

BAHAMIAN YOUTH

The Untapped Resource

by

The Coalition for Education Reform

Bahamas Chamber of Commerce
Bahamas Employers Confederation
National Congress of Trade Unions
Bahamas Hotel Association
Bahamas Hotel Catering & Allied Workers Union
Bahamas Hotel Employers Association
Nassau Tourism Development Board

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The Coalition for Education Reform is a group of business, professional and labour associations that are concerned about the state of education in the Bahamas. A listing of its members is on the back cover.

The Coalition commissioned this Report that examines the factual basis for their concern and proposes an education reform program which includes fourteen strategies that to a large degree are based on programs already in place.

This Report is a logical follow-up to a statement on education contained in the Tourism Taskforce Report on Trade Liberalization of April 2003. That Report was presented to the Trade Commission and education policy was discussed at that meeting.

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1 The Challenge

Because of its present and anticipated Bahamian manpower needs, the tourism industry has a heightened interest in the quantity and quality of Bahamian job applicants. This is not just a public expression of an immediate business need.

In this connection this Report will demonstrate that the country has a major learning challenge. We are talking about the great **Untapped Resource**. It is the difference between -

- “What Is” and “What Could Be”
- Acceptable academic achievement and unacceptable academic achievement
- An adequate supply of quality job candidates rather than an inadequate supply
- A people that are an active, rather than a passive ingredient in the growth process

This report will define this **Untapped Resource** with concrete data. But tapping this resource is a huge project that will require an unprecedented national consensus and will.

This idea is not new. The Ministry of Education is aware of this potential, has programs in place and is working on several key initiatives to improve academic performance. Furthermore, it is actively negotiating with the Inter-American Development Bank for the funding of specific programs.

Four anecdotes taken from real life are relevant.

1. A recent high school graduate in a beginning class at the Bahamas Technical & Vocational Institute answered “22” to the question “What does 2 times 2 equal?” The next question “What does 7 times 7 equal?” was answered “14”.
2. A Bahamian executive makes it a practice to interview all job candidates in his departments; and during each interview he always leaves the

office and asks the candidate to write a brief paragraph that includes his name and a description of his education and/or work experience. Invariably the applicant cannot write a paragraph with clear sentences, correctly arranged and with minimal spelling errors.

3. The University of the West Indies (UWI) offers a degree in hotel management at the Tourism Training Center that is roughly equivalent to the 4-year degree offered at Cornell University. There are 110 juniors and seniors in the program; but only three are Bahamians while the rest are from other Caribbean countries.
4. The Ministry of Education did a survey of high school graduates between 1994 and 2002 to determine their post graduation destinations. It showed that in 1994 100 graduates entered the Bahamas Hotel Training College, a vocational institute with practical courses. It was considered by some U.S. colleges as the equivalent to a U.S. 2-year associate degree program. The Training College was taken over by College of the Bahamas on August 1, 2000 and the number of students entering the program dropped from 58 in 1999 to 17 in 2000 and 8 in 2002.

The first two anecdotes deal with the proficiency of Bahamian job seekers in math and English. Some researchers define these skills as functional literacy - “something that can be acquired through education and training.”¹ This Report will deal primarily with these basics.

The last two anecdotes deal with the “engagement” of the Department of Education, the College of the Bahamas, UWI and the public with tourism, the country’s principal industry. These anecdotes suggest a severe “disconnect.” This is a major issue and is being addressed elsewhere.

BGCSE Examinations 2004 Grades "A" thru "U"

All Exams

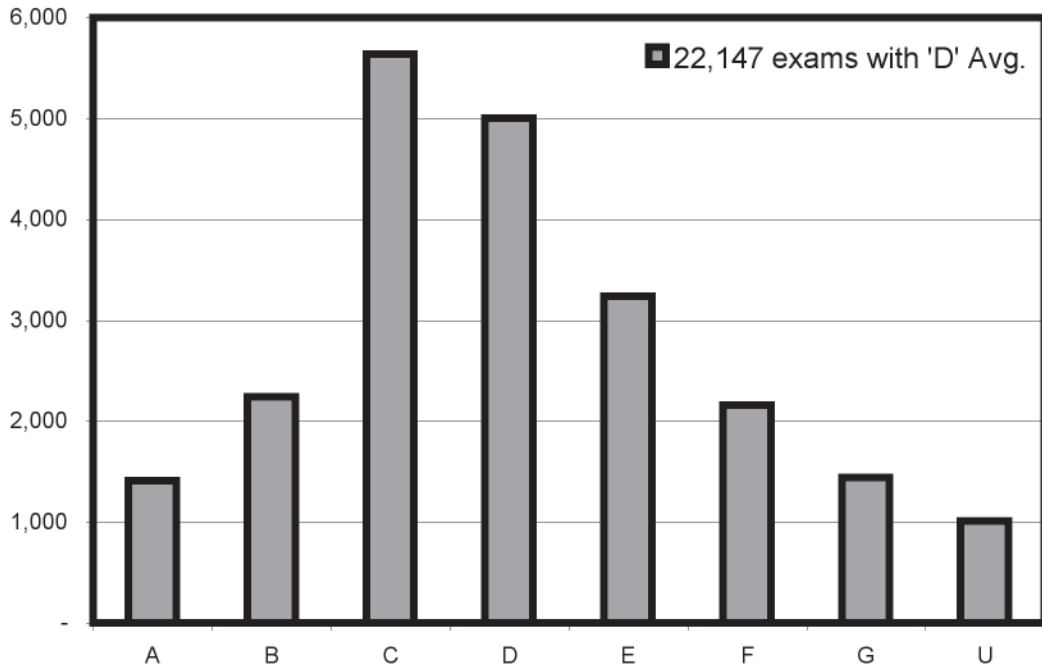


Figure 1

Distribution of Grades within each category Grades "A" thru "U"

