



# **Budget Contribution**

**by**

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Vocational Training**

**in the**

**House of Assembly**

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# Madam Speaker

It is my honour to stand in this house in the name of and on behalf of the people of Englerston.

I do so in a spirit of humility and a heart of gratitude to have been given by them the privilege to sit in this Chamber as their proud representative.

Madam Speaker, throughout my political life I have sought to be faithful in this representation and no doubt I have fallen short but I pray in the totality of things I have not let them down.

I understand that I am a servant

I serve a great people – and whilst most do not have big names or great wealth they have rich dreams and lofty hopes and aspirations, they are hardworking, honest and want a good life for their children and a decent life for themselves

I have always been a believer in and hopeful for a new day

Uprooting a status quo which ill serves our people and limits our full ascent has been my quest in public life.

Governance is not only a privilege – it is a prized and precious opportunity.

And I have said over and over in this House - governance is not only a privilege, it is an opportunity to create and construct a new reality for our people.

I have often quoted the lyrical poetry of the late Robert Nesta Marley - in his redemption song because it encapsulates the hope that despite the ravages of our history, in spite of the painful legacy of brutal oppression - we have been throughout the ages – and still are- a truly excellent people

We are reminded that governance must be a full redeeming in honour of our ancestors and in tribute to the generations yet unborn.

For me governance is the composing of a redemption song – a redemption song in the education of our young minds when previously we had limited access to education, in the equitable delivery of premium healthcare in an era when people without money or insurance face stressful and distressing hurdles, in being given a fair and equal chance in the economy and to overcome structural inequities, in the protection of our precious land and creating equitable access to ownership, in the preservation of our collective dignity and the protection of the weakest amongst us – in how we cultivate our beautiful and unique cultural heritage and identity

And in all things

In my own quest I have consistently asked the people I represent to help me sing these songs of freedom?

I have been privileged to sit on both sides of the House over a period of 5 consecutive terms.

I have always accepted the will of the people yet continued my fight from wherever I was positioned.

I was taken aback to hear the Leader of the Opposition remark that being in Opposition is “hard” - that has not been my experience.

I have found that sitting in the seat of governance is “hard” - because you must work to produce true change, strive to create new paradigms and oftentimes facing fierce resistance and sometimes in very difficult circumstances and constraints.

Sometimes you buck heads with the status quo, progress may seem slow, and your opponents try to slow you down but you continue to push with unshakable resolve.

We must measure political performance not by opportunistic posturing, or suddenly finding your voice in Opposition and demonstrating some first-time-ever-seen-in-all-these-years boldness but by concrete and manifest results and progressive outcomes and constituency which takes our people forward.

As the old people say talk is cheap but money buy land

What we know and cannot forget - and the empirical and verifiable facts show- is that The Party opposite in its last version less than 3 years ago proved to the Bahamian people that their agenda(if indeed they had one) lacked substance and was void of cohesive vision - even before Dorian and Covid theirs was a lackluster, disjointed, and tepid administration

The truth is most sitting across the way sat in that Cabinet and were substantive contributors to this weak result

But Now some seek to distance themselves from that dismal era - I can only imagine how Killarney feels when as Prime Minister he may have observed his ministers tripping all over him and now .. he is out there by himself -

These are the same individuals who in their sometimes inane political commentary castigate un on this side for driving in government issued vehicles and speak in disdain of ministerial travel but when they were there they were creased up in them same cars with the windows up tight- and they were flying all over the world

I am sure each of the members opposite can share interesting stories of their exotic travel in the 4 short years they were there

The Bahamian people remember – it was not that long ago

What they should talk about though is their track record

What is your track record?

The Bahamian people are very discerning

They see very clearly through the gimmicks and games and the cheap attempts to manipulate and incite negative emotions

- what they are asking is and I believe what they would like to know is where is your substance

Where was the substance as you sat in the seat

where is your substance?

We know you find Opposition hard because you told us so hopefully it is not that suffering that fuels your energies

We understand that you want to escape that hardship that you spoke of and you want to get back in government in a terrible kind of way

But where is the substance?

The country heard your long and frequent speeches and searing criticisms of our policies and stance on Grand Bahama

This is surprising to me

You were just in charge the other day

And we must be honest and say that regretfully your oversight was characterized by embarrassing debacle after debacle

It is not necessary to detail it in this debate – previous speakers have outlined many of the matters

Of particular concern though was the repeated pattern of getting swing

You got swing on the Our Lucaya hotel deal

You got swing on the Grand Bahama airport purchase

And you got swing on the Oban deal in which you were giving away hundreds of acres of sensitive crown land to fraudsters

This is Just to name a few of the mammoth failures

The sad part is when you were getting swing you carried the whole country along with you

And now you gat so much things to say right now about Grand Bahama you gat so much things to say

Giving so much advice and opinions

I have tried to stay on a narrow course in this House as I am focused and serious in my sacred undertaking but the hypocritical rhetoric and the condescending and cynical and in some cases outright nasty assaults in this House from those whose tenure has been mediocre at best is getting to be a bit much

But let me reiterate that while proverbial swords are sharpened on this side if that is the way you seek to go the nation should know we are much more interested in the agenda unfolding and the work underway daily and each minister in this House will lay out and have laid out the work that preoccupies their time how their work seeks to uproot the status quo that most of us in this country find so unsatisfactory

The enemies of progress have always been with us but we will not be deterred and with God's grace we will shift the course of this nation to a prosperous, progressive, more fair and righteous nation

In the realm of Education we have looked with honest eyes at the status quo.

We saw a country where thousands of children and young people are plummeting through the cracks of the system, we saw the hundreds of children on waiting lists to be tested and diagnosed and languishing in uncertainty, we understood that children are diverse and different but share a common objective of realizing their full potential and that a one size does not fit all.

We saw a country where thousands of children were not attending school.

