1,021,620.00, payable over one year, during the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 budget periods for the diagnostic assessment and accelerated learning recovery of the thousands of students who have been adversely impacted by the COVID -19 pandemic

- the Renaissance Learning Inc has operations in over 20 countries, namely Bermuda, Cayman Islands, some African countries, Canada and in the United States of America and engaged in Assessment of tens of thousands of students in the public school from K-12 throughout the length and breadth of The Bahamas in all 160 public schools beginning January 2023.

In round 1 of testing 33,420 students were given the star reading test and 29,960 in round 2

29,926 students sat the star math test round 1 and 25,330 in round 2

The students who were not tested are being sought out by the Project Coordinator in conjunction with the relevant schools and the Attendance Unit

The findings of this testing are the cause for significant concern and has revealed that the greatest need for urgent intervention is in New Providence, Grand Bahama, Abaco and Eleuthera. And that on average 44% of our students need urgent intervention according to the data reported. The finer results of these national findings will be discussed with all relevant stakeholders in the ensuing weeks.

In response to these findings Renaissance is providing personalized individual, small group and whole class interventions using nearpod and other strategies. The lessons include lessons on foundational concepts.

It is expected that these students that need support will participate in the summer extended learning sessions that begin in July and parents are asked to ensure their children participate as necessary.

- In the new school year, we will continue with assessments and the provide intervention to remediate the learning gaps resulting from school closures and other obstacles to learning.
- Students will engage in personalized learning opportunities utilizing an integrated learning system. The Ministry of Education seeks to engage our village of volunteers: civic organizations, NGOs, churches, etc. to assist by sitting with students and providing assistance as needed.

This is a crisis, and all hands must be on deck to help these young people to a place of full recovery. I wish to thank our school administrators and teachers who have worked extraordinarily hard to pull off the testing with limited devices and in facilitating student interventions. What we have seen in this exercise is the highest of service of which the entire nation should be proud.

The work ahead of us demands a singularity of purpose but we are confident that with the considerable efforts underway and with the investment of the necessary resources we will be able to assist our students in full recovery and perhaps even address historic deficits independent of Covid 19 which we suspect are also reflected in these statistics It has to be understood, however, that parents play a critical role in this process.

In the face of the learning loss and school disruptions due to lockdowns, the Ministry understood that there is an undergirding mandate of student wellness to build resiliency as I have previously stated hence the importance of athletic and creative outlets have been encouraged and emphasized.

Once Ministry of Health gave the green light Physical Education and all afterschool sporting activities were immediately reinstated.

We seek to create a Paradigm Shift through sports

- Earlier this year, the Sports Unit facilitated the delivery of sports equipment to each school nationally. That is the first time this had happened.
- Public school-based sporting facilities were assessed

- Collaborated with the Bahamas Football Association to stage the High School Soccer Nationals 2023
- Demographics of the physical Education Staff was conducted to determine gaps
- An assessment of the after-school sports programme was conducted
- A data base has been created to facilitate a more efficient means of payment for coaches and officials
- Worked in collaboration with the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture with the national high school championships
- Worked with the Local Organizing Committee for the Carifta Games
- Expanded the Let's Swim Bahamas Programme by one hundred percent

This has been a wonderful paradigm for our young people – In collaboration with the GSSSA we have facilitated track and field sporting events and Cross country, Softball and Baseball, Soccer, golf and swimming in conjunction with Let's Swim Bahamas and the Knowles who continue to be key partners in assisting students to learn to swim.

Swimming programmes now exist in the following schools:

Stephen Dillet Primary

Albury Sayles Primary

Woodcock Primary

T.G. Glover Primary

Sadie Curtis Primary

Thelma Gibson Primary

Sandilands Primary

I wish to thank Varel Davis, President of the GSSSA for her committed and tireless work in advancing after school sporting activities

Talks have begun with officials at the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources to add Sailing Clubs to 10 schools in New Providence for the next academic year. The plan includes 4 Primary, 4 Junior and 2 Senior Schools.

An initiative to introduce Chess to Public Schools is also being conceptualized
Madam Speaker, the passion and skill that I have witnessed of these young athletes has been a moving experience for me.

Madam Speaker, we seek to help build the whole child and to implement policy which advances this core objective but to do so requires effective and targeted policy supported by empirical evidence and reliant upon data for decision-making. It is this commitment that has led to the restructuring of the Ministry now underway to cause for laser-like focus on core strategies and continuous monitoring and for greater

responsiveness for our teams on the ground – our District Superintendents, School administrators and our teachers.

This includes reconceptualizing the Planning and Development Centre to become more central in policy formation and research. It is the necessary research that allows us to respond dynamically to the education of our children and yield greater fruit.

Based on historic performance in national exams, now compounded by the impact of Covid 19, we sought to understand what factors are influencing these outcomes and querying why students are leaving school in grade 12 struggling with literacy long before a covid 19 phenomenon. To design policies to address these deficiencies, the MOETVT/DOE has commissioned a comprehensive study to investigate the factors that impact student learning outcomes (especially academic outcomes) of school-aged students in The Bahamas.

We have commissioned research with the University of The Bahamas which is close to halfway through to analyze which factors influence learning outcomes both in student high performance and in underperformance.

Specifically, as the Study notes, despite the widening of access to education in the post-independence era and the strengthening of resources such as teacher preparation and availability of teachers, school construction and organizational restructuring, concern about student learning outcomes (especially academic outcomes) continues.

High School graduation rates, for example, do not reflect the level of investment made in the education enterprise and performance on national examinations invariably fall below expectations. In addition, employers continue to call attention to the absence of relevant skills, including soft skills in high school leavers; in particular, those needed to meet the labour market demands. Further, community observers have noted a decline in social behaviour, a lack of regard for the personal property of others and a lack of respect for the rule of law.

The purpose of this study is to determine factors that influence student-learning outcomes of school-aged children. The data arising from the study will inform policy directions. It is common knowledge that the school and the educational system do not exist in a vacuum. As one of the major institutions of society, the school and educational system is influenced by other social institutions in particular, the economy, the polity, health, religion. The research literature on student learning notes the influence of factors relating to the following: school, family, community, individual and policies. Therefore, the study will comprise several components as follows:

- (a) Community Factors: including location, rural vs urban etc.
- (b) School factors: including school leadership, parental involvement, physical and material conditions of schools, teacher characteristics, methods of organization for instruction, school social climate (including organizational and academic climates) and use of instructional time.

(c) Family Factors: including number of persons in the home, income, parental interest, mother's education level, father's educational level, sib ship etc.

(d) Individual: including ability, motivation, ability etc.

Methodology:

Using both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection including desk reviews, case studies, surveys, focus groups and observations, data will be collected and analyzed to answer the following Research Questions.

Research Questions:

General Research Questions

(a) What are the factors that influence and determine student-learning outcomes of school-aged children?

(b) What are the policies that must be introduced as intervention towards positive student- learning outcomes of school-aged children?

We await the findings of this Research which will assist in getting to the root of deficiencies and vulnerabilities empirically established and to guide reform and new policy initiatives

A second research project now underway with the recent publication of Request for proposals of interest has as its objective the maximizing of performance in mathematics of our students

As the publication states the Ministry of Education and Technical and Vocational Training desires to improve the teaching and learning of Mathematics throughout the Bahamian archipelago. This will include:

- Strengthening the pedagogical skills and deepening the content knowledge of teachers of Mathematics throughout the country.
- Diagnosing the challenges to learning Mathematics as presented by students at all levels of the system; and
- Determining the match between expected curriculum outcomes and the availability of human and material resources.

Duration of the Assignment:

The Consultant is expected to commence the assignment on 28 August.

The Ministry of Education and Technical and Vocational Training of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas has responsibility for more than 50,000 K-12 students attending approximately 170 educational institutions (Pre-primary, Primary, Junior and Senior High) dispersed over 14 education districts throughout the major islands in the Bahamian archipelago.

