

OPINION

Go for the Gold in Education

by Ralph J Massey

The learning crisis in public education has developed over decades and has its roots in the culture and institutions of the country. This is unfortunate in that change will disturb all those whose self-interest is aligned with the present system. This certainly includes the teachers' union and some teachers, administrators, politicians, parents and students.

The reality is that education reform...because of the scarcity of quality teachers... needs 10 to 12 years to implement and up to 30-35 years to see its full impact on the public welfare.

However...an inspiring improvement in academic test scores can appear rather quickly.

In this connection there are three long-term objectives that should be considered by the Ministry of Education.

First Objective. Public education must be perceived as an opportunity...and neither as an entitlement...nor as a child-tending public service.

- At present every parent is required only to cause his child to attend school from his 5th to 16th year of age. He can be penalized only if his child fails to attend; the student can be expelled before his 16th year of age only if he commits a felony; and while in school, social promotion naturally follows student failure.
- At present the Department of Education is required to provide both space and instruction for that student; and teachers are “public servants” that have the *de facto* life-time employment protections presently afforded to public servants.

These performance standards are a formula for failure because they demand so little.

The proposed standards would employ the “Broken Window” theory with high expectations, positive and realistic responsibilities for parents, students and teachers...and consequences for non-performance.

For the high school student, for instance, this would include expulsion for infractions against the standards of acceptable behavior.

Second Objective. Create a new standard for teacher recruitment, training and retention because -

“The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.”

It would require all teaching candidates to have a BA degree or its equivalent in an academic subject other than Teachers Education before the candidate enters teacher training; and the consequences for the country are likely to be high quality teaching instruction, fewer but more qualified and more highly paid teachers and better students.

Third Objective. Create two new institutions like the one included in the July 2005 Report of the Coalition for Education Reform and in all formal reports since then. That is a Government-owned privately-operated charter school, a college preparatory school with high performance standards open to students in the public school system. This education alternative has been a success elsewhere.

Likewise, the second institution would be a new charter school or schools on a second educational track, an exciting alternative to the regular high school, one with a concentration on vocational and academic basics.

Many will say “It won’t happen here” or “It’s not the Bahamian way.”

But...they are the building blocks...that is if **Bahamians want to “Go for the Gold in Education”**.

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Go for the Gold - Memorable Quotations

“Cultures involve attitudes as well as skills, languages, and customs...Culture is expressed in behavior, not lip service.”

Thomas Sowell, *Race and Culture: A World View*, 1994.

“The earnings of more educated people are almost always well above average, although the gains are generally larger in less-developed countries.”

Gary S Becker, *Human Capital, A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis with Special Reference to Education*, 1993.

Language and mathematics are “the two great inventions of man and are the cornerstones for all learning. They facilitate the acquisition, communication, organization and storage of knowledge, and all subsequent learning.”

Ralph J Massey, *The Learning Crisis: A Bahamian Public Policy Essay*, 2009.

“Students benefiting from regular yearly assignment to more effective teachers have an extreme advantage in terms of attaining higher levels of achievement.” Students having a series of years with poor teachers experience a “near-permanent retardation of academic achievement.”

William L Sanders & June C Rivers, *Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement*, University of Tennessee Value-Added Research & Assessment Center, 1996.

“The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers...The more effective systems get more talented people to become teachers, develop them into better instructors, and ensure that they deliver consistently for every child in the system.”

McKinsey & Company, *How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top*, September 2007.

“Teaching in a regular public school is a profession for saints, masochists, or low-aspiring civil servants. To do the job splendidly asks too much in the way of sacrifice; simply to meet minimum standards asks too little in terms of skills, knowledge, imagination, and dedication. Moreover, those who do it splendidly tend to be educational isolates, while those who could be better are resistant to significant change.”

Abigail & Stephan Thernstrom, *No Excuses, Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*, 2003.

“What KIPP [a Knowledge is Power Program school in the Bronx] is most famous for is mathematics...By the end of eighth grade, 84 percent of the students are performing at or above their grade level, which is to say that this motley group of kids...do as well as the privileged eighth graders of America's wealthy suburbs.

Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success*, 2008.

Go for the Gold - The Numbers

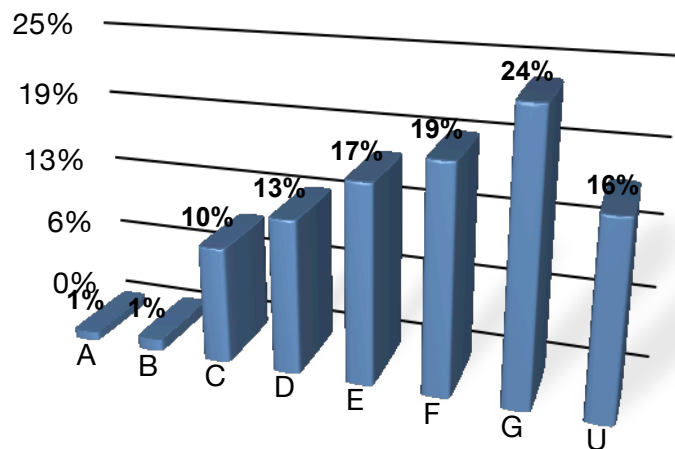
The media releases for the BGCSE exams historically have obscured the results rather than clarifying what is a true national problem. The Government use to release a single grade (the annual D+, D or D-) and it never showed the results for private and public schools or for the 26 subjects.

For instance, in the 2006 exam 2,565 Public High students sat the exam in Math. In the graph to the right you can see 1% got “As” and “Bs” ... 24% “Gs” and 16% “Us”. It is believed that the latter two groups are illiterate in Math...they do not know the difference between addition and multiplication.

The 2006 English Language results are somewhat better for the 2,823 students who sat the exam. Less than 1% got “As”, 1% “Bs”, 7% “Gs” and 6% “Us”. Better than the math results but still unacceptable.

The BGSE exams are derived from the Cambridge system and the standards appear to be rigorously applied. Nevertheless, the Department of Education will not publicly identify which of the eight grade designators are the same as the pass/fail standards used in it's high schools to determine who gets a diploma at graduation.

2006 BGCSE Math - Public Schools



2006 BGCSE English - Public Schools