We understood that the impacts of COVID 19 and the effect of prolonged isolation of children and young people, the pervasive nature of social media, depression and anxiety have created psychological disturbance in many children.

We also saw simultaneously the incredibly high performing and gifted students across the spectrum being produced in this country.

We start from the premise and it is our mantra - that every child counts

We understood that the mandate is to bring the necessary focus and support to all of our students across the board so that each child so far as is humanly possible will reach their full potential.

We believe that our educational system must produce strong, confident, ethical, creative innovative and confident young people who are able to think critically.

We see the educational experience as a space where children during their formative years will come of their own as the objectives of the system are achieved.

However, the classroom is only one piece of the puzzle admittedly it is a significant piece of the puzzle but only one piece nevertheless.

The other pieces of the puzzle which make up the holistic development of the child includes the parents and extended family support – another significant piece of the puzzle,

the wider village, mentors, NGO's, the Corporate community and all concerned contribute to the positive shaping of young lives and are pieces of the puzzle.

This is not an attempt to lecture or condescend The-research supports this including our own research done here in The Bahamas through the University of The Bahamas.

The research shows that these inputs especially that of parents exponentially increase a child's chances of success.

The main contributors to these outcomes and the primary drivers to achieve this ambitious and complex mandate are our teachers and administrators who are daily on school campuses nationwide.

They are critical stakeholders and the school campus is a microcosm of the nation's future.

How well the mission is executed on that campus and how effectively that work is enriched and extended in the home, the church and in the wider community will dictate what tomorrow looks like in The Bahamas.

Our administrators and our teachers are on the frontline of this supremely important enterprise.

In this country and it was an original commitment emanating from majority rule public school education is universal and free for all children.

This signifies the premium placed on education in this country by our forefathers and succeeding generations

But we must not objectify this critical and essential process simply as the role of the government or the jurisdiction of teachers.

All stakeholders must play their part for the effective education of our youth population and with the outcomes which we would all wish.

This is not only about the individual child - it speaks to our collective fate - we all have a vested interest.

I have always admired the contribution of teachers and educators, I had teachers too in my life who inspired me and helped to build my confidence and encourage independent thought but it was not until I assumed this office that I garnered a deeper insight into this profession.

I say without fear of contradiction that you will not find anywhere a more committed, diligent, caring, multi-talented, group of humans as is represented in this profession.

Teachers are fueled by love – they inspire, motivate, sacrifice and in many instances literally save lives.

I believe that the salaries and benefits of our nation's educators should more accurately reflect their critical role in national development.

I am confident that the salary reviews which the Prime Minister forecasted will see enhanced salaries and benefits for our administrators and teachers.

We have already seen some positive movement in this direction with recent salary and benefit increases under the recently signed industrial agreements with the teacher unions along with the introduction of a retention bonus but a more comprehensive review must take place.

We know the profession is very intense and the wellbeing of our teachers is a priority.

Their mission is a sacred one and one of great importance to the nation and to our future.

So in seeking to ensure the wellbeing of teachers in the course of the profession was being adequately addressed a survey was undertaken nationwide of public school teachers to better understand the concerns and perspectives of our teachers.



But when we received the feedback we found that while unsurprisingly remuneration is a factor, it was interesting to find that teachers were more concerned about other matters such as being appreciated and respected, about gaining greater access to professional development and advanced studies, a desire for greater support, and being provided avenues to share their views and having a voice.

After the survey we created an implementation committee to review the survey results and create an action plan.

Our motto is “you spoke, we listened”

We are responding to those concerns -

Beginning last year we have allocated funding for the teacher’s classroom preparation in the amount of \$250, a cost historically underwritten by teachers from their personal resources.

I am excited that a exclusive online portal now in the final development stages will allow teachers to provide feedback, give suggestions and share observations with the Department of Education and become more participatory in the process.

We have been in discussions with the ministry of finance for a more robust in-service award regime to allow administrators and teachers to pursue further professional development and post graduate degrees.

We have recommenced the previous dormant work to facilitate the career path for teachers.

During the 2023-2024 academic year, the Career Path Section completed the assessment of 97 candidates and have advanced recommendation of candidates for the promotion of Senior and Master Teachers in our system throughout the length and breadth of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas (i.e. Andros, Eleuthera, Exuma, Grand Bahama, Inagua, Long Island, New Providence and San Salvador). Trained Teachers from 49 of our public schools, spanning from Preschool to Senior High School, from various grade levels and disciplines were assessed.

In this academic year, 2023-2024, recommendations for successful applicants to be promoted to Senior and Master Teachers were forwarded to the Public Service Commission.

The total anticipated funding required totals two hundred, twenty-six thousand to facilitate the training and payment of assessors, printing and duplication of materials for workshops, laptops for assessors and the creation of videos for the training sessions.

To assist teachers with their classroom management in the upcoming school year we seek to hire some 100 teachers' aides in classrooms nationwide for Special Education, Pre- Primary, Pre-Vocational and Generalist Teachers.

Despite our best efforts in The Bahamas we too are impacted by the global Teacher shortage in critical areas such as Mathematics, Technical Studies, Modern Languages, Physical Education, Performing and Visual Arts and Special Education.

In answer to this the Department will engage some 319 new hires comprising teachers and guidance Counsellors and craft instructors in the shortage areas.

Additionally some 14 teachers will in December complete their Master's Degree in special Education at Barry University a programme in which the ministry partnered and will add capacity to teaching special needs children.

We are also in discussion with University of The Bahamas on a possible partnership with the university and the student teachers who are currently pursuing the Master's degree in reading.

A New teacher mentoring programme has been introduced to support new teachers which has to date successfully completed over 40 teachers.

Six self-paced courses by way of the Mabel Walker Professional Development Institute Online have been introduced.