Mandated to provide a quality education that will give students the opportunity to reach their full potential in a globally competitive world, the Ministry of Education and Technical and Vocational Training invests heavily in the educational enterprise.

According to the Draft National Development Plan, the system is well funded, normally, receiving the greatest portion of the national budget. Despite the ongoing investment in the educational enterprise, concerns about student achievement, especially in critical areas of literacy and numeracy, continue.

An overarching goal of the Ministry of Education and Technical and Vocational Training is to increase the school graduation rate from 50% to 85% by 2030. A major obstacle to achieving this goal, however, is student achievement in critical disciplines, especially Mathematics. From the perspective of Education Officers, far too many students do not understand the basic concepts of Mathematics, nor do they understand how these concepts are applicable. In making these observations, the Officers call attention to student performance of national examinations taken at all levels: Grade Level Assessment Test (GLAT), Bahamas Junior Certificate (BJC) and Bahamas

It is our expectation that this research project will give greater insight into the learning modalities of our students as it relates to abstract concepts and assist in developing strategies that will result in higher across the board achievement in mathematics and in other STEM subjects.

Madam Speaker, additionally we are investigating the efficacy of the integration of the creative arts with core subjects on the school curriculum

We have engaged a consultant who is running a pilot program in two schools that will provide curricula tools and strategies to infuse the arts in core subjects

Arts integration is progressive as it allows for student centered teaching and learning practices it is based on the constructivism learning theory. Through arts integration the gains in learning are maximized as arts allow for greater social interactions, greater use of critical thinking skills, more experiential learning, reflective practice, active learning as opposed to passive learning. Although it is piloted in 2 schools, we expect the training of trainers so that more schools are added in 2023/2024 school years.

We are aiming for quality integration of culture and the arts across the core subjects We believe that this will connect students and teachers to each other and to the larger community. We are looking for students to demonstrate deeper understanding and mastery of the arts and their core subjects. By learning through the arts students will be better able to problem solve, understand the role they play in their own lives, be better at conflict resolution; learn perseverance, improve their ability to withstand frustration and critique and become aware of themselves as capable and productive citizens The performing arts and the creative arts will therefore take on greater importance in the curriculum reform.

All over the country in schools everywhere we see the example of naturally gifted children. We also know that this can enhance learning in general and be the avenue for scholarships and many members of school bands and music students, visual artists and students of dance are able to access tertiary education scholarships for further education.

Additionally in order to understand student performance overall a review of GLAT results over the last 10 years has been undertaken and a number of gaps have been identified in how the system responds to these results as it relates to student intervention, gaps in communication with schools, teachers and parents were also identified.

A strategy has been devised –

1.	Collaboration amongst stakeholders	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Online release of 2022 GLAT Reports to junior high and central secondary schools to assist with remediation for 7th graders. 1. Meeting for Primary Curriculum Officers and Examination Officers to discuss the curriculum coverage for GLAT examinations and student performance. 1. Participation of Examination personnel in a session with District Superintendents to discuss performance on GLAT examinations. 1. Virtual session with PTA and School Board personnel to discuss student performance on the GLAT and share tips on how to improve performance. 	<p>18th November 2022</p> <p>Tuesday 13th December (to be continued thereafter as necessary)</p> <p>Mid - January 2023</p> <p>January 2023</p>
2.	Curriculum, Syllabus and Test Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Representation of Curriculum Officers and Examination personnel on revision panels for curricula and syllabi 1. Curriculum Officers to vet GLAT examinations before printing. 	<p>January 2023</p> <p>February – March 2023</p>

3.	<p>Use of School Improvement Plans (SIP)</p> <p>Strategies to address inherent weaknesses must be addressed in the plans.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Submission of District Improvement Plans and review by District Superintendents (to be used during observation visits) 1. Sharing of plans with Curriculum Officers so that they will be aware of strategies being implemented to promote improved performance. 1. District Superintendents will encourage the use of sharing of 'best strategies' amongst schools in a district 	<p>December 2022 for submission Commencing January 2023 for use during school observations.</p> <p>January 2023</p>
4.	<p>Review of national examination reports</p>	<p>Examination personnel will lead discussions.</p> <p>Test taking strategies will also be shared.</p>	<p>Commenced October 2022 on 'Dialogues in Education' session. Officers will also present during Professional Development Days throughout the academic year.</p>
5.	<p>Professional Development Activities</p>	<p>Examination personnel will facilitate District/School based sessions</p>	<p>February – April 2023.</p>

Madam Speaker, key to the stimulus of knowledge and the creation of a rounded student is a relevant and appropriately constructed curriculum. There is no doubt that the rapidly evolving world and in particular the growing importance of digitization and the growing importance of ICT mandates that an aggressive approach must be made to curriculum reform.

- As a result, there is continued revision and implementation of Curricula. Making full use of the Curriculum Development Cycle introduced in 2018, the Division successfully launched seventeen (17) newly revised curricula in 2019. Ten (10) guides were launched in March 2022. Language Arts Grades 4-6, Social Studies Grades 4-6, and Computer Studies Grades 4-6 were launched in March 2023. Religious Studies Grades 1-6 are expected to be completed by June 2023.
-
- There is to be greater oversight in the implementation of the curriculum. Several curriculum documents were recently launched. In order for the curriculum to be

used properly, the necessary training needs to take place as well as guidance and support provided as teachers implement the new documents.

- - Conduct professional development sessions. Face to face sessions is much more effective than in the virtual space.
- - Provide guidance and support to new and veteran teachers.

A recent Survey of primary school teachers and in discussions with many primary school teachers who expressed their concerns have caused for a review of international and regional approaches to Primary School curriculum. This is an effort now under review with a view to addressing the concerns of “course overload” whilst ensuring increased emphasis is placed on the foundational areas of literacy and numeracy and that our children are able to fully grasp the rigors of critical content which is benchmarked

Curriculum reform underway also seeks to fully integrate the use of ICT in all subjects and the last 12 months saw the introduction of coding to the curriculum including at the Primary School level.

We also wish to ensure that the curriculum contains exposure and instruction which assists young people in entering the world’s realities such as climate change, financial literacy and emotional intelligence.

A key component of curriculum reform is the introduction of modern Bahamian history as a core subject.

Brief Overview of The Textbook

The history curriculum has not been changed since 1982. Much of the past curriculum reflected ideas of the regimes on the colonial and European influence on The Bahamas. Additionally, as The Bahamas has progressed almost 50 years since independence (1973), the curriculum and history texts reflect the realities of a history of the modern period of nation formation and the contemporary period of social, political and economic history, while not ignoring the colonial legacy of the past. The supervision of the text was led by Dr. Christopher Curry, historian and Director of AMMC and Acting Assistant Director of Education Perlene Baker.

Twelve Distinguished writers have completed chapters on the textbook, and they are:

Dr. Keith Tinker

Dr. Michael Pateman

Patricia Glinton-Meicholas

Dr. Olivia Saunders

Dr. Lisa Lawlor Fuller

Dr. Cleveland Eneas III (An Ku Sa Ra)

Dr. Grace Turner
Christopher Davis
Dr. Ian Strachan
Patrice Williams
Nameiko Miller
Kim Outten-Stubbs

Importance of The Text

The text is a collaborative effort to address the major themes developed in the History curriculum. As such, the 2-volume series will address substantively Bahamian History topics outlined in seven thematic areas below. Although broader Caribbean history is included in the thematic chapters, it is important to give a more concentrated thrust to Bahamian history, particularly in the modern era of decolonization, independence and post-independence developments.

It is also worth noting that a concentrated effort to place indigenous and African societies within the same analytical and thematic framework was important given that these cultural areas and groups had direct impact on the emergence of Bahamian collective memory and heritage.

This approach also aligns chronologically with the development of world civilizations outside the traditional Eurocentric approach to history. It is important to understand civilizations that had a rich tapestry and culture before the trans-Atlantic slave trade was inaugurated by Europeans in the 15th century. With the above in mind, the span of this first volume covers indigenous and African societies up to the contemporary period of modern nation-state formation.