% of Total

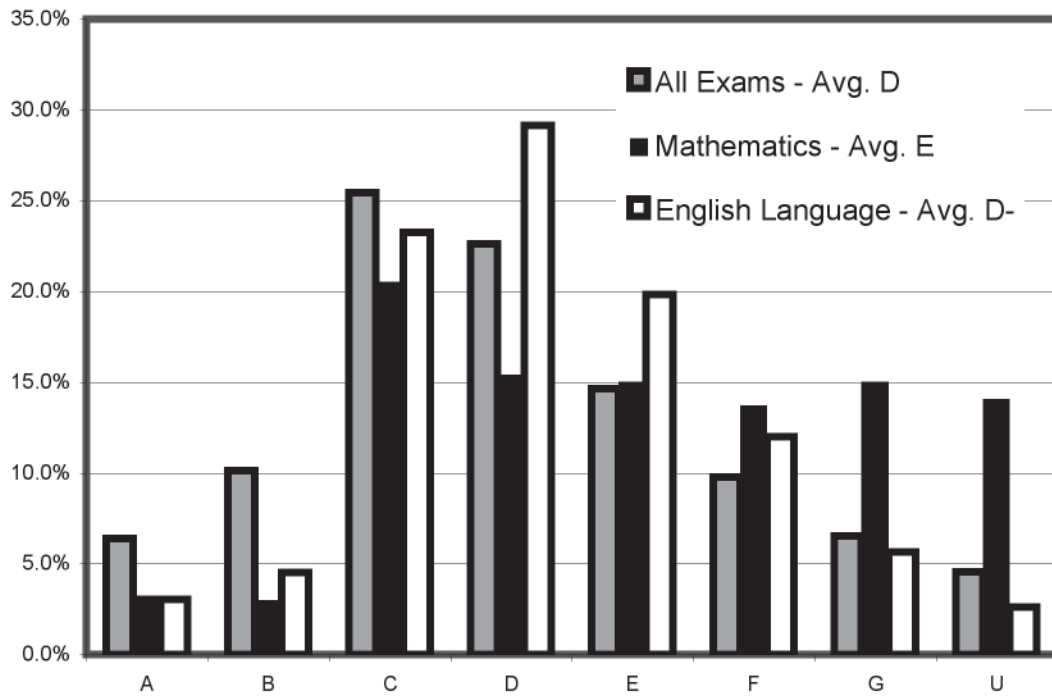


Figure 2

2 The Learning Gaps

The documents that clearly define the challenge are the annual high school qualification examinations in 26 subjects taken for the Bahamas General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE).² They determine what students “know, understand and can do after completing three years of high school study.” The system appears to be well-crafted and tailored to the Bahamas; and it is consistent with the Cambridge Syndicate.

In 2004 5,741 students took 22,147 exams and earned a “D” on an eight point grading scale that ranges from “A” to “U”. This data is shown in Figure 1 and as a table in Appendix A.

The heights of the columns “trace” a curve...a graphic picture of Bahamian academic achievement. As with almost any human trait, most people are bunched in the middle, with the number of people who are either talented or untalented diminishing rapidly as one moves left in the direction of greater talent or to the right in the direction of less talent. In this case the peak is a Grade “C” with the greatest number of exams extending to the right of the peak rather than to the left of it. The graph shows the greatest number of students taking the exams tend to be less talented.³

The Math exam was written in the greatest numbers; 4,367 students earned a Mean Grade of E.

This data is shown in Figure 2; however, the scores for each grade are shown as a percent of the exams written rather than the number written.

This graph starts with the same data for “All Exams” that is in the top graph but that data is now expressed as a percent of the total number of exams taken. Math data is added; and the math distribution, the tendency to more or less talent, is more easily compared to the “All Exams” results.

In fact, 14% got a “U”. The previously mentioned $2 \times 2 = 22$ anecdote merits a “U” grade defined as “no positive achievement with respect to the requirements set in the syllabus.” The student in the anecdote did not know the rules of multiplication that are considered as an elementary school Grade 3 standard in many school systems.

In the English Language exam 4,281 students earned an average mean grade of D-. In Figure 2, one notes that the peak grade is a D. Bahamian students show a greater talent for English than Math. Still the quality of writing of the job applicants in the second anecdote suggests an “E” grade.

This data substantiates the conclusion that the state of Bahamian education is “unacceptable.” This is reality; these are the brutal facts, and “you absolutely cannot make a series of good decisions without first confronting the brutal facts.”⁴