On-going training is underway for all teachers during the February & October Professional Development days as well as the In-Service Summer Professional development period, as well as

On-Demand self-paced courses available by way of the Mabel Walker Professional Development Institute Online.

We seek to give support to our teachers through training opportunities so that they may more effectively deliver instruction with premium outcomes and hone their profession skills.

The leaders on the school campuses are our Principals and administrators and they play a critical, multidimensional role in every sphere of endeavour on the campus and are key to achieving our outcomes and targets.

In support of our school leaders the Ministry is coordinating an onboarding and mentoring programme for new school leaders and technical officers, to support them in the transition to their new roles.

On-Demand courses are being developed to provide training in key areas of their role and function as administrators through the Mabel Walker Professional Development Institute Online.

This year - Conclave 2024 of all administrators will be held scheduled for August 19th & 20th, 2024 which will engage 475 school leaders.

Last year's Conclave 2023 hosted some 430 public school administrators were trained in twenty-four (24) focus areas.

We seek to support and help strengthen our campus leaders for the execution of more effective leadership.

**The Acting Appointments & Substantive Promotions of School Administrators:** In our efforts to strengthen our school management team, individuals are being granted one (1) year acting appointments through the Public Service Commission (PSC), resulting in substantive promotions. This process is ongoing. The last group of candidates were interviewed by the Public Service Commission during the period of January to March 2023 and commenced duties in August 2023. The HR team has begun the process of submitting recommendations to complete substantive promotions for those who commenced the assumption of new duties during the month of January 2023.

It is expected that approximately 90 individuals will receive their substantive promotion letters before or during the first part of the 2024/2025 Academic Year.

Promotion and Regularization of Special Services Staff: We have commenced the promotion exercise of the employees of the Special Services Unit. These include Guidance counselors, School Psychologists, Speech Pathologists and School Attendants. Some have already received their promotion letters and it is expected that the others will be concluded early in the new Budget.

A key issue for all educators and students is the issue of Digital literacy and the emergence of artificial intelligence.

These are compelling matters on which our educational system must be on the cutting edge and in front of new trends.

We will shortly roll out a strategy to maximize the objective of digitally literate teachers and students and seek to integrate this literacy into all core subjects.

In the 21st century we can expect nothing less

The Ministry met recently with a team from International Telecommunications Union (ITU) the United Nations specialized agency responsible for matters related to information and communication technology (ICT) and URCA in seeking their guidance and technical support as we move to expand digital literacy at all levels in the public school system.

ITU has agreed this summer to facilitate online training for digital literacy for teachers as a component of the professional development offerings

The Ministry is now in advanced discussions with industry stakeholders for the acquisition of technology to facilitate this digital literacy transformation for both students and teachers

Professional learning videos of research-based instructional practices, suggested tiered activities and assessments from the curriculum document will be recorded using proficient classroom teachers.

In furtherance of these efforts and In partnership with BTC

The JUMP programme will be introduced,

This is a regional initiative aimed at creating a more digitally equitable society by providing internet access to those most in need.

This initiative directly collaborates with the Ministry of Education to empower students from low-income households to overcome barriers and realize an improved quality of life.

Through the first phase of JUMP which is two years, 5,000 families will receive subsidized internet services, with BTC and The Government covering a portion of the monthly subscription fees, while families pay a nominal monthly fee.

Through its partnership with Dell, BTC will provide without cost new, Dell laptop computers to each family, along with a comprehensive eight-week digital skills training program. The training will cover not only the child, but the entire family, teaching them how to use programs including the Microsoft office suite, how to access and utilize online Government services like My Gateway, and how to access and follow their child's progress with the Ministry of Education.

Currently, thirty-five families are experiencing the benefits of the JUMP program during the local pilot phase.

When the 2024/2025 school year begins, JUMP will be in full effect, empowering thousands of households with affordable internet access, free quality devices, and free digital literacy skills.

Madam Speaker,

I have thus far in this contribution spoken to the meaning of education to our nation

I have spoken of the critical role of our Principals, administrators and teachers who oversee and manage campuses and classrooms nationwide and our resolve to enhance the terms and benefits and the training and preparation of the profession as they deliver the critical service and help to procure the outcomes we expect and require in our student population and for the future of our nation.

I move now then to those who are at the centre of the education enterprise - our children and young people.

These are the subjects for whom tremendous resources and strategies are deployed to ensure their accelerated performance and the realization of their full potential.

They are also our hope for a new day.

Currently there are just over 38,000 thousand children attending 159 public schools nationwide.

The children in our public school system come from diverse backgrounds and differing economic and social conditions with varying and sometimes unique needs.

The role of the Ministry is to design and tailor a system of education which meets the individualized needs of our student population and produces the kind of student I spoke of previously - young people who are positively activated and who will take their rightful places in the future progress of our country.

The ideal Bahamian 21st Century graduate is one who is therefore functionally literate, possessing career or college readiness competencies and skills; thinks critically, is curious and innovative.

They communicate effectively and collaborate willingly; are adaptable and socially literate.

This graduate possesses digital and other literacies and embraces his/her role as an environmental steward.

They exhibit civic responsibility, integrity, and ethical behavior.

You will see that this student construct ultimately requires the support of the entire village as she is shaped and nurtured

The vision of the Ministry of Education and Technical and Vocational Training is to create an ideal education system that produces this ideal student

A system which promotes excellence through the provision of holistic educational experiences - to foster academic, social and emotional excellence

Every child should have the opportunity to achieve at high levels.

Every child counts

This is not only a moral imperative but is essential to economic success and societal well-being.

We, therefore, prioritize equity and access.

Every child counts

It is clear and the evidence shows that many students in our educational system have missed entirely or have significant gaps in the foundational and building blocks of literacy and numeracy; they move up from grade to grade within the system with the original gaps widening more and more along the way -

this state of affairs has its own implications as the student becomes more and more alienated from the mainstream activity and in many cases become increasingly “at risk”

In the aftermath of the pandemic and the apprehension of learning loss having affected the student population - We deployed a universal measuring tool through the Renaissance testing so as to give the Department of Education real data at the individual, school, regional and national levels.