Each chapter was commissioned to a specific writer and with the entire project overseen by an editorial board and chief editor. The value of this approach allowed for the production of a text in an efficient and cost-effective fashion while also incentivizing the work of each individual chapter to a commissioned author. Additionally, each chapter was tasked to highly specialized expert in a particular area of concentration, thereby ensuring a high standard of cutting-edge research in a field of study related to the curriculum theme to be developed.

The collection of essays introduced new authors and cutting-edge research done by scholars. It also allowed for a deeper dive into often ignored or understudied areas of Bahamian history.

The Textbook & Revised History Curriculum

A curriculum committee spearheaded by Mrs. Pearlene Baker and associates within the Ministry of Education, Technical and Vocational Training has been established to review previous history curriculum for Senior High School students. A revised curriculum for both Bahamian/Caribbean and U.S. Domestic History and Race Relations was developed that focused on major themes and concentrations inclusive of post-Independence considerations. The curriculum addressed gaps in literature and recent trends in historiography.

Specific authors were targeted through an official Private **“Call for Papers”**. The Call included a detailed overall objective of the edited volume with specific instructions on the outcomes and deliverables required for each author. Authors submitted an abstract and outline of the chapter they intended to write and delivered by the end of phase one.

During this first phase, an Editorial Review Board was also established of prominent Bahamian educators who ensured their work was conducted without partiality towards and to uphold the highest standards in academia. The Board created a “Book Review Format” and designed specific rubrics that helped authors to include structured artefacts in the text. Assessment writers were also included in the text, and these were four teachers who collaborated on the creation of activities, worksheets, glossaries and questions from each of the chapters.

We believe this new text will bring a level of awakening to the consciousness of our students and engender pride and self-esteem. In the curriculum reform we understand that our student population is talented in diverse ways as I alluded to in my early remarks, our curriculum must anticipate our diversity in interest but also the diverse needs of our economy.

This has led to a strong focus on Technical and Vocational education which must be centered in the curriculum. The Minister of State will speak more closely to this issue including the introduction of an Apprenticeship programme and the expansion of BTVI into Eleuthera, Exuma and Abaco and the reintroduction of the Technical Cadet Corps and a collaboration with the LJM Maritime Institute for the creation of the national maritime college.

Madam Speaker

I am particularly excited about the new BAHAMAS POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE (Formerly Star Academy)

We will repurpose the existing infrastructure for an innovative educational experience.

We are engaged in active dialogue with the leadership of the Bahamas Conference Seventh Day Adventist, relative to the potential capacity of the former site of the Bahamas Academy school on Wulff Road.

Previously referred to as the STAR Academy, is the envisaged that this site will become the home of The Bahamas' first Polytechnic Institute of Excellence, transforming academics to application, in an effort to bridge employment gaps.

As a Polytechnic Institute, the site will serve as an Up-Skilling Hub for Bahamian students, providing increased opportunities for the development of Career and Technical Education skill sets. The institute will advance training in a phased-in approach, using an academy model, supported by state-of-the-art laboratories and facilities.

Students may opt for example, to be a part of the Academy of Information Technology, the Academy of Hospitality or the Academy of Construction, all providing highly specialized sector training, supported by certifications that validate training content. The Academy of Construction for example, will provide exposure opportunities in Advanced Carpentry, where furniture making will be a course of study, but so too will be drywall installation and boat building (for cultural posterity). Construction Subject Matter Experts will provide training for students in Computer Aided Drafting, HVAC, Tile Laying, Roofing for example, with a potential capstone course being the construction of a small home, integrating the Business of Construction (business planning, bidding, sourcing, etc.) with the technical requirements.

The introduction of the institute will center on the Academy of Construction, inclusive of the trade and technology (IT) to aid the trade. In this initial phase, the institute will also facilitate a maritime component in conjunction with the LJM Maritime academy, the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW), seeking to enhance our maritime commerce capacity.

The holistic vision is that as content is expanded and funded for career, technical and vocational education and training, the branches offering such training, (high schools, BTVI, UB, The Polytechnic Institute), will be categorically layered to ensure that credentials are not overlapping and are collective relative to the exit objective of either a diploma, certification or credit toward a degree programme.

We will brand The Polytechnic Institute of Excellence as the advanced certification mechanism for Career, Technical and Vocational Education in the country, where theoretical principles are supported by advanced infrastructure and where appropriate, cutting-edge simulation interaction for relevance and rigor.

The structure will align with a dual enrollment path where students will be expected to satisfy interest and skills requirements in the tenth (10th) grade of senior high school. In the second year, they will commence the dual enrollment programme with two (2) to three (3) days at the institute, depending on the academy in which they are enrolled.

In addition to professional certifications, students will be awarded National Competency Certificates which will indicate to potential employers, the capacity and skillset of each participant/graduate of the programme. In an effort to efficiently staff the institute, teaching resources will be required as educators are redirected from current assignments, replacements will be critical.

These are exciting times in Education, especially for Career, Technical and Vocational Education and Training...Building Bridges, Closing Gaps, One Student at a Time!
The investment in this dynamic, transformational center is projected at \$13million to complete the State-of-the-Art Facility, with equipment and infrastructure pegged at \$565 thousand.

It is this paradigm shift and the reality of 21st century economies, the deficits of skills in our own economy that has led to a more integrated approach of technical and vocational education to mainstream education.

We have also heard the cries of teachers, parents, students and the community at large as to the anomalies in the High School Diploma, I can now say the old High School Diploma.

For example, the inability to recover F's in earlier high school years, the duplication of criteria causing what might be called a double jeopardy for students, and our review of approaches globally to the graduation criteria led to action by the Ministry to review and analyze these concerns

On August 25, 2022, at a Press Conference, a team of professionals representing a cross section of education stakeholders were commissioned as The Bahamas High School Diploma National Review Commission (BHSDNRC).

Members were carefully selected and included some of our country's most distinguished retired and serving educators, coupled with highly accomplished individuals from the public and private sectors. Additionally, the membership included the presidents of the three education stakeholder unions, Bahamas Educators' Managerial Union, Bahamas Union of Teachers & The Bahamas Educators, Counsellors and Allied Workers Union.

It was during the initial meeting that the Commission that I gave the official mandate, to review all requirements of The Bahamas High School Diploma (BHSD) program and make considered recommendations toward the improvement of the initiative moving forward.

I am pleased to advise that in keeping with the official mandate to engage the community and identify concerns, members of the BHSDNRC over a period of two (2) months, (12th October - 15th December 2022) conducted a total of fifty-eight (58) very extensive Town Hall Meetings with varying groups of education stakeholders throughout

the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. It is also important to note that (55) of the (58) Town Hall Meetings were Commission's working sessions. The only virtual stakeholder engagement sessions were facilitated for the islands of Mayaguana, Berry Islands and Rum Cay.

The engagement permitted members of the Commission the opportunity to garner a deeper awareness and appreciation of concerns expressed across the nation, relative to the criteria to earn a high school diploma. Stakeholders expressed concerns about the EMIS/LMS System, Virtual School, Poor Connectivity, Shortages of Teachers, the Domicility Policy and accommodations for among other general matters.

The Commission concluded its work in January of 2023 and advanced the final report during the 3rd week of February, offering justified recommendations, compiled by 6 working sub-committees from within the BHSDNRC membership. The sub committees examined criteria, data collection, justifications, appeals, inclusion and industry acceptance.

The recommendations were reviewed by the senior leadership team of my ministry and 90% of all recommendations were accepted, with the remaining 10% amalgamated or awaiting resources (financial or human) to facilitate the necessary action. In keeping with our commitment to remain transparent with stakeholders, my team and I met with the Commission Members, headed by Chairman Cecil Thompson, internal and external stakeholders, public and independent schools and the general public via a press conference, advising of the recommendations and the way forward. The recommendations are effective immediately with positive implications for the class of 2023.