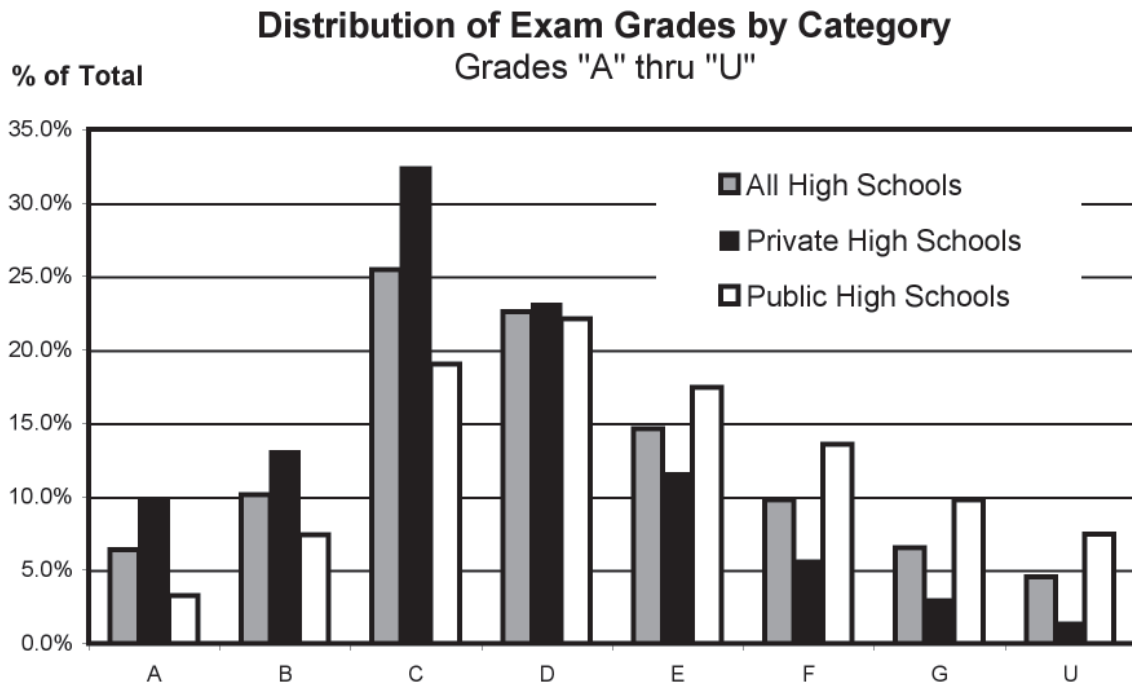


Figure 3

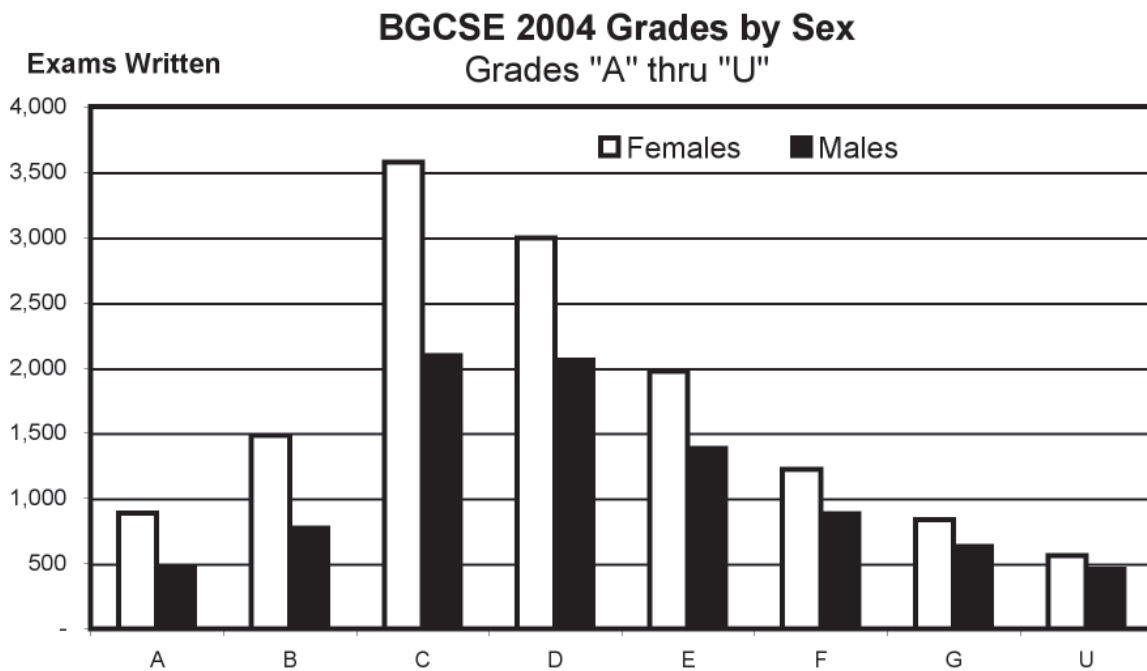


Figure 4

The Three Gaps

The BGCSE Report 2004 can take the task of identifying the **Untapped Resource**, the difference between “What Is” and “What Could Be”, one step further. It can identify three distinct learning gaps –

The High School Performance Gap

The BGCSE Report states “Were it not for the Private schools and a few Public High schools in the Family Islands, the Mean Grade for the country would have been an astounding E [rather than D]. This [level of academic achievement] is totally unacceptable.”⁵

These facts are shown in Figure 3. The data for “All Exams” and the number of exams written by students in Public and Private High Schools are shown as percents of their totals.

Furthermore, the Mean Grade for the Public High Schools on New Providence was F+ while the Mean Grade for the Private High Schools on New Providence was D+. Both the absolute levels and the gap between the two are truly disturbing.

The Male Achievement Gap

There is a profound male academic performance gap.

- Females wrote 13,350 exams while males wrote 8,745 and
- 2,368 females got As and Bs on the exams written while 1,240 males got As and Bs - almost half.

This difference was due both to the higher grades earned by females and a greater number of females writing the exams. See Figure 4.

The College Preparation Gap

There is also a serious lack of graduates prepared to enter college. The formal minimum requirement for matriculation into higher education is five exams with a minimum C grade average.

In 2004 5,741 students wrote exams but only 718 or 12.5% earned a minimum C grade average in five subjects. The Testing Center reports that it provided 1,600 transcripts on the 2004 exams for students seeking college entry. This number appears low al-

though directly comparable data is not available. One can look at actual college entry data. Many colleges both in the Bahamas and the U.S. accept students who do not meet the minimum academic requirement. This is the so-called “open enrollment” plan.

A 2002 Ministry of Education survey showed that 940 students from the class of 2002 entered college in the Bahamas and abroad. This is 34.8% of all responders to the survey. College entry rates in the U.S. are reported in one survey to be 76.5% - slightly more than two times the Bahamian level.⁶

Conclusion

This data identifies the **Untapped Resource**, the gap between “What is” and “What could be”; clearly the Bahamas has room for significant improvement. It can –

- Close the male/female academic achievement gap.
- Shift significantly its BGCSE test scores to the left to the more talented end of the scale, and
- Double the number of college eligible high school graduates.

Furthermore, this would change the status quo since up to now there has been virtually no improvement in the average Mean Grade since the system started in 1993. It was a D- from 1993 to 2001 and a D from 2002 to 2004.

The Annual Report

The Education Act requires the Minister of Education to make an annual report to Parliament on “the work of his Ministry and the state of education generally.”⁷

The 1994/1995 Report was the last one presented. In that Report, 19-pages of text discussed organization, staff and spending, the subjects with the greatest political import.

In contrast, the test results for a portion of the 1995 BGCSE exams were shown in three Annexes. Not shown were the overall mean grade for all exams written and the grades for the 25 subjects; nor could

the mean grades be calculated from the data included in the Annexes.

Also the overall mean grade of D- was not mentioned in the text. One sentence on page 23 stated –

“Although a significant number of students show a notable understanding of the material needed to pass the exams, more research is needed in the development of a scheme to assist those who exhibit lack of knowledge of the relevant subject matter.”⁸

This was not a candid description of “the state of education”; and regrettably there has not been an Annual Report since then.

Economic Implications

A general low level of academic achievement has individual, national and international consequences.

A recent study of adult literacy at Dublin’s University College is an example of recent work. It concludes that –

“For the young adult functional literacy plays a vitally important role in the determination of earnings.”⁹

Another study in the United Kingdom shows that–

The great increase in investment in tertiary education since the 1960s in the UK produced an earnings premium to the individual of 10% for each year of additional education.¹⁰

A Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, addressing the test results in math and science for U.S. students, contends that –

With a higher level of academic achievement, “the U.S. economy could realize a half of 1 percent boost in its annual growth rate. Half of 1 percent sounds

like a small difference, but it is in fact a very large number.” Over a 20-year period “the growth dividend could cover all of our national [kindergarten to twelfth grade] expenditures by 2040.”

And there are international consequences since countries vary greatly in their levels of achievement and logically this differential contributes to the significant income disparities that exist between countries.

To get a feel for the international academic achievements differentials, refer to the table “Math Scores of Eighth-Grade Students TIMSS 2003 report” that appears in Appendix B*.

Clearly a low level of learning adversely affects labor-productivity; and this is one element that contributes to higher operating costs. In the case of the Bahamas, high-operating costs cause a loss of international competitiveness as was pointed out in the Tourism Taskforce Report of April 2003.

Based on his day-in and day-out employment experience...

- The Bahamian businessman cannot help but agree with the BGCSE Report that the overall level of academic achievement of high school graduates is “totally unacceptable.”
- He cannot help but worry about a world that is becoming ever more “knowledge driven.” Improvements in productivity can come with the adoption of new technologies that require increased worker and managerial skills; and survival may be possible only by exploiting new service industries requiring greater job skills.

In discussing the BGCSE Reports and the Untapped Resource one can only conclude that something significant must be done with the Bahamian educational system.

* TIMSS stands for “Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study”, a report that is published by the National Center for Educational Standards, an organization funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

3 Fourteen Strategies

The Ministry of Education has clearly met a major objective of Majority Rule and the Education Act...it has made substantial investments in reforming universal public education. In this regard the Bahamas stands well ahead of many less developed countries.

Yes, the Education Department has a good testing system; but the test scores suggest significant deficiencies. There is the incredible learning gap, the great **Untapped Resource**, the difference between “What Is” and “What could be.”

But the country is not helpless in determining its own destiny. There are effective strategies that can be adopted whereby the Bahamas can tap that resource; but, when taken together, they are both evolutionary and revolutionary.

Order & Civility

A critical road block to progress is the absence of order and civility in the classroom. The recent outbreaks of violence and the related teacher protests are vivid testimony of this situation.

This barrier to learning is particularly acute in the Public Schools. The Education Act seems to provide the legal basis to establish order and civility in the classroom. It requires –

- The Minister, “as resources permit”, to provide appropriate training and education for all children from ages 5 to 16 “unless [the child] is incapable of benefiting from the types of education and instruction available,”
- Parents “to cause [their children] to receive full-time education,” and
- Public Officers to enforce the provisions for compulsory attendance. These officials follow the school attendance orders that provide for three levels of notices and graduated fines that

end at the third level with imprisonment for parents as an option.