This comprised a comprehensive reading diagnostic of students across the archipelago, the data from STAR 360 Assessment revealed that 44% of our students needed major intervention in reading and in math.

This result was cause for great concern and mandated an IMMEDIATE transformation of the public education enterprise as we address the myriad of challenges exacerbated by the impacts of Dorian and the COVID 19 Pandemic.

Our starting point then was to provide schools with Diagnostic Reports that indicate the details related to students classified as:

- 1) At/ Above Benchmark,
- 2) On Watch,
- 3) Intervention, and
- 4) URGENT Intervention.

Madam Speaker, we did not get here overnight but we are determined to reverse this dilemma - unfortunately it will also not happen overnight but we are resolute and already we are beginning to see improvements.

The data from this testing allowed for targeted interventions to be applied across the board.

One such intervention immediately implemented was a curriculum shift at the beginning of this current school year in grades 1 to 3 where instruction was concentrated primarily on literacy and numeracy for one full term.

Our research shows that almost without exception improvements were seen at every one of those grade levels in a comparison of scholastic attainment for Christmas 2022 and Christmas 2023.

Using a longitudinal analysis, in 2023 the Grade Point Average went up by 12% for students moving from grade 1 to 2 and 3% for students moving from grade 2 to 3.



All in all students in grades 1 through 3 showed improvement.

We are seeing clearly that a focus and reinforcement of literacy and numeracy skills is reaping positive results

By the end of the last term the urgent intervention group was reduced by 4%

This intentional thrust for literacy is also seen in the Ministry's decision to Extend Success Maker Licenses to more schools (teachers and students):

This Literacy & Numeracy Initiative is focused on extending the Success Maker Skills Gap Intervention programme.

This programme is designed to assist teachers in addressing and bridging the learning gaps of students across all primary grades. This initiative equips educators with the tools and strategies necessary to provide personalized support, ensuring every student can achieve foundational proficiency in literacy and numeracy. Through tailored digital interventions and continuous progress monitoring, the programme aims to enhance student learning outcomes, fostering a solid academic foundation for future educational success.

We seek to provide the necessary training to help teachers with the implementation of the programm

The ministry is also implementing the IRLY Bird Workbook Series that will be implemented in public primary schools in The Bahamas.

The workbook promotes literacy skills, critical thinking and cultural awareness among Bahamian students in the areas of STEM-Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, SEL-Social Emotional Learning and Health and Safety.

The Ministry is also Piloting the Savvas Reading Routines which is a research-supported resource that provides teachers with explicit literacy instructional guidance and academic routines. It outlines explicit, scaffolded, and differentiated instruction for each literacy component.

“The Science of Reading” which is a body of education research, supports this approach to meeting specific literacy learning loss needs.

The outcome of this pilot programme will advise future implementation methods and usage in primary public schools nationwide.

This programme will be piloted in twelve schools within the two New Providence Districts.

Additionally we have instituted a pilot project at 2 primary schools integrating the arts into the core subjects of literacy and numeracy.

The research is still underway but preliminary reports suggest progress is already being seen across the board.

It is the Ministry's intent to roll out these strategies at scale urgently once shown to be effective

The monitoring of the implementation process of The New Primary Language Arts Curriculum (Grades 1-6) in schools throughout The Commonwealth of The Bahamas entails the following:

**PUBLISHING OF A TEACHING READING GUIDELINES POLICY DOCUMENT:** A new, standardized framework for reading instruction will be released for Grades 4-6 and a revised version to strengthen the implementation of The Reading Block in grades 1-3.

**CREATING DIGITAL, ON-DEMAND INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT:** Professional learning videos of research-based instructional practices, suggested tiered activities and assessments from the curriculum document will be recorded using proficient classroom teachers which I previously alluded to.

**MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION NATIONWIDE:** Face-to-face classroom observations and post-conferences conducted by education officers will be reinstated on Family Islands, particularly on islands with no or insufficient resident education officers.

Madam Speaker,

The 2024/2025 term will entail a huge thrust in literacy which the ministry believes will continue to yield significant results for our children and young people.

On the issue of numeracy

From the perspective of Education Officers, it is concluded that far too many students do not truly understand the basic concepts of Mathematics, nor do they understand how these concepts are applicable.

Having undertaken a preliminary investigation, the Department of Education (DOE) concluded that this state of affairs is “rooted in the way Math is taught”- a likely result of the inadequate preparation of Mathematics teachers in the Public School System and also exacerbated by a shortage of mathematics teachers.

Our focus on numeracy and our resolve to ensure the Bahamian child is able to think and master mathematics has initiated a research project which is now underway.

After an RFP process The Ministry engaged Sapphire Education and Community Development Services to:

- 1) Determine the adequacy/sufficiency of the Mathematics content of teachers in relation to the expectations of the curriculum;
- 2) Assess the alignment between the Mathematics Curriculum in the schools and Mathematics content existing in the teacher preparation programs at the University of The Bahamas;
3. Diagnose the challenges to learning Mathematics as presented by students at all levels of the system;
- 4) Recommend appropriate resources to be used in the teaching – learning process; and
- 5) Recommend and develop resources which can be utilized to inform Curriculum Design and improve pre-service and in-service training for teachers.

We anticipate that this work which is already underway should be completed in-less than 12 months and that the findings of this research will assist the ministry in-creating new paradigms for greater breakthroughs for our teachers and students in mathematics teaching and learning

In light of the findings of the Renaissance testing and a review of GPA's at all schools nationally, the Ministry has determined to track the progress of students who are deemed to be at risk or perceived as "underperforming" in junior and senior high schools but the Ministry is also simultaneously bringing a keen eye and intentional support to the potentiality of the very high performing students and to closely monitor the progress of all students on each campus.