Of the immediate recommendations advanced, the criteria were modified, as opposed to 4 BJs of Math, English Language, a Science and a Social Science, students are now required to secure 4 BJs to include Math and Language and any other 2 subjects. Students now have three (3) pathway options to earn a diploma, categorized as a general diploma, an honors diploma or an equivalency diploma.

For the first time, industry recognized certifications outside of the BJC and BGCSE can be considered to satisfy the academic requirements for earning a diploma. The credits programme which proved to be a duplicated requirement was removed and students are now required to satisfy a cumulative 2.0 GPA.

The Bahamas High School Diploma Honors Pathway criteria:

Students are expected to maintain a minimum of a 3.0 grade point average over three years (grades 10 – 12). They are expected to have passed four BJs with B passes: English Language, Math, and Science are mandatory along with any other BJC subject. Students are expected to obtain 3 BGCSEs with C passes or above, or an SAT score of 1000 or an ACT score of 20. They should participate in leadership in the school (example: serve as a prefect) and participate in three extra – curricular activities. They

are expected to maintain 80% attendance and 80% punctuality over three years (grades 10 – 12). They are also expected to participate in 30 hours of community service and 20 hours of job readiness training over three years (grades 10 – 12).

The 3 parent teacher conferences requirements were removed as the Commission felt that it penalized students for their parents' failings which was unfair and imposed a criteria to be fulfilled by someone other than the student herself

That does not mean that parental support is not required in general for the student's success, it is simply being removed as a criteria for the student who will not now be disadvantaged from earning a diploma, if parents fail to act.

The following recommendations were also accepted and enforced or implemented immediately:

- The formation of an independent Justification and Appeals Committee, to review all special consideration requests where students may not have received a diploma.
- formation of an oversight committee to hold the ministry accountable for implementation of the recommendation.
- The establishment of a BHSD Unit to be staffed by 5 team members, 2 are already in place and 2 in the very near future.

Gratitude is extended to the Commission led by Chairman Cecil Thompson, a veteran educator and the entire team.

Again, as in last year all school leavers in grade 12 will collectively mark their end of school life in a school leaving ceremony. We are seeking to build confidence and to allow our students to create pathways to success in their high school years.

The greatest opportunities lie in our Pre-Primary students who would not have suffered the consequences of Covid 19

- Research has proven that investment in the early years of a child's life through education, health care and social development will yield positive returns in adulthood. The Government of The Bahamas is committed to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4.2
Early childhood development and universal pre-primary education – “By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.”

The universal preprimary policy outlines three strategies to ensure access to high quality education from as early as 3 years of age.

- Firstly, expanding government preschools by increasing the number of preschool classrooms throughout The Bahamas. In the new academic year, 2023, a new

preschool unit will be established in Spanish Wells, and it is anticipated that, in response to the increased number of students diagnosed with special needs, a new preschool special education class will be opened at Thelma Gibson, September 2023 making it the third special preschool class in New Providence. We will continue to open new units in primary schools where there are available classrooms.

- Secondly, establishing partnerships with approved private preschool providers who will provide preschool placement through a voucher program. Families who are in need of financial assistance and cannot be accommodated in government schools are given a voucher for \$2,000 to assist with tuition. More than 4500 students are now accommodated but the need is so much greater the government must find solutions to ensuring that in the shortest possible time we are able to accommodate universal access to Pre-Primary education
- We are today facing a dilemma where many children with special needs are not able to access the educational system due to lack of resources and a shortage of teachers and physical space in the public schools, this includes testing and screening

We must supplement technical support and create greater access, but efforts are underway to expand access.

School Psychological Services - Collaborations with Speech Therapy Unit

Bahamas National Screening Program – Identification of students with special needs or those ‘at-risk’/ placement in the Marjorie Davis Institute for Special Education (MDISE)

Eleuthera District wide assessments – Psychoeducational & speech Therapy Fall, 2023.

Initiated follow-up ‘Pilot Program’ – identification of 10-12 high risk students across the district to target academic, psycho-social, communication needs in collaboration with teachers and parents. Involved weekly training and intervention for the students. Post-tests will be administered to assess progress and future needs

Continued professional Development training for teachers (public & private schools) in the Grand Bahama District – Self-Care, Teacher Burn-out, Emotional Intelligence, Stress Management

Assessment and management of Grade 1 students in Grand Bahama.

Country-wide weeklong training in Special Education Students and Diversity – Summer 2022 by Lesley University & Authentic Caribbean Foundation Boston MA

- . Training of 14 Teachers for the MA Degree in Special Education by Barry University. Scholarships are given to them as well. Started Spring 2023
- . Online training on Autism for Technical Officers of the section with Toronto University
- . Placement of 200 plus students in special education programmes
- . Opening of 4 new Special Education Units
- . Special Education Initiatives to commence September 2023
- . Additional training in Special Education (IEP) planned for Summer, 2023
- . Hiring of 22 Cuban teachers to further address the needs of students with special education needs. (Aligns with National Persons with Disabilities Act – 2014 & UNESCO SDG #4 – Access & Equity. Will also facilitate the opening of new Units in N.P. & F.I.
- . Hiring of an additional Special Education Officer (EO) to assist with the growing administrative & supervisory demands of the Unit.
- . Retraining and institution of Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) to guide and direct the instruction/management of students with special education needs.
- . Opening of new Special Education programmes in New Providence and the Family Islands
- . Confirmation and redeployment of Special Education teachers who are currently serving in other capacities.
- . Introduction of Model Regional Special Education/Inclusive Education Policy as drafted by Caribbean Development Bank member countries for inclusion in schools/programmes

Speech Therapy

- . Teacher and parent training by speech therapists and occupational therapists for stimulating overall development in preschoolers.
- . Collaboration with NGO REACH so as to offer additional speech therapy sessions to students in preschool and special education Units (East Street Early Childhood Development Center & Garvin Tynes)
- . Eleuthera District wide assessments – Psychoeducational & speech Therapy Fall, 2023.

· Research has proven that investment in the early years of a child's life through education, health care and social development will yield positive returns in adulthood.

Madam Speaker, we promised in our campaign commitments that we would begin to take significant steps toward diversifying our economy.

A key sector for that diversification is the Orange Economy.

For many years, Bahamians have recognized the great potential that exists within our creative and cultural community. The Orange Economy commercializes that opportunity, so that people may have fulfilling careers that generate both jobs and wealth. There are a range of activities in the cultural and creative industries which make up the Orange Economy. They range from architecture and design, to craft, fashion, film and music.

Madam Speaker:

One of the broadest sectors is the creative and performing arts.

The performance side covers activities like acting, dancing, singing and playing musical instruments. The creative side covers writing, directing, producing and so forth.

These are foundational to so many creative products and services, whether live performances in a theatrical space, or performances on radio or on screen.

Here in The Bahamas, we have talent in abundance in these areas. Once we support and train and develop that talent, I have no doubt that we will produce world class creatives and performers, who will do great things for this country.

Madam Speaker:

I am excited and proud to announce that we will soon have a School for The Creative and Performing Arts. The school will be a full-time tertiary-level institution, meaning that only those who have finished high school will be eligible to attend. There will be no upper age limit, so those who are highly talented and highly dedicated, who may have already embarked on another career, will also be eligible to attend.

While we are still very much in the planning phase, we want to make sure that scholarships are available to every Bahamian who satisfies the entry requirements to be able to attend. We want this to be the best school in the region, and plan to make it attractive to fee-paying, international students.

The syllabus will cover all of the disciplines which I mentioned a few moments ago, as well as some of the technical skills which are essential to the creative arts.

Courses will run for 3 years, 1 year along with shorter courses in the evenings and at the weekend.

In September, the National Dance School will be re-opened, which is the first step toward moving to full-time training. We expect to launch short writing courses thereafter. In the short term, classes will be held over various sites until a purpose-built space can be created. A number of properties are being considered for permanent premises.

In order to better prepare younger people for enrolment at the school, we are already developing the arts syllabus in primary and secondary schools. I will say more about this in due course. With our colleagues at the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, we are also exploring ways to support the talent which emerges during the National Arts Festival.

