

Statement Highlighting State of Education in 2018

**First Meeting of the 2018/2019 Session
of the Cayman Islands Legislative Assembly**

By the Honourable Juliana O'Connor-Connolly, MLA

Minister of Education, Youth, Sports, Agriculture and Lands

Statement Highlighting State of Education in 2018

Thursday, 06 September 2018



**MINISTRY OF
EDUCATION, YOUTH, SPORTS,
AGRICULTURE & LANDS
CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT**

Mister Speaker, on behalf of the Government, I am eager to present to this Honourable House this statement, highlighting the upcoming projects in education for this school year.

Annual Educators' Welcome Back

Mister Speaker, we began the school year with the Annual Education Professionals' Welcome at the Mary Miller Hall in Red Bay, last month. All Government Education staff were in attendance to celebrate the start of the new school year. The Acting Governor as well as many of my colleagues in Caucus/Cabinet were in attendance. I would like to graciously thank them again for attending as this demonstrates the level of support from the Government for education in the Cayman Islands. Only by working together, can we provide the 'The Best Education Opportunities for All Our Children' as specified as one of the Broad Outcomes in the Strategic Policy Statement.

Mister Speaker, I would also like to recognise my colleagues on the Opposition who were also in attendance. This further confirms that the support for education is wide-spread throughout our MLAs, and the country on a whole. At the Welcome Back Event, I was delighted to be able to share several initiatives that will be implemented over the next year to truly strengthen our education system.

Mister Speaker, it brings me great pleasure to not only share those initiatives in the Legislative Assembly today but to announce even more. My colleagues in Caucus/Cabinet along with the staff in the Ministry of Education, the Department of Education Services and Schools have been

working together to make education an absolute priority, as we nation build and prepare our students for every success so that they may develop into productive, responsible, caring and honourable members of our society.

Increase of Teachers' Salaries

Mister Speaker, I am sure you as well as all my colleagues would agree that teaching is one of the most honourable professions. It can also be one of the most difficult. Teachers today take on a range of roles, from parents, to caregivers, to nurses, to counsellors to name just a few. Our teachers play a critical role in the lives of our children. Many factors contribute to a student's academic performance, including individual characteristics, family and neighbourhood experiences. But research suggests that, among school-related factors, teachers matter most. When it comes to student performance on reading and math tests, a teacher is estimated to have two to three times the impact of any other school factor, including services, facilities, and even leadership.

Teachers' salaries for Government schools have remained largely stagnant for a number of years. Each year, there is a high turnover rate of teachers as they seek job opportunities elsewhere. Recruitment for quality teachers has become increasingly difficult without a competitive remuneration package. Countries such as the United States of America and England have reported teacher shortages and across the globe incentives are being introduced to retain quality teachers. These range from pay increases, year-long sabbaticals, flexible

working hours, the development of multiple avenues to gain teaching qualifications and the reduction of qualifications required to become a teacher.

Internationally, fewer college students are pursuing education majors. This declining interest in the field of education is also noticeable in the Cayman Islands as more students opt for potentially more lucrative careers in finance, law and tourism.

Mister Speaker, as I said in my speech to educators in August, 2017 (last school year), teachers must have a pay increase as one of the methods to raise the interest in teaching as a career for Caymanians, retain quality teachers within the teaching profession in Government schools, and attract quality teachers from other jurisdictions to meet the educational needs of our students.

Last year, in August, I gave the commitment to increase teachers' salaries to at least CI\$5,000 per month during this Administration. This is being accomplished utilising a phased method. In the first phase, which begins this September, 2018 teachers' will have an increase to a minimum of CI\$4,300 per month. In the second phase (September, 2019), teachers' will have an increase to a minimum of CI\$5,000 per month. For comparison purposes, if you consider a newly qualified Caymanian teacher, he or she would have received a salary of CI\$3,689, prior to the salary raise. Now that newly qualified Caymanian teacher will earn a salary of CI\$4,300 per month, a difference of over CI\$600 per month.