The Ministry of Education has engaged Ms. Paulene Adderley, a veteran educator for over forty years, to serve as the Academic Success Coach for 12 months in the first instance.

The Academic Success Coach will oversee and support the planning, implementation and tracking of the acceleration and remediation activities offered by all public schools.

Fifteen schools at the primary and junior and senior high levels have been identified to be a part of the remediation and acceleration initiatives and ninety students as a part of the Honours Society .

At these schools effective next September Student Success Teachers will be engaged to assist with remediation and acceleration

It is our hope that these extraordinary efforts will close gaps and fuel excellence.

Madam Speaker,

The Honours Society alluded to was created In recognition of the extraordinarily gifted students within the public school system

\* · The National Public School Honours Society (NPSHS) officially launched through the Student Development Section on 18th January 2024. The main aim of this initiative is to identify, promote and support academic excellence in students.

\*

\* · Beginning in grade ten, students who meet the criterion of a 3.50 and above grade point average during the Christmas term exam are tracked and provided with the necessary support systems (mentoring, seminars, college visits etc.) to produce even more academic gains. The intention is that 'exceptionally excellent' students will be inspired and motivated to set targets that will result in advancement placements in colleges and scholarship opportunities.

To date Ninety (90) students have been identified in twenty-nine (29) schools in The Commonwealth of The Bahamas to be inducted in the first cohort in the new school year.

Eligibility for the National Public-School Honours Society is as follows:-

\* Students must possess a 3.50 and over G.P.A.

Students must possess a minimum of three or more BGCSEs with a C grade or above at grade eleven (inclusive of Language and Math)

- Students must possess three BJC's with a 'C' grade or above (inclusive of Language and Math)
- Students must achieve a minimum SAT score of 1200 or ACT score of 25
- Students must be members of at least two or more service clubs
- Students must maintain a punctuality and attendance rate of 85% or more

The Society will bring together these students so that they are in a concentrated environment for excelling

Madam Speaker,

While we work to fill gaps in literacy and numeracy The Ministry has brought a focus to the science and STEM offerings in the public school system

For example Coding has been introduced into the curriculum including Introduction of computer coding for pre-schoolers.

A pilot programme was introduced in 3 classrooms using Kibo robotics. Each pre-school child will have the opportunity to engage in a hands-on no screen computer coding programme.

A Marine Science Virtual Reality Programme pilot program is being developed to expose our students to Marine Science through a virtual reality program.

The Ministry aims to partner with a team from Florida International University to facilitate a "train the trainer" workshop. Training will commence July 2024 in preparation for broad based implementation in the upcoming term.

The program exposes students to an interactive engagement with their local marine world that should be familiar to us as coastal inhabitants. Using preloaded special 3D headsets, students will have a “virtual reality” experience in a fun but educational way.

This pilot will incorporate two schools, one in Abaco and the other in New Providence.

### **Math Numeracy Clubs**

Math clubs play a crucial role in enhancing students' mathematical abilities and fostering a positive attitude towards the subject. These clubs will foster enhanced interactive learning through games, competitions, and collaborative projects. Students will also experience interactive and hands-on learning, which can be more engaging than traditional classroom settings. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills will be promoted by engaging students in challenging problems and puzzles. Math clubs are invaluable for fostering a deep appreciation for mathematics, developing essential skills, and providing opportunities for students to explore and excel in the subject.

### **Science STEM Clubs**

To ensure that Primary School students are given the opportunity to excel in the areas of STEM, After School and Lunchtime Science clubs will be initiated. Using the IRLY Bird series, along with hands-on application within the Science Club's curriculum, students will gain a greater appreciation for STEM as they are provided with the opportunity to engage in STEM experiments.

This term we saw many of our schools excelling in engineering and science competitions.

### **Agricultural Science**

Agricultural Science and the need for food security and sustainability are being promoted in our schools. The expansion of Shade house technology to schools in the Family Islands through Collaboration with Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources and BAMSI is a step towards reaching this goal. Shade houses were recently established at Old Bight High School and Arthur's Town Comprehensive School, Cat Island. Proposed schools include,

A. Loftus Rocker High School – Acklins

Admiral Ferguson High School – Crooked Island

North Long Island High School – Long Island

Sherlin Bootle High - Abaco

Patrick J. Bethel High – Abaco

I Thank the Minister of Agriculture for this valuable collaboration

## **Robotics**

C.R. Walker Senior high school’s Robotics programme has been expanded

The school received 30 new robots in March 2024 to add to the 15 purchased last year. The addition of the new robots will allow more students to participate.

Madam Speaker,

The Ministry is contemplating the enormous task of curriculum reform and has invited the input of UNESCO to begin the dialogue.

In advance of this, however, I am proud to say that the Bahamian History Textbook, an Indigenous Bahamian textbook compilation has been completed.

Content experts Dr. Rosanne Adderley and Dr. Michael Pateman have edited the work and since then revisions have been made.

Designs are being done by graphic artists which are being vetted. The book is being edited and proofread by Dr. Christopher Curry and Perlene Baker.

In the weeks ahead, it will be forwarded to the publishers and in schools for utilization in September of this school year.

We believe this will provide stimulating and relevant awakenings in our young people and incite greater awareness of our nationhood and the journey of our people.

## **Junkanoo**

The Ministry has been working assiduously on Junkanoo Curriculum Integration - The integration of Junkanoo in the curriculum is expected in the upcoming school year.

All curriculum section areas have given input, for example: Sciences, Modern languages, Visual Arts, Language Arts, Modern Languages and Building Trades.

It is anticipated that in the month of November, all levels from pre-primary through high school will focus on Junkanoo integration. It is also projected that another opportunity to do so is the month of April as April 15th is observed as Cultural Month.