These provisions seem to provide the Department of Education with an adequate legal basis for assuring order and civility. But they do not.

They do not because the Act also provides for School Standing Orders...the regulations that define, among other things, the discipline, punishment and suspension for students who presumably are not capable of benefiting from the education offered. These Orders are spelled out in a Manual for Administrators and Teachers.

The manual is virtually a road map of policies and expectations that could produce a perfect school system. For instance, it states that students are expected to “Accept responsibility for their own behaviour” and “Maintain high academic standards.” All parents are expected to “Become actively involved in the school community” and “Control and correct the behaviour of their children.”¹¹ But these are “expectations” and not responsibilities with consequences.

The Manual describes four levels of unacceptable behaviour that may lead to suspension from class and expulsion from school. Suspension is removal of the student from regular classroom activities and isolation in a closely supervised environment.

Schools, however, cannot expel; they can only recommend expulsion. Only the Minister of Education can expel; but he can only do so in cases where the student is sixteen years or older. Students between five and sixteen “who commit expellable offenses may be placed in an Alternate Education Programme.” These students are given an In-School Suspension rather than expulsion. The program that accommodates these students in Nassau and Grand Bahamas is also known as program SURE. Please see the text box.

AEP or Program SURE: An Undernourished Success?

The Alternative Education Program or Program SURE (a.k.a. Success Ultimately Reassures Everyone) started in Nassau in February 1992 and in Grand Bahama in March 1993 for male students with chronic disciplinary problems. These students are emotionally detached from school and unable to function in the traditional school setting. They tend to disruptive and/or violent behavior and/or commit “expellable” but not criminal offenses warranting arrest.

The Nassau Program occupies a school complex on Gladstone Road and has a capacity for 40 students. It is a four and one-half month program designed to promote a positive self-image and discipline and develop problem solving and conflict resolution skills. Students are referred to the Program by the Department of Education teachers; and the program focuses on functional literacy, vocational training, athletics and counseling.

Individual and group counseling are very important yet the program has not been able to recruit and retain two full-time male counselors, and for periods of time it has operated without any counselors or with only a part-time counselor.

Teachers who transfer to the school receive a \$300.00 per year salary premium that is an insufficient inducement to attract and retain the “optimal” all male teaching staff.

The program requires parental and guardian presence in student/parent/counselor reviews at three points in the program. These sessions are important for success; yet to date it has been unable to reach and involve male parents or guardians.

Overall the Program appears successful insofar as the limited data available shows a relatively high “return to school” record. But this raises the serious issue, “Is the program undernourished?”

As a start the effectiveness of the program should be more thoroughly documented. If the program is successful, shouldn’t the capacity be increased to 80 or 120 students? If higher pay will attract the male teachers and counselors necessary for success, why not pay more? One would expect that good management would find a way.

So...the situation is this. The Education Act levies fines and imprisonment on parents who do not get their children to school; but neither the Act nor the Orders have comparable penalties for parents with children whose bad behaviour destroys learning in the classroom.

Strategy #1 – Responsibilities

The mandate for every parent and child must change from “Being in school for 12-years” to “Being there and living a code of behavior that is conducive to learning.”

The responsibilities of teachers, parents and stu-

dents must be clear; and non-compliance must have real consequences. Penalties for parents similar to those associated with the compulsory school attendance would be an appropriate place to start.

Good Governance

A second major barrier to improving the education system is governance. As indicated the Education Act requires an Annual Report to Parliament on “the state of education”; and for the last decade the Government has not used this formal requirement as an opportunity to focus parliamentary and public attention on this critical national issue.

Strategy #2 – Annual Report

The Annual Report of the Minister of Education to Parliament should contain a meaningful discussion of the output of the system, the students, and its most meaningful inputs, teachers and principals.

With respect to students the State of Education message should include not just the BGCSE exam results but also the Bahamas Junior Certificate (BJC), the Grade Level Assessment Test (GLAT), the Extended Learning Program (ELP) and the Alternative Education Program (AEP).^{*} These are all tests and remedial programs of the Department. Furthermore, the Report should present data on drop-out rates, social promotion and unexcused absences.

In short, the Annual Report should be a comprehensive presentation on “the state of education” that includes measurable benchmarks that permit the country to measure progress.

Ultimately the Annual Reports of the Government should also include a comparable report on teachers and administrators.

Strategy #3 – TIMSS

The Grade Level Assessment Test should be redesigned and included in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) reporting system (See Appendix B). In this way the Bahamas would measure its progress against other countries.

Strategy #4 – Line Responsibilities

Another governance problem is that the line executives in the Department of Education, the district managers and principals, have very limited powers. Management responsibilities must be decentralized.

Now district managers and principals do not control their approved budgets so they cannot allocate resources to optimize teacher and student perfor-

mance. They cannot provide a financial reward for good teaching. They do not hire, fire or discipline teachers since a teacher is defined as a “public servant” and subject to the provisions of the Constitution.

Chapter VIII of the Constitution gives the power to hire, fire and discipline public servants to the Public Service Commission whose members are “appointed by the Governor General acting on the recommendations of the Prime Minister after consultation with the Leader of the Opposition.” The Constitution also created a Public Service Board of Appeal whereby a separated or disciplined public servant may appeal any decision by the Governor General and the Public Service Commission.

The Regulations of the Public Service Commission provide the supporting procedures to the system “outlined” in the Constitution.

The net effect is a process so involved in procedures, so time consuming and so politically charged that it is rarely used. In effect, it buttresses the belief that “Government employment is lifetime employment.”

One can easily conclude that principals cannot do anything significant when it comes to managing their schools. They can cause things to happen often only on the weight of their presence and personality and not on the basis of the law or regulations. In private industry this system would be against all norms of good management and would be a prescription for bankruptcy.

Successful schools in poor neighborhoods, such as the Knowledge Is Power Program schools in the U.S. described in Appendix C, have a completely different modus operandi. More will be said about this in connection with the All Male Laboratory School proposal.

^{*} The BJC is a test of academic achievement given to ninth graders.

The GLAT test is given to 3rd, 5th and 8th graders to both measure academic achievement and to identify “Child at Risk” issues with specific students.

The ELP is a one-month half-day summer remedial reading and math program for students who fail.

AEP is a separate school for students of less than 16 years of age who have committed offenses warranting expulsion.

Good Parenting

The single parent female-headed family became the emerging family structure in the 1970s; and it poses significant risks for children and the nation.

A national effort is needed. Parents and potential parents need to know what Good Parenting is, and likewise, which risks are presented to the children of the single parent female-headed family.

Such children are “more likely to have problems in school, to drop out of school prematurely, to become teen mothers, and to have trouble finding a steady job as compared with children who grow up with both parents.” Studies in the U.S. show that the income loss associated with divorce accounts “for about half of the disadvantages associated with living in a single-parent family, and too little supervision and parental involvement and too much residential mobility account for most of the remaining disadvantage.”¹²

We cannot turn the world back 35-years; but the knowledge of what is the social reality of today and what constitutes **Good Parenting** are logical first steps for sound remedial efforts.

