

A Letter to the Editor

A 2010 Math Exam for Math Teachers

by

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It is abundantly clear that the Honorable Desmond Bannister, Minister of Education, is dealing at this moment with some really big problems. This includes the formulation of a 10-year plan to replace the Draft presented at the 2009 Education Summit.

One always hesitates to make unsolicited suggestions. BUT...there is a simple one that could be helpful...the addition of a Math Exam for Math Teachers to the 2010 academic testing calendar. The logic of this proposal is as follows:

The videos "Academic Failure & The Skills Gap" (<http://www.vimeo.com/662906>) and "Teachers Also Count" (<http://www.vimeo.com/7354361>) deal with the known academic failure of students in the Public Schools...particularly in mathematics.

Now...there may be as many as 700 teachers teaching mathematics; but what do we know about them? According to the second video -

"There is a complete absence of publicly available data on what teachers know and can do. However, the high student failure and illiteracy rates [measures of what students know and can do] strongly suggest that the average public school teacher is ineffective." Therefore, there appears to be a hidden critical mathematics skills shortage in the Public School teaching corps.

In this regard one should note that the UK apparently has a similar mathematics learning crisis, a crisis reported by Julie Henry, the Education Correspondent for the London Telegraph (www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/julie-henry/).

"Primary school teachers have such a poor grasp of basic maths that they struggle to solve sums that 11 year olds should be able to answer...Only four out of 10 teachers could work out that 2.1 per cent of 400 is 8.4...A test of simple maths skills taken by teachers from schools across the country has revealed a "shocking" lack of mental arithmetic ability and basic maths knowledge.

"A generation of teachers did not fully understand the subject...Our obsession with generic teaching skills has crowded out time in which we could be making sure that people actually have the basic content and knowledge of content that they need...Probably more than half of them know so little maths that they cannot be conveying mathematics to their children in the classroom."

This suggests that getting such data on the Bahamas, if it is not now available, could be a good starting point for reform in math teaching instruction. A 2010 Math Exam for Math Teachers would differ from the BGCSE Exam for Students in one important respect, the addition of a section where each teacher lists the math courses taken in their secondary and tertiary education. The results could lend great substance and support to the Minister, the Department of Education, itself, and Parliament to the reforms contained in a revised 2009 10-Year Plan.

This seems like a logical first step to cure the basic-math skills shortage.

February 22, 2010