We are fully aware that no-one is going to attend the school unless they can see a career path afterwards. And so, we are already working on this with a number of institutions.

Everything we are doing seeks to build on existing talent and structures. And so, we will actively pursue a range of partnerships around The Bahamas, and around the world, so that we can provide programmes and opportunities to make our people, simply the best!

Madam Speaker, once the details of the full vision for the school are made public, I hope that many will be inspired as I am.

Shortly after the 50th Anniversary Independence Celebrations in July, we will launch a consultation document, and begin a series of conversations, to get feedback from the widest possible range of members of the public.

Madam Speaker:

Thousands upon thousands of Bahamians will be touched by the creativity and talent coming out of this school. Thousands upon thousands will benefit directly and indirectly. These are the first steps toward building a school. And our New Day success will shine brightly for generations.

Regularization School Board Employees, Library personnel & Weekly Paid Employees

The regularization of school board employees, library personnel and weekly paid employees remains a critical commitment for this Ministry as many are geared to retire or die without benefits after working all their adult years within our schools and libraries, if we do not take action now. As stated before, there are approximately 179 people working within the school system (outside the Public Service). As previously agreed, we have begun to collect the requisite documents to make the appropriate recommendations to accomplish this goal.

The payment of arrears and allowances to our teachers and other staff is a collaborative effort with the HR, School Management and Accounts Units that remains in motion year-round.

The HR Staff is currently working on the Service Wide Promotion Exercise. Hundreds can expect advancements within the Clerical, Executive and Registry career paths. In fact, the majority of individuals within the clerical field can expect to move up two steps during this exercise that is scheduled to be completed this month.

In an effort to ensure that all our staff feel valued, the files of our employees in the 'M' and 'T' Scales have also been reviewed on an individual basis to determine their eligibility for advancement based on performance.

- To date we have made a tremendous inroad in concluding the process of the permanent and pensionable establishment of our previously contractual support staff. Between July 2022 and present, 136 General Service Workers, Teachers' Aides, Security Officers and Janitorial staff who were initially appointed on contract and thereafter temporary month-to-month terms, were recommended to the Permanent and Pensionable Establishment based on their maintained acceptable performance and attendance records. This has been a very successful initiative as many of these individuals received their establishment letters and payments of arrears were instituted by the Accounts Section. These individuals can for the first time make transactions with lending institutes.
- - The process is ongoing as we work with the remaining individuals to submit the requisite documents to be submitted to the Ministry of the Public Service for consideration. We have made provision in the 2023/2024 budget preparation to facilitate the continuation of this process because we do not intend to leave anyone behind.

National Job Creation Skills Enhancement Program (NJCSEP)

- - As you are aware, the former National Job Creation Skills Enhancement Program (NJCSEP) participants were appointed on Temporary month-to-month terms by the Ministry of the Public Service in June 2020, and assigned to government agencies where they were already giving service. The Ministry of

Education benefited from some 225 and made the necessary budgetary commitment to include their salaries. The process of transitioning the salaries of the individuals from Budget Head 005 to Budget Head 035 is almost completed. We have already begun to mobilize our efforts to facilitate their appointment to the Permanent & Pensionable Establishment. We intend to conclude this process during the 2023/2024 Budget Year. As stated during my Midyear Communication, we do realize that most of them are the breadwinners in their families. Their permanent and pensionable status along with the recent increase in minimum wage brings essential value to their lives.

- Colleagues, you would recall that in January 2022 we responded to the outcry to onboard more janitresses and security personnel to fill the dire needs in our schools. We engaged 182 janitresses on a contractual part-time basis while we awaited the results from the security vetting and other essential documents to facilitate their appointments within the Public Service. To date we have received appointment letters for 31 security assistants and 41 janitresses. They are now in full employment. 127 applications are still awaiting the requisite documents, mainly Security Vetting results.
- The process is ongoing as HR is working with the District Offices in the family islands to obtain the requisite documents from applicants. We are committed to completing the process during this upcoming Budget Year.

Promotions of Staff in the Career Paths of Guidance Counsellors, School Psychologists, Library Personnel and Security Personnel

- We have commenced the promotion exercises for our officers in the Guidance Counsellors, School Psychologists and Security Career Paths. We are finalizing the amendment of the requirements for the library cadre. These processes are ongoing, and it is intended that they will be concluded during the 2023/2024 Budget Year. In fact, we have already received promotion letters for some of our Guidance Counselors.

I wish to thank our Human Resource and Finance Officers for their very hard work in achieving these results despite many challenges including working within a manual system

The Learning Management System (LMS)

Houses educational resources inclusive of digital resources designed for subjects and levels.

- Student assessment, student support and analysis of both are components of the LMS.
- Allows for teaching across districts and schools.
- Allows for Lifelong Learning and under Emergency/Crisis situations.

Accomplishments for the 2022-2023 School Year

- - 100 % Mainstream Schools, Primary through Secondary levels produced Report Cards for the Christmas 2022 Term.
- - The LMS Integration (for authentication) completed and functional for the Renaissance Assessment of Learning Loss.
- - A new Reports Dashboard was designed, created and implemented so that District Administrators can have access to school reports (Attendance, Broadsheets, GPA Reports, Subject Statistics,). This allows for analysis of student performance.
- - Reports on Student Attendance produced in the EMIS. This allows for monitoring and reporting of student attendance rates as well as supporting decision making for attendance policies and programmes.

In order to ensure the successful rollout of the evolving BELMS for the Public Education System, the Ministry of Education has secured the services of Radiant Solutions to provide oversight project management support.

The main tasks of the company include:

- - Change management
- - Testing oversight
- - Quality assurance (product and methodology)
- - Monitoring of project deliverable
- - Tracking of project targets
- - Ensuring incorporation of industry best practices

Department of Education Virtual Learning Network

One component of the Department of Education's Virtual Learning Network is that which includes a wide variety of virtual resources hosted across various a range of digital platforms that include social media, local media channels and the soon to be launched Digital Repository. These allow for access to instructional and learning resources for students, teachers, parents and lifelong learners.

TECHNOLOGY/SCHOOLS MANAGEMENT

In a post-COVID environment everyone is being challenged to adapt to a new normal, we expect that our educational system will meet the needs of all of our students. As a

result, we have been afforded the opportunities to redefine and potentially enhance our teaching and learning environments. Leading the charge is technology, whose mandate is the implementation/upgrade of technologies in our schools. This implementation/upgrade would ensure that all students and all teachers would have equity, and access to education, inclusion, and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, ensuring that all students strive to reach their maximum potential.

FIBER UPGRADE

Our goal is to improve the technical infrastructure linking all districts, public schools, and all satellite offices with the Ministry of Education. Thus, creating a WAN (**a Wide Area Network**). We have completed all schools and satellite offices on the island of Abaco, Acklins, Andros, Eleuthera, Exuma, Cat Island, Crooked Island, San Salvador, Grand Bahama, Long Island, Mayaguana, and New Providence. The islands not completed are Inagua and Ragged Island. Inagua is scheduled to be completed by the end of August 2023 and Ragged Island is scheduled to be completed shortly after the school is completed. Subsequently, during the Summer Repairs, the internet infrastructure was damaged by contractors, and the Ministry made the repairs. \$750, 000 was appropriated if this eventuality occurs again.

- Additionally, A Technology Task Force was commissioned and tasked with the responsibility of the implementation of a comprehensive EMIS (**Education Management Information System**) and LMS (**Learning Management System**). Hurricane Dorian and COVID-19 have shown us that EMIS and LMS are badly needed. The execution of • Additionally, A Technology Task Force was commissioned and tasked with the responsibility of the implementation of a comprehensive EMIS (**Education Management Information System**) and LMS (**Learning Management System**). Hurricane Dorian and COVID-19 have shown us that EMIS and LMS are badly needed. The execution of this initiative will be conducted by the Ministry of Finance. MOF contracted Ecovis headed by Mr. James B Gomez in May 2022. In the interim One-on-One is continuing to provide an interim solution. To date, there have been no developments from Ecovis. We must seek a permanent EMIS (**Education Management Information System**) and LMS (**Learning Management System**). The is projected to cost is \$5m.