Madam Speaker I remind you that just last December UNESCO declared Junkanoo as a world intangible cultural heritage and it is only fitting that this remarkable cultural art form should be inculcated into the consciousness of our students through the curriculum

Madam Speaker,

The name change of this Ministry under this administration was more than a simple name change: it signified the singular commitment to developing and strengthening the technical and vocational arm of this Ministry and the mandate to produce technically skilled young people who can fill critical roles in our national economy

As a means of empowerment and facilitating our students who are technically brilliant, the Department of Education through its Career Technical Education section, is seeking to provide several options for our students to gain accreditation in technical areas of study.

Some of these include certifications in Pitman and Royal School of Music for example.

Presently, we are awaiting NAECOB & Examinations and Assessment Division approvals and anticipate a collaboration that should reflect an increased number of students achieving a BHSD with either certification through either an academic or technical track.

Primary School Cluster Programme – We are planning to introduce a pilot program for primary school students to explore a technical cluster programme which provides several advantages, such as early immersion in technology, which cultivates critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

It should aid students in making informed career decisions and boost engagement through interactive, hands-on learning.



Moreover, this program aims to promote equity by ensuring all students have access to high-quality technical education, reducing the tech industry skills gap in, and preparing students for future technological developments and changes in the job market, with a head start.

Madam Speaker, this academic year

One hundred and ninety-one (191) students sat and passed the American Hotel and Lodging Association International Certifications. AHLEI is widely recognized as the permanent leader in global hospitality certifications.

In February 2017 it became part of the National Restaurant Association's Training Certification Division.

Recipients included students from five (5) schools in New Providence and 3 schools in Grand Bahama.

An international Certification Recognition Ceremony was hosted at the Tourism, Hospitality, Culinary Arts and Leisure Management (TheCalm) at Choices Restaurant on Friday May 24th, 2024. The CTE Section will double the number of entrees next year.

Madam Speaker I am particularly excited about the PolyTechnical Institute for Secondary Students

The Bahamas Polytechnic Accreditation and Training Hub or (BPATH), will be a new center of technical excellence,

It is envisaged to be an institute where high school seniors, will be afforded opportunities to access professional credentials via a tiered approach to certifications, which they can earn independently, one at a time, or as a programme, combined to satisfy a professional certification or diploma pathway.

It is envisaged that the institute will serve as a branch of Technical and Vocational Training, providing supplementary offerings to the existing high school curriculum, with the capacity to serve as a feeder pathway to both the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI), other tertiary technical training facilities or directly into industry.

Training at BPATH will afford technical CTE students exit certifications, which are industry recognized, strategically positioning them to make positive economic contributions to our nation,

and indeed the world. Additionally, it will assist with bridging learning gaps which have been exacerbated since the pandemic and the learning loss recognized by our Ministry. Finally, it will create solutions to reducing the number of work permits required for technical areas.

The curriculum is currently being developed

Madam Speaker, I believe this new polytechnic which construction is underway as we speak will prove to be an exciting addition to the public school plant and will bring an exciting new paradigm to student offerings and preparation

Madam Speaker,

All of the research shows that children who have access to a sound pre primary education excel and are more likely to access tertiary education

The goal is 100% access by 2026

Although this is an ambitious timeline significant strides have been made

· To provide support for the advancement of universal preschool, Consultant Agatha Archer has been engaged. Consultant Archer will work in collaboration with the Early Childhood Section to action policies, partnerships, professional development and advocacy.

The Ministry has expanded its Public Private Partnerships to include. Since 2021 (see attached)

In September 2024:

The Early Childhood Section will engage in an assessment of all government .preschool centres including those private centres the ministry has partnered with to ensure compliance and the delivery of high-quality childhood education.

This is a quality assurance measure

\* • Buttonwood Preschool will see expansion

\* Refurbishment of 2 classrooms at Walter Parker

\*

\* Additional Special Education pre-school class will be added at Early Childhood Development Centre

\*

\* Through the expansions the continuation of public private partnerships with MOE approved private preschools. We want to expand to include Exuma, Eleuthera and Bimini.

\* It is my hope that the push to 100% preprimary access will accelerate in the upcoming months as a matter of priority as it is directly related to overall student success

## Special Services

Madam Speaker we have brought a stronger focus to the delivery of special services

To provide a holistic approach to education by meeting the diverse needs of students, the ministry has enlisted the services of Developmental Specialist Group (DSG) to:

\* · create and train teachers to administer a universal screener to identify students who will benefit from support intervention or intensive individual instruction

\*

\* · Support the restructuring of Marjorie Davis Institute for Special Education; and

\*

\* · Support the expansion of Special Services Section; and

\* • Special Services PPP (assess neuro divergent): students who have waited on the list to be assessed will no longer have to do so. The company is generating a universal screener that will allow us to identify which learners need additional assistance in order to meet learning goals

Support the Enrichment Services Model (ESM) that will provide training, classroom set up/maintenance, personnel, supervision, initial and end-of-year progress data for some of our students

I previously mentioned the anticipated added capacity that will come from the additional 14 teachers who are in the last few months of completion of the Masters degree programme in Special Education at Barry university

We expect that with these efforts teachers will be trained during the Summer, testing commencement this September and the waiting list will be fully eliminated and all students placed as appropriate so as to receive the necessary and appropriate support

We trust that these strategies will bring about an adeptness in the Ministry to allow going forward for testing on demand so as to meet the urgency that is frequently presenting itself within the system

## **School safety**

### Program

1. Madam Speaker, I now turn my attention to the important issue of school safety. Keeping school students, teachers and staff members safe in the school environment is a fundamental duty

We realize that an important strategy in changing the current trend of more young people becoming involved in criminal behavior is to positively engage them at the school level with the goal of diverting them from a life of crime.