In addition, to the salary increase for teachers, over the next few years, the Ministry would also like to review the salaries of all educators, including principals, deputy principals, and assistant

teachers, to name a few. This will ensure that all educators are being paid fairly, what they deserve, and will further assist in elevating this most honourable profession to the level where it should be recognised.

Teachers Pay Scale, Prorated Summer Pay and Discretionary Leave

Mister Speaker, I recognise whilst increasing teacher remuneration will have tremendous benefits, it is not the only strategy for increasing interest in the teaching profession and for teacher retention. In addition, for September, 2018, the Ministry will be working with the Portfolio of the Civil Service (POCS) to introduce a Teachers Pay Scale/Plan with realistic and achievable salary expectations. The plan will outline how teachers can attain certain standards, achievements and qualifications in order to advance on the salary scale. This plan allows high quality teachers to remain in the classroom while earning higher salaries. Currently, teachers require promotions to other posts (outside the classroom) to earn a higher salary. Mister Speaker, I cannot state enough the importance of retaining high quality teachers in our classrooms. Research shows that the highest impact on student achievement and progress is the classroom teacher and it is therefore imperative that we have the best teachers working with our students. Our students deserve this.

Mister Speaker, in addition to the Teachers Pay Scale/Plan, we have been working with POCS to change the summer leave proration which has an impact on the ability of the Ministry of Education to recruit teachers mid-year. This change will enable the Ministry to pay teachers over the summer when they are contracted to work at least a full school year (even if they start

mid-way through the year). Currently, when there is a need to recruit teachers after the school year has started, their summer pay is prorated. Therefore, teachers lose a portion of their summer pay and this has a negative impact on successful recruitment. Many good teachers are dissuaded from taking up employment in the Cayman Islands, as they simply cannot afford to lose their pay over the summer. I am happy to announce that this is a barrier we can overcome for the benefit of our students.

Mister Speaker, there is even more good news. Through this collaboration with POCS we are working to provide Heads of Departments with the authority to grant discretionary leave for teachers. Currently, teachers and other staff on 'teachers' terms and conditions' have to take unpaid leave to attend significant life events (e.g. graduation of a child from university, etc.) when these events occur during the school year, as they have no flexible leave allocation. The introduction of limited discretionary teachers' leave will allow the appointing officer flexibility in reward for staff. The Director of Education Services in consultation with the Ministry would develop and implement internal policies to implement and manage this clause. Resulting staff absences would be expected to be covered internally and managed by the school itself.

I would like to thank the Acting Deputy Governor, Gloria McField-Nixon and her team at POCS for the work they have done over the past few months to address these long standing issues. The high level of collaboration and the commitment to education is clear – thank you. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Human Resources and Finance teams in the

Ministry of Education. They have gone above and beyond to ensure these changes are in place in a reasonable timeframe.

Small School Non-Teaching Deputy Principals

Mister Speaker, smaller schools (East End, Edna Moyle, Creek and Spot Bay and West End primary schools) have been operating over a number of years without a non-teaching Deputy. This meant that the only non-teaching personnel in the schools were the Principals. We can all imagine that for a teaching Deputy Principal, having to teach a class full-time during the day leaves very little time for leadership and management for the school. This is all left to the Principal and creates challenges.

The recent inspections carried out by the Office of Education Standards demonstrates that the majority of our Government Schools have made progress since the Baseline School Inspections were carried out during the 2014-2015 academic year. Even with these successes there is more work to be done. In raising standards in schools and expecting greater improvements we must ensure that schools are equipped with the necessary resources.

Mister Speaker, I am again delighted to share that all Government schools on Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac have begun this school year with a non-teaching Deputy Principal. This addition will strengthen the leadership structure and enhance the monitoring and support of effective teaching as well as improved student progress in all our schools.

