

# OPINION

## The “Misleading and Nonsensical Statistic” by Ralph J Massey

In his recent statement to Parliament on the Education section of the 2010-2011 Budget, the Honorable Desmond Bannister, Minister of Education, forcefully stated that -

The erroneous and misguided practice of publishing a national average for the Bahamas General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) examination will be discontinued because it is “a misleading and nonsensical statistic”; and the Department of Education (DOE) will develop an alternative.

**To this observer it appears that this annual “single bit of information” when taken in isolation, suggested...quite properly and despite its limitations...that something has been wrong with education in the Bahamas.**

**AND...**the data contained in the Annual Report on the BGCSE Examination contains a treasure of valuable insights.

**BUT...**the DOE has consistently covered-up the problem by never going beyond the “single bit of information”, the annual D+, D- or D for all schools and all subjects. It has neither released the official annual BGCSE Report nor even an executive summary of it to the Media.

**For instance,** the “single bit of information” covers up the widely accepted reality that the public and private school systems produce radically different test scores.

The BGCSE testing system measures what a student “knows and can do” in 26 specific exams at eight levels of knowledge...seven positive levels (A through G) and one “negative” (a “U”). For instance, an exam writer on the math test who shows no measurable understanding of the subject gets a “U”; in contrast an exam writer who can solve quadratic equations is likely to get an “A”.

**Furthermore,** the DOE reluctantly concedes that a “G” and a “U” in mathematics constitutes illiteracy, namely one does not know the difference between addition and multiplication. By this test standard between 40 and 50 percent of Public School leavers sitting the BGCSE math exam are illiterate in mathematics.

For a very long time the Public Schools have been producing too many students who are, in effect, learning impaired...a point made by the Honorable Hubert Ingraham at the July 2009 Education Summit. His observation no doubt played an important role in the 10-year plan presented at the meeting being marked DRAFT.

The DOE, with its seemingly long use of the “single bit of information” to describe the state of education in the Bahamas, has, in fact, not wanted to recognize the following realities:

- There is a skills shortage at all levels in the labour force; this has serious adverse consequences; and it is associated with unacceptable Public Education outcomes, ultimately, that is what students know and can do on leaving school. The business community has actively raised this issue with the Ministry since July 2005.
- The country’s Human Capital is vital to its economic and social welfare. Its importance was formally recognized in the December 2008 European Union/Bahamas Funding Agreement.
- The Ministry and the electorate need a valid picture of how the Public Schools are doing in acquiring important learning skills. This should be an easy task given the data that is available.

Tuesday, June 29, 2010