WI-FI OPTIMIZATION

The design of the One Network was for students and teachers to be able to access the internet using a device. We are now moving to the optimization phase where every student and teacher will be able to access the internet all at once. For this to happen the speed and number of access points will have to increase.

- **SECURITY THREATS**
- In recent times, we have experienced several threats to our network. We must have a maintenance contract to provide cyber security services that will monitor

the network for vulnerability and asset discovery. The projected cost is \$1.7m. It is recommended that this service is outsourced.

NAECOB

Moved to a new office location.

Registered educational providers are as follows:

- Post-secondary – 19
- Training – 21
- Allied Health – 8
- Programmes – 59 and
- Primary and Secondary Schools – 130
- Recognized institutions – 15

Visitation of schools - 1 announced visit and 1 unannounced visit.

New Providence 95 + schools visited and 85 family island schools, in the following islands: Grand Bahama, Andros, Cat Island, Abaco & Bimini. Future scheduled visits by August 31st, Exuma, Eleuthera, Berry Islands, San Salvador, Crooked Island, Inagua, Long Island, Rum Cay and Mayaguana.

It was noted during the inspections that several schools needed to make repairs. Some schools have followed through with the repairs and reported that several repairs have been completed and are ongoing.

- 6. Our registration drive continues with schools that are not registered.
- 7. We continue our relationships with international and regional associations that are responsible for higher education and quality assurance.
- 8. Evaluations and verifications continue to come into the office from within the Public Service and walk-ins.

DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES

· According to UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme "For each state, its documentary heritage reflects its memory and identity, and thus contributes to determining its place in the global community." Additionally in its Recommendation Concerning the Preservation of, and Access to, Documentary Heritage Implementation Guidelines UNESCO postulates that "it is memory institutions who identify and select

documentary heritage for preservation, who care for collections, who provide access, who identify and manage risk and who advise governments on the resources needed for their work.“ It is in this international context that the Department of Archives, one of the oldest heritage institutions in our country, operates.

The International Relations Unit/ UNESCO

The International Relations Unit (IRU) of the Ministry of Education is responsible for the conduct of business with the international organization United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in seeking their support for key ministries programmes, either through direct funding of projects, the provision of technical assistance or opportunities for capacity building.

UNESCO Meetings

Participation and contribution to several virtual meetings inclusive of:

- The global launch of a new guide for policymakers on "Addressing Hate Speech through Education."
 - Capacity building and strengthening of policymakers and planners on gender responsive TVET institutions and programmes in the Caribbean.

 - Contributed to a UNESCO Country Case study on the status of GCED mainstreaming in the Caribbean.

 - Participated in UNESCO's survey on the governmental use of AI as a public good for education.

 - Webinar: More effective use of learning assessment data. How do we get there?

 - Second SIDS Dialogue on "Transformation of Education in the Digital Age"

 - UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) Survey of Formal Education, Bahamas - 2022 Indicators Review and Validation: Global and Thematic SDG 4 indicators.

 - Online Ministerial Meeting on Generative AI in Education
- World Poetry Day
World Poetry Day 2023 Bahamas Celebration under the theme: "Transforming Our World through Poetry: 50 Years of Written Rhythm". Four Bahamian poets were honoured representing the past, present & future:
Patrick Rahming
Dr. Marion Bethel
Tania Pratt
Virginia Miller

Collaborating organizers: The National Commission and MOETVT High School Language Arts Department. C.H. Reeves Junior High School was the host school. Minister Hanna -Martin, Acting Director of Education, Mrs. Dominique McCartney-Russell and Spouse of the Prime Minister, First Lady Ann Marie Davis brought remarks.

Inspiring renditions by students of:

C.H. Reeves Jr. High

L.W. Young Jr. High

S.C. McPherson Jr. High

Anatol Rodgers Sr. High

R.M. Bailey Sr. High

Permanent Secretary Lorraine Symonette-Armbrister congratulated the honourees and presented them with their plaques.

Creation of a National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)

The National Commission submitted a funding request to Secretariat of the UNESCO ICH 2003 Convention in the amount of \$99,363 to create a National Inventory of ICH which establishes our country's intangible cultural heritage assets inclusive of practices, festivals, craft and cooking methodology, knowledge skills, expressions, instruments, objects, and artifacts. The 24-month project is a collaborative effort between the Division of Cultural Affairs and The Bahamas National Commission. A decision on the request will be made at the next meeting of the Evaluation Body slated for July 2023. Selected as a beneficiary country in the UNESCO EU-funded Transcultura programme (ongoing)

Transcultura is a programme jointly undertaken by UNESCO and the European Union (EU) seeking to strengthen the bonds uniting Cuba, the Caribbean and the EU through Culture and Creativity. The Bahamas was selected as one of fifteen beneficiary countries. So far calls have been offered for courses in filmmaking, small business management and hip-hop artists.

The Bahamas National Commission was selected to host Transcultura's "Connecting Caribbean: Broadcasting Diversity, Streaming Inclusion" Workshop on March 30, 2023. Participants were from the 17 countries that are a part of the Transcultura Programme in addition to a representative from the European Union and UNESCO Headquarters.

The panelists were from the following countries:

The Bahamas

Jamaica

Trinidad & Tobago

Cuba

Barbados

Haiti

Dominican Republic

I was the Keynote Speaker during the Opening Ceremony.

International Jazz Day

Every year on April 30th, UNESCO Member States celebrate International Jazz Day bringing together countries and communities worldwide to celebrate jazz and highlight the music's important role in encouraging dialogue, combating discrimination and promoting human dignity. International Jazz Day is an initiative of legendary jazz pianist and composer, Herbie Hancock who serves as a UNESCO Ambassador for Intercultural Dialogue. This year we partnered with the Ministry of Tourism, Investments and Aviation to host the event in historic Pompey Square.

- During our 2023 celebrations, under the theme "Passing the Baton: A Family Affair" aligned with the country's 50th Anniversary of Independence, we honoured Mr. Adrian D'Aguilar (mentor) and Mr. Giveton Gelin (mentee) both world renown jazz artists.
- The 2024 celebration will highlight another outstanding Bahamian, jazz bands in our high schools and University of The Bahamas will be included in the concert and a school component with workshops will be added.

The project "Capacity Building for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in Emergencies in Small Island Developing States in the Pacific and the Caribbean 2022-2025".

- The Bahamas, as a State Party to the 2003 Convention Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, benefits from international co-operation activities including but not limited to the exchange of information and experiences, joint initiatives, and the establishment of mechanisms to assist in efforts to safeguard the Intangible Cultural Heritage.
- The Bahamas was selected as a beneficiary country for the project "Capacity Building for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in Emergencies in Small Island Developing States in the Pacific and the Caribbean", which is funded by the government of Japan, allocates \$100,000 to each selected country for the implementation of the project which is 36 months in duration.
- The project addresses severe threats caused by natural hazards to the transmission and viability of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and aims to integrate ICH safeguarding into disaster risk reduction strategies, helping communities prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies through capacity-building approaches.
- Local partners involved in the implementation of the project along with The Bahamas National Commission for UNESCO will be the Division of Culture, Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) with the Division of Culture being the primary local implementing agency.

- There was a delay in implementation of Phase 1 of the project which includes Town Hall Meetings to inform the communities selected (in New Providence, Grand Bahama and Abaco) about the project and a 5-day Training workshop facilitated by UNESCO Global Facilitator, Dr. David Brown. Phase 1 is now scheduled to be implemented in June 2023.

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Funding was received from UNESCO's Participation Programme for the following activity scheduled for September 21-22, 2023:

Climate Change Guardians Workshop, Promoting Climate Change Awareness in Public School Students.