Additional Staff to Support Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Mister Speaker, as you and my colleagues know, all Government schools enrol students with a range of special educational needs that include academic, behaviour, social, emotional and mental health disorders. These students face a range of barriers to education that in many cases prevent them from having the same levels of progress and achievement than their peers.

Government schools differ from private schools in relation to their admissions policies. Currently, several private schools have admissions policies which include aptitude exams. These schools generally only accept students who perform at average or above average levels in mathematics and English. Students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEN/D) normally do not gain entry into these schools.

Government schools accept all students with SEN/D and provide a range of support services to help meet their individual needs. Government schools therefore have a disproportionate number of students with special education needs than their counterparts in the private sector. Approximately seven percent (7%) of students in mainstream Government schools have been formally diagnosed as having a Special Educational Need. This does not include the students attending the Lighthouse School.

Again, I have to thank my Cabinet colleagues for this one, as they recently approved my request for eight (8) Teaching Assistant posts and two (2) specialist posts to support students with

special educational needs. The 8 Teaching Assistants will be assigned to various students with special needs throughout the system to provide these students with further support.

The two (2) specialist posts – an Occupational Therapist and a Speech and Language Therapist - will be assigned full-time, right here, in my beloved Cayman Brac, where there are currently no specialists permanently stationed. The need here on the Brac is just as significant as the need on Grand Cayman for our students with special educational needs and these posts are long overdue for Cayman Brakers.

New John Gray High School Project

Mister Speaker, I am delighted to report that my colleagues in Cabinet and I have approved the progression on the New John Gray High School construction project. This new all-through high school will be able to accommodate 1,200 students from West Bay and George Town.

The project scope includes the construction of:

- Four (4) academy buildings (two-storey building with ICT suits and art/science laboratories)
- A two-storey administration building (also housing a library and food production facilities)
- A performing arts building (housing drama, music, dance, and other subjects)
- A technology block (housing auto mechanics, woodwork and metal works), and
- A gymnasium has been completed

The goal I have set for the completion of the new John Gray is December 2020.

In addition to the New John Gray High School, approval has been granted for extensive renovations to the George Hicks Campus which will be used for a range of education services including:

- The Department of Education Services
- The Cayman Islands Further Education Centre (CIFEC)
- Parenting and Pregnant Teens Unit
- The Behaviour Units for Primary and Secondary Schools, as well as,
- Additional accommodation for the University College of the Cayman Islands (UCCI)

This project is due to start after the completion of the New John Gray High School as the current students would need to vacate that campus and move into their new school.

Approval was also granted for a third project which is to demolish some of the buildings at the current site of the Cayman Islands Further Education Centre (CIFEC) and construct new sports fields for the John Gray High School. This work would begin after CIFEC students have been relocated to the refurbished and much improved George Hicks Campus.

Reception Classroom Block at Red Bay Primary School (RBPS)

Mister Speaker, Red Bay Primary School is the only Government Primary School on Grand Cayman without provision for Reception classes. The current school buildings cannot accommodate Reception classes so students within the Red Bay Primary School catchment have

to attend Reception classes in other schools or receive funding support from the Government to attend a private Early Childhood Centre.

Provision for reception classes at Red Bay Primary School is essential because by having students in Government Reception classes there is more direct control over the quality of provision. Additionally, adding Reception would make the transition from Reception to Year 1 smoother for the children and parents. When students are placed in out of catchment Reception programmes, they have to subsequently move schools into Year 1 at Red Bay Primary.

Adding Reception will also remove the logistical difficulties that some parents experience, with having children of both Reception age and older primary school age placed in different schools. Therefore, construction of three new reception classrooms is due to begin in the beginning of 2019 at the Red Bay Primary School to fill this void. This will ensure equity of provision with other Government Primary Schools, reduce the pressure for places on neighbouring catchment areas and reduce the number of children funded by the Early Childhood Assistance Programme.