Strategy #5 – Child Support

There must be a strong national message that all nonresident fathers are expected to support their children. The Government should assure that all children of nonresident fathers will have a child support award that is adequate, is indexed to the father’s income and is paid in a timely fashion.

“Enforcing child support will not only increase the income of single mothers, it will send a strong message to men”...“if you father a child, then you must assume an 18-year financial commitment.”

Given the prevalence of “sweet hearting” in Bahamian society, implementing this policy will require a national consensus and an unremitting political will.

Strategy #6 – Promoting Good Parenting

Churches and community service organizations should provide mechanisms to –

- a) Reinforce parents’ willingness and ability to foster their children’s intellectual and moral development, and
- b) Build links between children and other adults in the community who can serve as role models and sources of information as well as provide emotional support.”¹³

Strategy #7 – Longer School Hours

Schools should extend their hours so that children’s after school time is organized. This can be used as teaching time and/or time for extracurricular activities and the opportunity to participate in apprenticeship programs.

Strategy #8 – Summer School

The Extended Learning Program of the Department of Education is a remedial learning program that has been in operation for 3 years. It is a 4-week half-day summer program for 3rd, 5th and 8th grade students who are two grade levels behind their class. It concentrates on reading and math and is voluntary for the student.

At the present time this program is a half-way measure. The key design issue has not been program content but –

- Whether attendance will be mandatory and
- Whether failure to pass will cause the student to repeat the failed grade.

Attendance should be mandatory and failure to pass should cause the student to repeat the failed grade.

Strategy #9 – Social Promotion

But to be successful the Extended Learning Program would have to be tripled to cover all the intermediate grades so that every student who fails would have to attend. No one should be allowed to fall two grade levels behind.

This would eliminate social promotion,

“The practice of allowing students who have failed to meet performance standards to pass on to the next grade with their peers instead of completing or satisfying the requirements...”

“Neither social promotion nor holding back without help is a successful strategy”¹⁴

Strategy #10– Parent Seminars

In addition, the Extended Learning Program should be modified to include the mandatory participation of parents in a seminar on parenting.

Good Teaching

Public School teaching too often is an unrewarding experience.

Everyone agrees that good teachers make an enormous difference in getting students to master demanding subject matter. It is far easier to get a student to feel good about learning “watered-down” science and math. Smart, articulate, eager and hard working people are needed to nurture disadvantaged youth to reach higher academic expectations.

But getting such teachers to work in an atmosphere lacking order, civility and respect and without adequate “combat pay” is too much to expect.¹⁵

Furthermore, it is discouraging to work within a teacher compensation system based solely on seniority and the number of teacher training courses taken. Degrees in core subjects like math, for instance, are not on a par with teacher training as far as compensation. For instance, a teacher with a Master’s Degree in Education has a higher salary than a teacher that has the far more difficult master’s degree in math even though qualified math teachers are in short supply.

In addition, the annual performance review rates a teacher on a scale of one to five. The problem is that virtually all teachers receive a four rating described as “Above Average” or Five described as “Outstanding.”

The problem is teacher compensation is not connected with either the Department’s needs in specific subject areas or with student academic achievement, the output of the system.

Strategy #11 – Teacher Evaluation & Compensation

Specifically, the generally favorable performance reviews of teachers and administrators are completely at odds with the generally poor performance of students as measured by the BGCSE and GLAT exam scores.

This is a poor system and the Department must develop a new one. This is a daunting task because authoritative research on “good teaching” is sparse and there is an absence of time-tested programs. Creating a new Teacher Evaluation and Compensation Plan means breaking new ground. But this can be done if the country has the national will.

The bottom line is that the country must upgrade its teaching corps if it is to produce a greater number of educated young adults...if it is to tap the ultimate **Untapped Resource**

Strategy #12 - The All Male Laboratory School

The male education gap discussed in Chapter 2 is so important to the nation that it warrants a drastic and innovative solution. The proposed revolutionary solution is the creation of an all male Laboratory School based on Knowledge Is Power Program principles (see Appendix C). It will engage males in education and begin reducing the Male Achievement Gap.

It should be a Lab School that concentrates on the basics yet employs advanced computer technologies as appropriate. It should be an exciting experiment to demonstrate how good Bahamian males can be. It should embrace the Five Pillars and the teacher, parent and student contracts of the KIP Program.

Also it needs the KIP Program’s application of the “Broken Window Theory” to school.

“To ignore one piece of trash on the floor...one shirt improperly tucked in, one fight between kids, one bit of foul language, would send a disastrous no-one cares message. And thus...the staff responds to every sign of disorder - however, slight.”

The Broken Window Theory

This theory was developed 20 years ago by a researcher in crime and urban decay to explain why some buildings and neighborhoods in cities decay while others do not. The Theory has been successfully applied to crime prevention and even to computer programming. In the latter instance, physicists had observed that in the universe disorder in a system grows naturally. "When disorder increases in software, programmers call it software rot...a natural tendency to systemic disorder when a bad design, wrong decision or poor code is left un-repaired."

Source: "Software Entropy", www.pragmaticprogrammer.com.

This policy produces a learning environment in which high academic expectations are realized. (Refer to Appendix C.)

While formally within the Department of Education, the proposed school somehow must free itself of the organizational restraints that bedevil good teaching in the present system. It must operate like a private school dedicated to academic excellence. The Department of Education must expand its educational horizons and expertise if it is going to raise the performance of all its schools.

The implementation plan should be progressive to assure success. It should start with the 5th grade and add two grades each year so that within 6 years the school would have both primary and secondary programs.

An all female laboratory school should be added to the system as soon as feasible after the all male school is started

Good Business

Strategy #13 – Constructive Partnering

There are many ways that business and business executives can play a supportive role in the improvement of education.

- Business can give well-directed money in ways that make a long-lasting difference in student achievement rather than be merely public relations gestures.
- Business can provide student internships.
- Businessmen can advocate stronger education policies.

- Businessmen can serve on advisory committees to help shape better systems and curriculum.

Good Labour

Strategy #14 – Support Change

The mission of all labour union leadership is to get the best package of wages and working conditions for its members. It gets this not only by hard-bargaining in contract negotiations but also by securing and maintaining its political base within the union and in Government. This is true of the Teachers Union.

However, the Union must support education reform if such reform is to succeed...given its organizational and political ability to influence change if it so chooses.

For instance, the objective of equal pay for equal work is now interpreted as pay based on seniority and teacher training courses taken. Changing this will create problems. Also hiring foreign teachers in order to get an adequate number of superior teacher candidates raises the Bahamianization issue. The proposed strategies create managerial challenges for the Union leadership.

Ultimate Objectives

For the country these fourteen strategies are nothing less than a revolution, a revolution that could have an economic impact equal to the year-around tourism and off-shore banking initiatives of the 1950s.

The objective of the revolution is to duplicate the success of Ireland. That success had two important dimensions, human and fiscal.