This is not to omit the critical role of parents

2. Over the last two (2) academic years, the Ministry in partnership with the Ministry of National Security and the Royal Bahamas Police Force, has launched the School Resource Officer Program (SRO).

The SRO program involves the deployment of specially trained police officers (SROs) at junior and senior public high schools in New Providence, Grand Bahama and the Family Islands. The program also involves a joint partnership between school administrators, security officers and the SRO who all work together to improve school safety.

3. Since the last 2 academic years, school safety has been improved as a result of the SROs work on campuses.

Although public schools will not close until the end of this week, preliminary figures indicate a decrease in school violence, stabbings, and assaults.

SROs continue to be successful in taking contraband from students including knives, and dangerous drugs. Once school officially closes in a matter of days, we will share the school safety figures for this academic year

4. At the start of the current school term, a new School Policing Support Unit was established to support the work of the SROs including conducting follow up investigations on school incidents and meeting with parents and guardians after school hours.

The team also spends time mentoring students at Program SURE, TAPS, the Simpson Penn Centre for Boys and the Willie Mae Pratt Centre for Girls.

While SROs are not currently posted at public primary schools, officers of the Support Unit make regular visits to primary schools to address any safety concerns that Principals may have and to render the appropriate support for any incidents that may occur on those campuses.

Private schools have also partnered with the School Policing Support Unit as we have seen that school violence is not isolated to public schools.

The School Policing Support Unit also assists the Ministry of Education's School Attendance Unit with their work in locating students chronically absent from school

5. Madam Speaker, I am dismayed that One of the concerning trends in school safety that we have noted during this academic year is the issue of parents or guardians coming on school campuses to challenge school staffers regarding their child's behaviour or grades.

In several of these cases, SROs had to place parents under arrest for a variety of offences including threats of death, disorderly behavior, obscene language, and assault.

These parents were subsequently placed before the courts as it should be known that we will maintain a 'zero' tolerance approach to this threat to school safety.

Another concerning trend we are addressing is the issue of students milling around business establishments near their school, especially barbershops, during school hours. In some of these cases, barbers have been found to be giving haircuts to students during regular school hours.

SROs have warned these business owners and advised them that they are in breach of the Education Act, which could potentially constitute grounds for their business license to be revoked.

I wish to admonish all business owners not to provide any products or services to school students during school hours, and support us in our efforts to ensure that our nation's youth obtain their education.

7. I wish to encourage all parents and community stakeholders of school aged children to work with us and assist us in bringing up the next generation of our nation's leaders.

9. The 2nd Chance Program is still being used as a viable diversion program for at-risk the Program involves SROs who will be investing quality time with these students and determine how best they can divert them from a life of crime. Some of these students have pending criminal charges over their heads. If they successfully complete the program, the police will exercise its discretion and consider not charging them with the initial offence, thereby giving them a 'second chance'. The next cohort of students will begin the Program on 24th June, 2024.

10. Some of the officers who are attached to the School Policing Support Unit will also be receiving additional specialized international training with the National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO) at their upcoming Annual School Safety Conference in Phoenix, Arizona this summer. Moreover, the Royal Bahamas Police Force will also be carefully selecting and certifying 30 new SROs this August under the auspices of NASRO as we move to deepen and expand the involvement of SROs in their mandate.

Madam Speaker, violence in schools is being observed globally and regionally.

I wish to thank the minister of National Security and the Commissioner of Police for collaborating with the Ministry of Education now in a second year and which has allowed for strategies to be developed and deployed in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic.

I thank Asst. Commissioner Hanna for his stellar leadership in this work

Beginning September 2024 all students will be given a Code of Conduct which will outline expected behaviors on campus and penalties for violations.

It is hope that this will aid in bringing about greater personal responsibility and help to curb negative behaviors on campus and ensure that penalties for certain behaviors will come as no surprise to the student.

The Cabinet of The Bahamas recently appointed a Cabinet sub Committee chaired by the Minister for Social Services and the member for Pinewood and including the Minister for Immigration, The Minister of State for the Environment and myself to explore the feasibility of the creation of a Boarding School essentially for boys at risk.

I am pleased to advise that that dialogue is well advanced and Cabinet has approved the recommended concept. The Ministry of Works is being asked to create the architectural designs and consultants are assisting with the programme design.

We believe that this will prove to be a powerful intervention in the lives of many of our boys

## **School Attendance**

Find every child

Madam Speaker, as you know the Attendance Unit was fortified in 2021 with the enlistment of Attendance officers both in New Providence and Grand Bahama.

This was necessitated by the specter of thousands of children not returning to school once schools reopened in January 2022.

You will recall education officials and other stakeholders took to the streets, door to door, nationwide to make the call for the return of students.

That effort remains unrelenting

Attendance Officers and school monitors conduct home visits and walk-about regularly with home visits being conducted with the assistance of School Resource Officers (SRO) once per week.

On May 29th, the Attendance Unit received a vehicle to more effectively carry out its mandate.

The fourteen school monitors in New Providence were initially placed in the Urban Renewal Centers, and were relocated to thirteen schools in April 2024. Schools included but are not limited to C H Reeves, D W Davis, R M Bailey, S C McPhee, Ridgeland Primary, Columbus Primary, and Thelma Gibson Primary.

The relocation of monitors saw an increase in referrals

In March there were 122 referrals

In April 336 referrals

The Attendance hotline was officially introduced January 15, 2024 and is proving to be a valuable tool.

A total number of calls received up to April 30, 2024 was 173 calls

January 78 calls

- February 43 calls
- March 30 calls
- April 21 calls

Our latest records indicate that school attendance has now climbed to 92% but it is still surprising how many parents do not cause for their children to attend school.

(Cases)

It is important to note that school aged children ages 5 to 16 must be enrolled in a recognized course of instruction - failure to do so is contrary to law.