Buses

Mister Speaker, my colleagues in Cabinet and I have also approved funding to purchase several much needed school buses. Several of our schools have buses that are very old, some over 20 years old, and often in need of repair. This interferes with schools ability to utilise the buses on a regular basis. Whilst most schools utilise the contracted bus services for morning pick-ups and

afternoon drop-offs of students (due to the large number of students requiring this service), schools often need a bus service for daily educational field trips, sporting events, and other special events. Many schools also offer additional afterschool education support or other co-curricular activities that require bus services. We want to encourage schools to share practices and have children collaborate with each other. We therefore need to provide the means for them to do so.

Mister Speaker, so far this year bus or van transport has been approved for:

- West End Primary School,
- Lighthouse School (a Coaster Bus and a Wheelchair Bus),
- Red Bay Primary School,
- Bodden Town Primary School, and
- Creek and Spot Bay Primary School.

Since this initial approval, it has been brought to my attention that a few other schools (Layman Scott Senior High School, Clifton Hunter High School, John Gray High School and Sir John A Cumber Primary School) are in need of buses and I have given the commitment to work with my colleagues in Cabinet to review these needs.

Heavy Duty Multi-Purpose Printer and Photocopy Machines

Mister Speaker, in addition to the salary increases, the changes to Personnel Regulations for educators, the New John Gray High School Construction Project, the George Hicks Campus

Refurbishment Project and the school buses, my colleagues in Cabinet and I have also approved funding for new Heavy Duty Multi-Purpose Printer and Photocopy Machines to be deployed at all schools. Our students complete a lot of project work. This gives them opportunities to integrate a range of subject areas into one learning project. Students have opportunities to engage in research, report writing and presentations. Teachers are also utilising a range of online resources and provide activities for a wide range of students that is differentiated to meet students' learning needs. These, and other factors, have increased the need for printing at schools.

With the increased printing and photocopying needs at schools, the Department of Education Services is currently implementing a resource consolidation plan, which removes desk-top printers from classrooms and creates resource centres across schools. This plan is expected to significantly reduce the associated costs, including servicing of the machines, paper and toner used. The implementation of this resource consolidation plan includes the purchase of several high capacity multi-purpose machines for schools.

School Fields

Mister Speaker, as you know, I am also the Minister for Sports and I believe that our students need opportunities to be physically active throughout the school day and also have opportunities to develop the necessary athletic skills. We have many talented students who are capable of competing and dominating international competitions if they are provided with the appropriate facilities and training to do so.

As a result of this, my colleagues in Cabinet and I have given approval for funding to install new outdoor artificial pitches at five (5) primary schools this year. The school fields will be utilised for physical education classes, recreation at break and lunch times and some are utilised for primary school football league fixtures. Some of the new fields will also provide the capacity for Inter-Primary Soccer 11-A-Side games. The all-weather design will allow for use all year under normal weather conditions. The installation of outdoor Astroturf will provide low heat gain to facilitate comfortable use throughout the day and the year and allow our students the outdoor enjoyment they deserve on these brand new quality fields.

Mister Speaker, the five (5) primary school fields, include East End Primary School, Spot Bay Junior School, Edna Moyle Primary School, Red Bay Primary School and Bodden Town Primary School.

It is anticipated that the fields will be completed by the end of this calendar year – a wonderful New Year's present for the students at these schools who will get to return in January to brand new fields to play on.

In addition a track and bathroom block will be constructed at the George Hicks Field as well as changing rooms at the East End Football Field.

Dress Code Policy

Mister Speaker, the Dress Code Policy has been implemented for this school year under theme 'Take Pride in Your Stride'. Overall the general community, principals, teachers, parents and students have embraced these new standards.

We have seen pictures of parents taking their children to the barber to get their hair cut and even some with fathers and sons going together. The need to have consistent standards has been long overdue. We need to work with students so that they can have pride in how they carry themselves. We need our students to be well groomed and to see the importance of first impressions as they leave school and go into further studies or the workforce.