A major element was Ireland's investment in its people that began in 1960. "When the Irish Development Authority began its operations to attract foreign investment in 1970, it emphasized tax concessions and financial inducements. As a result of its investment in education their public relations thrust in 1983 took a radically different look and tone. It featured Ireland's educated youth and one-liners like – 'Ireland – Home of the Young Europeans' ... 'Hire them, before they hire you.'"

Success seemed realized...but, in fact, it was not. While the country was investing in education, attracting foreign investment, "brilliantly" using all the development financing made available by the European Union, it "became hooked on annual increases in Government employment financed by higher taxes and debt."

In January 1987 Ireland had a financial crisis that was so bad that it faced the prospect of direct intervention by the IMF in the financial affairs of the country. The national response was a major political realignment and a cut back in all government

expenditures with education suffering the least. Business confidence was restored, investment and GDP grew; and a fiscal surplus was created...a process described as an "expansionary fiscal contraction."

The Economist magazine annually ran feature supplements on Ireland. The January 1987 issue had "the picture of a poverty-stricken family standing on a Dublin bridge under the caption 'In Hock, Out of Work.'"

One year later the caption read "Poorest of the Rich" and nine years later "Europe's shining light... its Emerald Tiger." ¹⁶

For a Caribbean perspective please refer to Appendix D on page 20.

All Bahamians should work for the day when entrepreneurs see the unquestioned virtues of its people and invest in the Bahamas. However, getting there will require an unprecedented national awareness and political will.

4 Lessons

Management and Politics

Reforming the public education system can only be accomplished with strong leadership over a long time using strategies that are clearly stated and widely endorsed.

However, a major problem in all democracies is that politicians are elected; and this makes them responsive to the needs of the voters.

But all voters are not equally organized. Politicians respond first to the organizations that have the people and/or money to provide support on Election Day. Construction contractors, developers and unions, for instance, are better organized than parents even though parents have the greatest direct interest in quality of the output of the system. These interest groups greatly affect the management of government functions and the distribution of scarce resources.

Somehow the Government must depoliticize the education system and allow thoughtful, creative and energetic educators to do their jobs.

Solutions may satisfy the needs of some special interests but have undesirable side effects that can make reaching the objective unattainable.

A good example of this is a 1996 Los Angeles California initiative to reduce classroom size by one-third - the proposed solution to poor academic performance and a solution invariably endorsed by the National Education Association, the largest union in America. The argument is that smaller class size in itself allows for better teaching. This is true if all other factors are equal.

In this case it meant that the school district, in order to meet the timeline specified in the implementation plan, had to increase its hiring of new teachers by 50 percent. That objective could be achieved only by lowering teacher standards.

After spending \$4 billion on the program, testing showed that student achievement did not increase one bit.¹⁷

The End of Academic Elitism

Under Majority Rule there was an expansion of the school system that Michael Craton, a leading historian on the Bahamas, described as “huge.”¹⁸ However, this period saw the implementation of policies that had adverse side effects.

One such policy is most often associated with the history of “old” Government High School (GHS) that was founded in 1925 and closed in 1976. GHS “was modeled on the English Grammar School system” and had a Board of Governors separate from the Department of Education.¹⁹ The school’s enrollment was limited by its capacity; and candidates were selected in part on the basis of entrance exams. It sought the best and brightest students and tried to provide a superior academic education.

However, it was alleged that GHS was “not open to all”; and therefore it was the symbol of “elitism.” Rather than correct whatever faults existed in the student selection process, the Board of Governors was dissolved and GHS became an ordinary public high school.

The real issue was power and control not education; and education suffered.

In the process the Government created a false dilemma, a choice between equality and excellence. It chose equality.

Equality meant being “open to all” and this meant the elimination of a meritocracy, a recognition that some students of greater talent could achieve extraordinary goals if given the right learning environment. Thus the Government closed the old GHS.

Bahamianization

The second policy called for a preference for Bahamian teachers in the school system. This had the effect of precipitously reducing the qualifications of the teachers in the Department of Education.

“While the number of teaching candidates multiplied six fold in a decade, the proportion of entrants with the original requirement of five “O” level passes fell from 90 to less than 10 percent.”²⁰

This meant that less than 10% of the teachers hired had the minimum high school grade level to enter college. Since then the Department of Education has worked hard to reduce the adverse impact on teaching quality and student academic achievement.

One must note that another unintended consequence of Bahamianization was the social promotion of students...students could now advance in grade without passing the grade.

The Family

Perhaps the most disabling factor affecting academic achievement in the Bahamas today is out-of-wedlock children and the single parent, female-headed family.

In the 1970s there was a profound change in the structure of the Bahamian family. This is evident in the data on live births (Figure 5). “Live Births to Single Mothers” rose from less than 30% of the total to over 60% in the 1970s.

Abigail and Stephen Thernstrom in their book *No Excuses* note that most social scientists looking at the U. S. education gap conclude that the single parent, female headed family structure “is almost always associated with lower educational attainment and more behavioral and psychological problems” for the children.²¹

These problems include poorer cognitive skills on entering school; *cognition* is the “capacity for

knowing” and *cognitive skills* include attention, memory, visualization of relationships, problem solving, scanning, categorization, comprehension, etc. Also, while attending school, there is a lessened ability to complete tasks and a greater tendency for argumentative, disruptive and threatening behavior that is destructive to the educational process.

Although Bahamian society differs from the U.S. in important ways, Bahamian educators recognize the validity of these views.

However, the subject as covered repeatedly in the Bahamian press concentrates on the impact of this

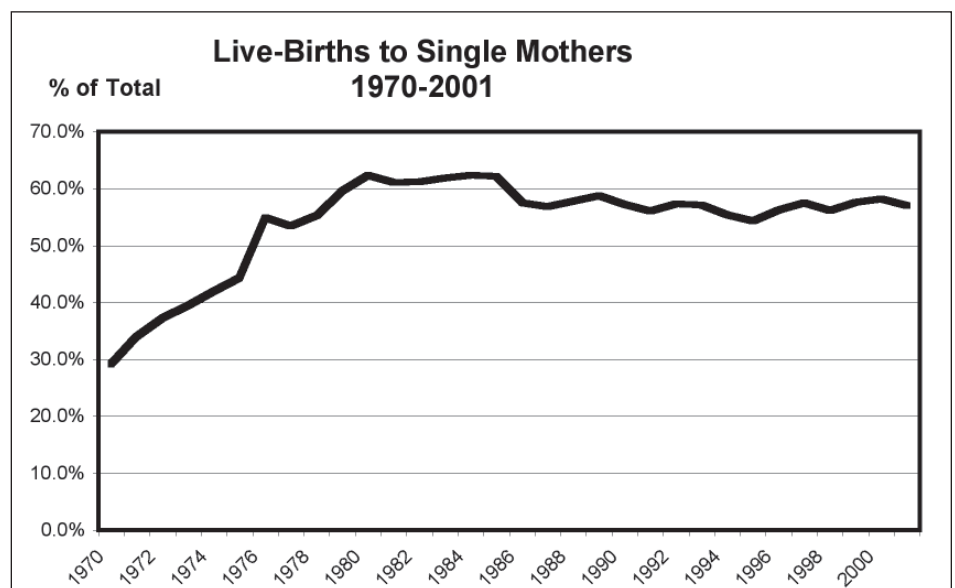


Figure 5

family structure on male development and academic achievement. They are quick to point out that 60% of male students have no significant male figures in their family life and this vacuum is not ameliorated by the school system where 80% of the teachers and administrators are female.