Many students in The Bahamas are not aware of Climate Change and its effects on the country and the global perspective. As a result of this 2-day workshop it is expected that:

- Development of a Youth network of climate actors in the archipelago of the Bahamas and for the Caribbean SIDS
- Strengthening of the Interface between Youth, local communities and policy developer on climate action
- Promotion of climate action and solutions in schools, local communities for climate adaptation and mitigation.
- Increase the understanding of the interrelation between climate disruption, the declining health of the ocean and biodiversity loss for ocean countries and the Caribbean SIDS in particular stronger dissemination of information and activities development to heighten awareness of Climate Change in students and school administrations.
- Open up the reflection on a better integration of climate and biodiversity education in school curricula in The Bahamas and Caribbean SIDS. The Bahamas will have youths as change agents for sustainability in their communities.

The workshop is being organized by The National Commission in conjunction with the UNESCO Cluster Office for the Caribbean and the Department of Education. Director Newbold of OPM also offered some input. Estimated cost of workshop is \$25,867.15. UNESCO contributed \$21,867.15. The balance of \$4,000 is a New Spending Request.

Madam Speaker, the purpose of the Scholarship and Educational Loan Division (SELD) is to ensure that qualified Bahamian students connect with transformative scholarship opportunities and resources that will enable the pursuit of tertiary level education, resulting in globally competitive citizens who are nation builders.

- Madam Speaker, during the budgetary period, 2022/2023, the government has provided pathways to higher education for 1484 Bahamian recipients (665 new students and 819 existing Students). Out of the 665 new recipients, 225 were Males (34%), and 440 were Females (66%). The government’s contribution for the 1406 students totaled some twelve million one hundred twelve thousand, five hundred sixty-eight dollars (\$12,112,568.00) toward post-secondary educational attainment. The ripple effect of this number touches homes and communities that span almost every inhabited island of this great nation. As a result, the Ministry of Education and Technical and Vocational Training is working toward a “College Ready” nation.

- 2022 AWARDEES BY ISLAND

- Island Count % of Total
- Abaco Count 5 0.75%
- Acklins Count 1 0.15%
- Andros Count 7 1.05%
- Bimini Count 1 0.15%
- Cat Island Count 2 0.30%
- Eleuthera Count 11 1.65%
- Exuma Count 10 1.50%
- Grand Bahama Count 116 17.44%
- Inagua Count 5 0.75%
- Long Island Count 4 0.60%
- New Providence Count 503 75.64%
- Grand Count 665

- The Scholarship Division has also secured thirteen (13) additional Agreements and fostered relationships with international colleges and universities that have all committed to offering tuition waivers and discounts to Bahamian students who have been accepted to attend under the Public-School Scholars Programme and the Organization of American States/Government of The Bahamas Scholarship.

- The additional universities and colleges are as follows:

- New PSSP Universities/Colleges
- Ferrum College
- Hollins College
- Philander Smith College
- Fox Valley Technical College
- Voorhees College
- University of Missouri- St Louis (UMSL)
- Tennessee State University
- Illinois College
- Buena Vista College

- Milkkin University
- New OAS/GOB Universities
- The New School
- The University of Tennessee
- Ana G, Mendez University

- **UNIVERSITY OF THE BAHAMAS**

Not accurate. The change in the VAT treatment relates to the unlikely event the University were to sell the property. The buyer would no longer be able to claim a VAT exemption on that purchase. The University has never sold the real property, so this is only clean up, and standardizes the VAT treatment among statutory entities.

- The University of The Bahamas was a cornerstone of the nation-building project when it was founded in 1975 as the then College of The Bahamas. It remains so to this day. It has been seven years since its transition from College of The Bahamas to University of The Bahamas and new programmes, both at the undergraduate and graduate level have been developed and offered. The University of The Bahamas (“UB”) has now entered a new stage of development, planning for both national and international accreditation, a process that will bring increased opportunities for Bahamians by facilitating student and faculty exchanges, by opening new avenues for research funding and by creating a culture of continuous quality assessment and improvement.
- UB is preparing to submit its application to the National Accreditation and Equivalency Council (NAECOB) for national accreditation and to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) for international accreditation. In order to meet the strict criteria required for accepted candidacy, UB is investing in people, processes, and infrastructure.
- In 2021, we discovered that the legislatively mandated audits for UB had not been completed nor presented to Parliament since 2012. To ensure compliance with the University of The Bahamas Act and as a part of the accreditation process, UB has completed outstanding financial audits for the years from 2012 to 2018 (they will be tabled by me during this Budget debate).
- Three years of financial reviews for the years 2019 to 2021 are in progress and will be completed soon. It was determined to conduct financial reviews rather than audits so that resources could be most productively allocated. I understand that UB is expected to complete its 2022 financial audit by the end of August 2023, and its 2023 audit by mid-November 2023.
- UB is also conducting an in-depth review of its policies and procedures to ensure that these are consistent with expectations of a leading national university, and that they meet international accreditation standards. The work requires updating current policies, developing new policies, producing up-dated employee handbooks, upgrading the human resource infrastructure as well as upskilling, as required, those who serve in that function.
- Other important steps have been or are being taken by UB driven both by the need to comply with international accreditation standards, and by its

responsibility to provide strong programme support to the National Development Plan.

- First, at the university is a rigorous assessment of its academic programmes.
- Second is implementing or upgrading payroll, academic information system and human resources functions to enable more effective and cost-efficient operations and enable data-based decisions to be made.
- Third is an upgrade of its technology platform and to modernize and equip classrooms and labs so that students and faculty are supported to achieve excellence in teaching, learning and research.
- While the accreditation project provides a focus for these actions, all are aimed at delivering on the UB mission 'to advance and expand access to higher education, promote academic freedom, drive national development and build character through teaching, learning, research, scholarship and service'.
- UB has also embarked on other critical initiatives, designed to better serve its students and its mission, two of which I would like to highlight.
- The first one is the UB North Rebuilding project, which includes the purchase of the Kipling Building in downtown Freeport, and the relocation of the campus to the new site. As you know, Hurricane Dorian destroyed the main Northern Bahamas campus building. The University moved to secure rental spaces in the Teachers and Salaried Workers Credit Union building as well as in one of the High Schools in order to continue to offer services to northern Bahamas students.
- By the end of the calendar year 2023, I expect the University to have relocated all northern Bahamas students and staff in one location at the site of the recently purchased Kipling Building in downtown Freeport, Grand Bahama.
- This rebuilding and relocation project is essential to providing appropriate university services to students, faculty, and staff. The relocation and upgrade project will also contribute significantly to growth of the Grand Bahamian economy.
- As part of its rebuilding project, UB North is creating a Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation. It has secured grant funding and formed a partnership with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to assist with the development of the Centre. The mission of the Centre is to improve the capacity of the Bahamian innovation ecosystem for entrepreneurship, digital transformation, and economic diversification. The Centre will enhance entrepreneurship and innovation, create and strengthen innovative ventures, and increase the pool of digital talent. I expect its work to lead to the creation of more and better employment and income opportunities in across The Bahamas. The total cost of this project is one million dollars. On January 18, 2022, the IDB signed an agreement in which it commits \$500,000 to the project while the University commits to a \$500,000 contribution, \$251,400 of which to be cash and \$248,600 to be in-kind funding. The staff has already moved into their new space at the Kipling Building and held their first entrepreneurship event in Freeport in May of 2023.
- The second initiative I wish to highlight is the much-needed expansion of the Tourism and Hospitality Management, and Culinary Arts programmes.