Science Strategy

Mister Speaker, I am also happy to announce that a new Science Education Strategy for 2018 to 2023 has been developed in consultation with education stakeholders. The strategy is designed to help students develop a passion for science by raising the level of scientific curiosity, skills, knowledge, and confidence for all students.

The Science Education Strategy has three (3) goals:

1. High Quality Science Education - Ensure all students have access to high quality science education that includes scientific inquiry based skills as well as subject knowledge

2. Improved School Leadership & Teaching Capacity - Enhance the quality of science related teaching and learning through improved school leadership and teaching capacity
3. Partnerships with Tertiary Institutions, Businesses, Industry & Charities - Improve the skills, engagement, and participation of students by developing science related opportunities through partnerships with tertiary education, businesses, industry and charities

Mister Speaker, science is a fundamental subject for all, as like the other core subjects of English and Mathematics, it has an important bearing on our everyday lives. Science plays a key role in the development of inquiry, collaborative, reasoning and critical thinking skills. Regardless of whether our students end up in a science-related career or not, chances are, they will definitely require these skills to be globally competitive, and positive change agents within our communities. Not only is this Science Education Strategy important for our students and the communities they belong to, but science is fundamental to the economic wellbeing of Cayman. Global trends indicate that there is, and will continue to be growth in; the numbers of jobs, numbers of careers, average wages, and national income as the result of STEM related fields. Textbooks for students, Teachers' Guides and Online Resources have been purchased and delivered to all schools.

Water Sports Apprenticeship

Mister Speaker, I am delighted to report that this academic year we will be introducing a Water Sports Apprenticeship. This is in addition to the Construction Apprenticeship that is currently carried out in partnership with the Public Works Department.

The Water Sports Apprenticeship has developed through partnerships with local watersports companies and the Cayman Islands Further Education Centre (CIFEC). This pilot program seeks to offer the opportunity for an apprenticeship for up to 10 students to work in the private sector water sports operations in the Cayman Islands, in order to develop relevant competencies and obtain certification.

The students will study for the BTEC Sport Level 2 award course in addition to diving certification and other relevant certifications, for example, Rescue Diving. Additionally, the students will have an opportunity to resit English or mathematics at CIFEC

International Mathematics Conference

Minster Speaker, this year the Ministry will be hosting a Realistic Mathematics Education (RME) Conference. This 3-Day Conference focuses on mathematics education and is the first of its kind here in the Cayman Islands.

The Ministry will be hosting educators, researchers, curriculum developers, and educational administrators interested in proven, innovative approaches to support teacher practice and student learning. The conference will include presenters and participants from many countries

including Australia, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States and Cuba.

Curriculum Review

Mister Speaker, this academic year the Education Council will be reviewing the curriculum for Cayman Islands Government Schools. The current curriculum is now 10 years old and is need of a significant review. Countries such as Finland, Australia, England and Singapore regularly review their curriculums to ensure they are relevant, developmentally appropriate and adequate to prepare students for the next steps in their lives, whether that is for further studies or employment.

The review of the curriculum will include a review of resources (texts and online materials) for all subjects areas as we know this is very much needed.

Social Studies Curriculum

Mister Speaker, in addition to the curriculum review, the team in the Ministry will be developing a new Social Studies Curriculum that is unique to the Cayman Islands. It is critical that students have a good understanding of the Caymanian history and culture. This includes an understanding of Civics.

The Ministry team will be working with other entities to develop the Social Studies Curriculum and supporting resources. This is a very exciting project as we continue to nation build with our young people.

Closing

Mister Speaker, as you can see we have a lot planned for education. I am confident that we will see significant progress over the next year with support from my colleagues, the Education Council, and the education teams in the Ministry, Department and Schools.

Education is a passion for all of us in this house as we recognise that it will create the foundation for the future of these islands. I look forward to the continued positive input by all as we work together for the best interest of our children.

Thank you, Mister Speaker.