Addressing this issue head-on is the basic rationale for the All Male Laboratory School proposal.

This analysis suggests that the education crisis in the Bahamas has deep roots. Education reform will be successful only with a sustained commitment of every element of society, every stakeholder and every political party. Education reform must stand high on the national list of priorities over the long haul.

Appendix A BGCSE 2004

All Exams			Math & English Language				
	Exam Taken	Grade		Math Exam		English Exam	
			Grade	Number Taken	% of Total	Number Taken	% of Total
Academic:							
Mathematics	4,367	E					
English Language	4,281	D-					
Biology	2,705	E+					
Religious Studies	1,739	C	A	141	3%	130	3%
Literature	1,153	D	B	131	3%	194	5%
History	841	C-	C	896	21%	995	23%
Spanish	761	D+	D	673	15%	1,247	29%
Chemistry	511	D+	E	657	15%	849	20%
Geography	572	C-	F	599	14%	513	12%
Physics	518	D+	G	656	15%	241	6%
Combined Science	413	D+	U	614	14%	111	3%
Economics	400	E+	Total	4,367	100%	4,281	100%
French	196	D	Mean				
Total Academic	18,457		Grade	E		D-	
Business:							
Bookkeeping	664	F+					
Typewriting	461	D					
Commerce	430	D					
Office Procedures	322	D+					
Total Business	1,213						
Vocational:							
Foods & Nutrition	378	C					
Art & Design B	363	C					
Art & Design A	285	C-					
Graphical Comm.	209	D+					
Carpentry/Joinery	179	C-					
Music	167	C					
Electrical Installation	95	C					
Clothing Construction	80	C-					
Auto Mechanics	46	D					
Total Vocational	1,802						
Total	21,472	D					

Source: Confidential Report 2004, Bahamas General Certificate of Secondary Education, Testing And Evaluation Section, Ministry of Education, Bahamas Government.

Appendix B Timss

Math Scores of Eighth-Grade Students TIMSS 2003 Report*

Country	Average Scale Score	Significant Change 1995 – 2003
Higher than U.S.:		
Singapore	605	
South Korea	589	+8
Hong Kong	586	+17
Taiwan	585	
Japan	585	-11
Belgian-Flemish	570	-13
Netherlands	537	
Hungary	529	
Not Measurably Different from U.S.:		
Malaysia	508	
Russia	508	-16
Slovakia	508	-26
Australia	506	
United States	504	+12
Sweden	499	-41
Scotland	498	
New Zealand	494	
Lower than U.S.:		
Italy	484	
Serbia	477	
Bulgaria	476	-51
Romania	475	
International Average	466	
Norway	461	-37
Jordan	424	
Iran	411	-7
Egypt	406	
Chile	387	
Philippines	378	
Botswana	366	
Saudi Arabia	332	
Ghana	276	
South Africa	264	

* Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2003, December 2004, National Center for Educational Standards, U.S. Dept. of Education, page 7.

Appendix C Knowledge is Power

There are many examples of primary and secondary schools in the U.S. that have forged successful programs targeting disadvantaged students in low-income areas. The reason for their success is quite clear. Francis Galton in the late 19th century argued that “intelligence alone is not enough to explain genius. Rather, he appealed to “the concrete triple event of ability combined with zeal and with capacity for hard labour.”²² It is also the basis of one such learning alternative, the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) schools.

This is a group of thirty-four schools that started with one grade level, the 5th grade in Houston, Texas, expanded up to include an 8th grade, and then branched to the South Bronx of New York City.

Over 95% of KIPP students are African American or Latino/Hispanic; and over 80% of KIPP students are eligible for the federally subsidized meals program. Students are accepted regardless of prior academic record, conduct, or socioeconomic background. However, 76% of KIPP alumni attend college versus 48% in New York and Houston.

The schools are “free open enrollment college-preparatory public schools where educationally underserved students develop the knowledge, skills, and character needed to succeed in top quality high schools, colleges, and the competitive world beyond.” KIPP schools operate on the basis of the “Five Pillars” that, in effect, change the culture of the classroom.

1. **High Expectations.** The program is based on clearly defined and high expectations for academic achievement and conduct. They are measurable and do not make allowance for excuses based on the students’ backgrounds.
2. **Choice & Commitment.** Students, parents and teachers participate strictly on a voluntary basis and each sign an agreement to the basic principles of the school. Breaches of the agreements have consequences.
3. **More Time.** The parties commit to longer school hours...7:30 AM to 5:00 PM Monday thru Thursday. 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM on Friday, 9:15 AM to 1:05 PM on Saturdays, and one month of schooling during the summer. KIPP students spend 62% more time in school each year.
4. **Power to Lead.** School principals “are effective academic and organizational leaders who understand that great schools require great School Leaders. They have control over their school budget and personnel. They are free to swiftly move dollars or make staffing changes, allowing them maximum effectiveness in helping students learn. There is no blaming “downtown” or “blaming the system”...all decisions rest with the principal.
5. **Focus on Results.** The focus is on high student performance on standardized tests and other objective measures. There are no shortcuts, no excuses. The expectation is “a level of academic performance that will enable them to succeed at the nation’s best high schools and colleges.”

In 2003, KIPP schools received a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to build out some of their middle schools into a combined middle-and-high schools. The KIPP Houston High School is a college preparatory charter school, and shares a campus with KIPP Academy, the original middle school.

KIPP Schools operate under formal written Commitments to Excellence. The parent/guardian and student contracts are as follows:

PARENTS’/GUARDIANS’ COMMITMENT

We fully commit to KIPP in the following ways:

1. We will make sure our child arrives at KIPP every day by 7:25 A.M. (Monday-Friday) or boards a KIPP bus at the scheduled time.
2. We will make arrangements so our child can remain at KIPP until 5:00 P.M. (Monday - Thursday) and 4:00 P.M. on Friday. We will make arrangements for our child to come to KIPP on appropriate Saturdays at 9:15 A.M. and remain until 1:05 P.M.
3. We will ensure that our child attends KIPP summer school.
4. We will always help our child in the best way we know how and we will do whatever it takes for him/her to learn. This also means that we will check our child’s homework every night, let him/her call the teacher if there is a problem with the homework, and try to read with him/her every night.
5. We will always make ourselves available to our children and the school, and address any concerns they might have. This also means that if our child is going to miss school, we will notify the teacher as soon as possible, and we will carefully read any and all papers that the school sends home to us.
6. We will allow our child to go on KIPP field trips.
7. We will make sure our child follows the KIPP dress code.
8. We understand that our child must follow the KIPP rules so as to protect the safety, interests, and rights of all individuals in the classroom. We, not the school, are responsible for the behavior and actions of our child.

Failure to adhere to these commitments can cause my child to lose various KIPP privileges and can lead to my child returning to his/her home school.

X _____
Please print name(s) here.