- In May 2023, the University approved a new Bachelor of Arts degree in Tourism and Hospitality Management. In addition, I am advised that the university expects to commence expanding its Culinary Arts programme from Associate to Bachelor's degree and to begin to offer this new programme by September 2024.
- UB also plans to offer four to six-month-long Certificate programmes in Tourism and Hospitality, and in Culinary Arts. These Certificate courses will target Bahamians currently employed in the Tourism and Hospitality industry who seek additional formal training as part their career advancement plans. Since Certificate programmes are not full-time degree programmes, students enrolled in such programmes are not eligible for scholarships under the Bahamas Government Tertiary Grant Program. Given my government's commitment to support the career aspirations of all Bahamians, I am pleased to advise that \$1,230,630 has been allocated to support this group of students.
- I expect this expansion of the Tourism and Hospitality Management and Culinary Arts education to serve the needs of our tourism and hospitality industry. It represents my government's commitment to invest in our most important asset, our people and will expand our capacity to provide well-trained human resources at the entry level in the industry, and to offer lifelong learning opportunities for those currently employed in the industry. Research efforts focused on supporting national development and protecting our natural resources are key components of the University's mission and the number of such efforts is increasing. For example, the University is collaborating with government and with local and international partners to carry out research aimed at preventing the spread of Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease – a serious disease that is spreading rapidly and devastating our coral reefs, posing a major threat to our fishing industry.
- UB can claim twenty alumni among sitting Parliamentarians. They know, as I hope most of you also know, what I am pleased to confirm: UB offers accessible and high-quality higher education. Education this Government is proud to support.

The Ministry of Education and Technical and Vocational Training recommits to ensuring that we will do all that is within our power to ensure that all children in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas are afforded the opportunity to receive an education which will allow them to become self-actualized, productive citizens, contributing to the growth and development of our country.

We are guided by the Department of Education's Sector Plan which encompasses the full context of this presentation

The Planning and Development along with key stakeholders at the policy, administrative and operational levels of the Education Sector will develop the Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2023-2027. The development will be based on findings of the Factors Impacting Learning, Digital Consultation on the Implementation of the Curriculum, Digital Consultation on Discipline and the Learning Assessment conducted by Renaissance, the targets of the Sustainable Development Goal 4, obligations to international treaties

and conventions, and the Governments Blueprint for Change. The guiding principles are based on the commitment to Access, Equity and Quality. The plan will be student centered, focused on student learning outcomes but more than this intended to ensure the education and training of the Bahamian labour force, adequately equipping the products of our Education System to meet the national development needs of The Bahamas.

EDUCATION GOALS (Short Term ST, Medium Term MT, Long Term LT):

Curriculum

1. Engage education officers: there is a need for subject matter experts in key areas. ST
2. Review all curriculum to strengthen program alignment with students' interests, abilities and needs. MT
3. Integrate arts in the core subjects to enhance teaching and learning for a diverse student population. Arts integration maximizes quality social interactions, critical thinking, experiential (active) learning and reflective practice through differentiated instruction strategies. MT
4. Produce an indigenous repository to support teaching and learning. MT
5. Expand and introduce new technical and vocational offerings in junior and senior high. The junior high cluster program will allow greater access to technical and vocational training subjects. LT

Academic Intervention

1. Provide pull-out intervention sessions for students needing major intervention in Literacy and Numeracy. ST
2. Use an integrated learning system to support customized, self-paced instruction in literacy and numeracy. ST/MT
3. Encourage student attendance in the extended learning summer intervention program. ST
4. Re-establish the uninterrupted sustained silent reading program. ST
5. Provide all teachers with monthly literacy and numeracy training strategies. ST/MT
6. Reduce the curriculum content in the lower primary grades, focusing on foundational skills in literacy and numeracy. MT/LT
7. Outfit schools with high interest books to promote reading comprehension. ST

Special Education and Services

1. Create an inclusive path to obtaining a Bahamas High School Diploma. MT/LT
2. Engage special education teachers and teacher's aides. MT
3. Conduct training for teachers and other education and paraprofessionals. ST/MT
4. Engage school psychologists, audiologists, speech pathologists and occupational therapists in public private partnership as needed. LT
5. Integrate self-contained units in all schools. LT
6. Acquire instructional resources. MT/LT

Technical and Vocational Education and Training

1. Create standards and skills certifications for CTE programmes. MT/LT
2. Expand and introduce new technical and vocational offerings in senior high. MT/LT
3. Expand the cluster programs in junior high. MT/LT

Behavior Modification/Management

1. Revise the Safe Schools Manual to include restorative practices. MT
2. Establish co-curricular, extra-curricular and intervention programs. MT
3. Conduct training for all teachers in classroom management techniques. ST/MT
4. Conduct training for teachers in differentiated instruction. ST/MT
5. Conduct student development seminars: conflict resolution strategies, coping skills, health and wellness, etc. ST/MT
6. Engage Guidance Counsellors.

Tertiary Education

1. Encourage students who have not obtained a BHSD to participate in BTVIs Smart Start programme. ST/MT
2. Promote the expansion of the AP programme to allow more students to access university courses. MT/LT

Teacher Recruitment and Retention

1. Expand the Future Teachers Programme (FTP) through incentivizing. MT
2. Continue to provide scholarships to deserving students. MT
3. Re-establish the teacher recruitment committee to ensure the appointment of quality teachers. ST
4. Compile a list of supply (retired) teachers. ST
5. Rehire proficient retired teachers on short term contracts. MT/LT
6. Optimize the mentoring program to ensure all new and developing teachers are supported. MT
7. Affirm teachers through staff appreciation ceremonies. ST/MT

Pre-Primary

1. Provide universal pre-primary education for all three- and four-year-olds. LT
2. Expand offerings utilizing PPP opportunities. ST/MT
3. Monitor for quality assurance. ST

Technology and Innovation

1. Provide for permeable education through digital instructional technologies to support a diverse student population.
2. Future proof the potential workforce through tiered training in ICTs utilizing the cluster framework.

Research and Development

1. Provide training for planning officers in quantitative and qualitative research.
2. Promote action research among practitioners.

3. Provide opportunities for researchers to present their studies and findings.
4. Improve capacity through the procurement of resources.

Sports Development

1. Establish a development program for all sporting disciplines.
2. Identify and track all athletes from pre-primary to young adult.
3. Provide training for all athletes.
4. Provide industry-approved training and certifications for all coaches.
5. Establish a scholarship program for athletes.

Professional Development

1. Capacity Building for all (teachers, administrators, education officers) through digital and face to face short term courses. ST/MT
2. Rebrand the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) to include practical applications for all substantive and aspiring administrators. MT

National Pride

1. Re-establish the local government student councils in all high schools. ST
 2. Review and revise the civics curriculum. MT
 3. Produce a Bahamian history text. ST
- Flags purchased
4. Ensure national symbols and distinguished Bahamians are displayed in all classrooms and main offices.
 5. Ensure all schools have and hoist the National Flag every day.
 6. Ensure the school's patron and other distinguished Bahamians are celebrated.

Parental Involvement

1. Establish a Parenting Unit. MT
2. Meet with PTA Presidents quarterly. ST
3. Provide training on various topics to support learning. ST/MT
4. Provide counselling services for parents. ST
5. Offer self-help courses. MT

School Plant Management

1. Map out all satellite offices and education buildings. MT
2. Develop and implement a comprehensive plan for the construction, repair and renovation of all schools and facilities. MT
3. Conduct hazard mapping of all schools and education facilities. ST/MT
4. Re-establish preventative maintenance for all facilities. MT/LT

Security

1. Engage security officers on all campuses. MT
2. Provide training for all security officers. ST/MT
3. Increase surveillance on all campuses and satellite offices. LT

Madam Speaker, the delivery of education in any national population is at best a challenging exercise, it is not an exact science and the effectiveness of strategies are often mitigated by external factors , it is critical that there is an unrelenting monitoring, implementation of research based strategies, that results are measured and the necessary modifications made, At the core of the enterprise is the future of our country – they are invaluable and we must work tirelessly to ensure they succeed no matter who they are or where they come from – every child counts and we will fight for their future.

The Minister of State and I have visited scores of schools – perhaps close to 100 all over the country and throughout New Providence– we have met virtually with thousands of teachers and hundreds of administrators, and we have met with parents nationwide.

I believe and I am supremely optimistic that this is a new day in education, and I pray God's guidance and strength and blessings and protection over the stakeholders in this enterprise so that they are able to continue in strength to do the necessary work for our nation's future.

We can and must build this nation with our own hands.