STUDENT’S COMMITMENT

I fully commit to KIPP in the following ways:

1. I will arrive at KIPP every day by 7:25 A.M. (Monday-Friday) or board a KIPP bus at the correct time.
2. I will remain at KIPP until 5:00 P.M. (Monday - Thursday) and 4:00 P.M. on Friday.
3. I will come to KIPP on appropriate Saturdays at 9:15 A.M. and remain until 1:05 P.M.
4. I will attend KIPP during summer school.
5. I will always work, think, and behave in the best way I know how, and I will do whatever it takes for me and my fellow students to learn. This also means that I will complete all my homework every night; I will call my teachers if I have a problem with the homework or a problem with coming to school, and I will raise my hand and ask questions in class if I do not understand something.
6. I will always make myself available to parents and teachers, and address any concerns they might have. If I make a mistake, this means I will tell the truth to my teachers and accept responsibility for my actions.
7. I will always behave so as to protect the safety, interests, and rights of all individuals in the classroom. This also means that I will always listen to all my KIPP teammates and give everyone my respect.
8. I will follow the KIPP dress code.
9. I am responsible for my own behavior, and I will follow the teachers’ directions.

Failure to adhere to these commitments can cause me to lose various KIPP privileges and can lead to returning to my home school.

X _____
Please print name here.

Appendix D Caribbean Perspective

This report uses Ireland as an example in the “The Ultimate Objectives” section; and this has raised the suggestion that a Caribbean example such as Barbados would be more appropriate.

The World Bank this past April published a 300-page study on “Caribbean Development in the 21st Century”²³ The study is based on a 138 country data set that assigned a numerical code to the Bahamas. No data appears under that code number in the data set; and the Bahamas is not mentioned in the study.

The relevant chapter, “Building Skills for Knowledge-driven Growth”, makes the following relevant points:

1. “Through the last half of the twentieth century, Barbados was the region’s star performer. Its adult population added 1.9 years of schooling from 1980 to 2000, a rate above the world average, but similar to countries at its level of income.”²⁴

The World Bank stated in the study and confirmed in an exchange of e-mails that –

Barbados managed early on to provide close to universal enrolment and completion of secondary education. It also maintained quality teaching and impressive learning outcomes even as the system expanded towards the inclusion of the last third of its pupils. This expansion of enrollments and the maintenance of education quality is a goal that the majority of the English speaking Caribbean countries did not meet.

2. Although Barbados was the star of the Caribbean it was able only to maintain its relative position of 25th in the world.

To put things in perspective, South Korea added three years of schooling to its labor force be-

tween 1980 and 2000, 50 percent more than that of Barbados.²⁵

3. “The public expenditure reviews show that high spending is not commensurate with educational outcomes. In essence, the region’s education systems fail to translate the record high spending into outcomes that will significantly narrow the education gap between the Caribbean and the OECD countries, as illustrated by the 120 years that it currently will take Jamaica to reach the education level of USA in 2000.”²⁶

While the Bahamas was not in the World Bank Study, the research work done in connection with the Untapped Research report does indicate that –

- There was according to the 1970-2000 census data a significant increase in the number of years of schooling of the adult population. This is the measure of universality of education used by the World Bank.
- The BGCSE scores provide evidence that there has been little improvement in the level of academic achievement since 1993 and the overall level is “unacceptable”.
- The expansion of the education system during the 1970s and 1980s was accompanied by a significant decline in the qualifications of teachers.

The World Bank in other studies develops the theory that there is a strong interaction between Human Capital (the quantity and quality of the knowledge base) and a society’s ability to absorb foreign technologies ...to adapt and modify them...and then to create new technologies. This interaction is a key ingredient to economic growth.²⁷

This theory achieves practical significance in “development economics” because of the success of small countries like Ireland, Finland and South Korea in the past 30 years.

There are two important inferences for the Bahamas:

1. If Barbados, the star of the Caribbean in the World Bank study, was able only to maintain over the last two decades its position in the world with respect to Human Capital, then the Bahamas' position in the world declined during this period given its academic performance.
2. If Human Capital is the critical resource in the 21st century, then the Bahamas must urgently pursue an education reform program that eliminates its learning gaps.

End Notes

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- ⁵ Confidential Reports 2004, page 30.
- ⁶ Thernstrom, Abigail & Stephen, *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*, Simon & Shuster, page 33.
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- ²² Murray, Charles, page 87.
- ²³ World Bank, “A Time to Choose: Caribbean Development in the 21st Century”, Report N o. 31725-LAC, April 26, 2005, 168 pages.
- ²⁴ Ibid, p. 152.
- ²⁵ Ibid, pages 147 – 148.
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The Coalition for Education Reform

Participating Organizations and their Mission

Bahamas Chamber of Commerce

P.O. Box N 665, Nassau, Bahamas
Phone: 242-322-2145 • Fax: 242-326-5346

Mission: The mission of the Chamber of Commerce is to promote trade, expand commerce and build a better community. It is a civic clearinghouse, a legislative representative for its members, an information bureau, and a research and promotion medium.

Bahamas Employers Confederation

P.O. Box N 166, Nassau, Bahamas
Phone: 242-328-5719 • Fax: 242-322-4649

Mission: The Bahamas Employers Confederation promotes the interests of employers by seeking to create and to promote the best environment for employers to succeed and to add value to members through advocacy, representation, information and support.

National Congress of Trade Unions

P.O. Box GT 2887, Nassau, Bahamas
Phone: 242-356-7459 • Fax: 242-356-7457

Mission: The National Congress of Trade Unions is recognized in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas as the “Official Voice of Labour” by the International Labour Organization, the Caribbean Congress of Labour and the Government of The Bahamas.

Bahamas Hotel Association

P.O. Box N 7799, Nassau, Bahamas
Phone: 242-322-8381 • Fax: 242-326-5346

Mission: The Bahamas Hotel Association serves the needs of The Bahamas’ hotel industry by providing a forum to facilitate the promotion, profitability, quality growth and security of the tourism industry consistent with the needs of The Bahamas.

Bahamas Hotel Catering & Allied Workers Union

P.O. Box GT 2514, Nassau, Bahamas
Phone: 242-323-5933 • Fax: 242-325-6546

Mission: The BHCAWU, the recognized bargaining agent for hotel and catering workers in The Bahamas, is dedicated to the growth and development of the whole person and the educational, cultural, social, political and economic advancement of its members

Bahamas Hotel Employers Association

P.O. Box N 7799, Nassau, Bahamas
Phone: 242-322-2262 • Fax: 242-325-8998

Mission: The Bahamas Hotel Employers’ Association strives to achieve and maintain a stable industrial relations environment in the hotel sector of The Bahamas through understanding and mutual respect between Employers and Employees. By so doing, the BHEA will contribute to the continued development and expansion of the Tourism sector of The Bahamas and maximize its contribution to the local economy.

Nassau Tourism & Development Board

P.O. Box N 4740, Nassau, Bahamas
Phone: 242-326-0992 • Fax: 242-323-2998

Mission: Working in partnership with industry leaders and government, to advance a tourism product which is clean, safe, exciting, and uniquely Bahamian and perceived as value received for value spent.