If parents or guardians perceive any difficulty or barrier to getting their children into school they should reach out to the Ministry for assistance.

Children must be in school.

### **Breakfast programme**

Since the launch of the breakfast program, we have seen attendance rates rise

The NSBPP expanded to five additional schools in New Providence, adding an additional 2,197 students to the beneficiary count.

The Breakfast Programme is poised to expand to all Family Island primary schools for the 2024-2025 school year.

The Research is clear on the impact of free breakfast to students showing a strong correlation with increased attendance and higher student performance.

Madam Speaker,



## **Performing Arts**

To immediately address the need for a culturally relevant performing arts education (four strands: dance, drama, music and media arts) as well as address the long term, comprehensive teacher training and infrastructure to provide quality performing arts programming for an orange economy, and culturally competent citizens, the Ministry is preparing to enter a two-year consulting contract. To -

\* Performing Arts: Develop, promote, recognize and preserve culturally responsive National Performing Arts Standards for grades K-12. Provide Support for the establishment of tertiary degree programs in dance and drama and teacher certification tenable at the University of The Bahamas.

Apart from honing the talents of the incredibly gifted creatives in our student population - this is also a tool for social emotional learning and improved health and wellness for our students.

## **Visual Arts**

ICT - Incorporated into the Visual Arts Curriculum:

- Programming and interactive media
- Students technical skills will be further developed as they engage with cutting-edge technologies that shape our digital world

New forms of artistic expression are being explored

- Exploring Digital Art Fundamentals
- Art in Film
- Exploring Digital Art Fundamentals

The Ministry understands the essential importance of providing avenues for the artistic expression of our young people.

This also creates new opportunities for scholarship to tertiary institutions and as we speak many of our students are in universities abroad on art, dance and music scholarships.

## **Sports**

The Ministry understands the power of sport

We wish to host High School Nationals in the eight contested sporting events which are held each year.

We seek partners from the Business community, Federations and the Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Culture to ensure that our student-athletes get to perform on a national platform, highlighting their talents and further defending and developing school pride.

It is a beautiful sight and emerging from all of the sporting events are some incredibly gifted athletes

Just last week a young girl Janae Bain from CH Reeves a brilliant athletic all-rounder was awarded a scholarship to an athletic boarding school in the Wichita, Kansas United States

She is someone the nation must keep their eye on as there are so many as we speak

We recall the win by world record holder Devynne Charlton just yesterday in the women's 100mH at the USATF NYC Grand Prix,

The Ministry will engage with the Ministry of Youths Sports and Culture to develop strong, structured after school sporting programmes which will inure to the development of even more world class athletes.

Development of athletic tracks at, GHS, Eva Hilton, Huntley Christie, Patrick Bethel and Doris Johnson., D.W. Davis

Upgrade to athletic facilities at public Schools throughout the country

The Sports Unit of the Department of Education is developing the establishment of a comprehensive learning-to-swim program specifically tailored for student sailors.

This initiative aims to ensure that all students in our school system's sailing clubs are equipped with essential swimming skills, thereby increasing their participation in sailing activities.

I wish to acknowledge and thank Andy and Nancy Knowles of *Let's Swim Bahamas* for their swim programme in 8 primary schools in New Providence.

This programme is producing scores of first time swimmers.

Their input has been invaluable.

The Ministry intends to expand our swimming programme even more through a public private partnership.

We are now in dialogue with the Bahamas Swim Federation and potential donors

And an official announcement will be made in the next few days as the first groundbreaking for the construction of a swimming pool in our Pools-in-Schools initiative will be made.

Several other public primary, junior high and senior high schools are scheduled to receive swimming pools in the ensuing months.

The curriculum division is working to incorporate swimming as a core subject in the physical education curriculum.

The Pools in Schools initiative will provide us with the opportunity to have our students in a holistic swim program that teaches students an important survivor skill but also that will grow and expand to develop competitive swimmers.

## **BHSD**

In July 2022 the Cabinet of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas approved the appointment of the Bahamas High School Diploma National Review Commission (BHSDNRC) comprising distinguished educators, stakeholder unions, civil society whose primary objective was to review and assess the criteria required to obtain a BHSD.

The Commission traveled all across the country engaging in over 50 consultation meetings after which they made a series of recommendations

Based on the accepted recommendation of the BHSDNRC new criteria was implemented including the recommendation to establish Bahamas High School Diploma Unit which was established in May 2023.

\* Based on the new criteria the following outcomes were realized

Comparison of 2022 to 2023:

I am pleased to advise that In 2023 The Graduation rate **increased by 14%**.

Pending Diploma/Alternative Certifications - To help in student success and an improved graduation rate, BHSD Unit seeks to incorporate an alternative pending diploma to add an option to the general diploma.

The option requires literacy and numeracy competencies alternatives to BJC such as City and Guilds among others and to include technical subjects.

The BHSD Unit is only now awaiting approval from governing bodies, NAECOB and Examination and Assessment Division before making this a reality.

Madam Speaker,

As previously stated we understood that the COVID and Dorian experiences have taken a toll on the psychology of many of our young people.

As a result the Ministry has brought a special focus to this important issue

2. Workshop Sessions have been held

\* a) CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT SESSIONS (Critical Incident Consulting Firm)

\*

Workshops are to be provided to assist School Administrators and teachers to manage violence and crisis which occur on school campus. Program Highlights will include;

Psychological crisis and psychological crisis intervention

Evidence based practice

Basic crisis communication technique

Suicide intervention

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) etc.

\* b) TRAINING of Security Officers assigned to school campus

\*

The Ministry will Provide (six weeks) training which will outline the vital role of Security Officers on School Campus in combating school violence.

\* c) TRAINING for Teachers' Aides

Madam Speaker,

### **Review of school uniforms**

The ministry has appointed a committee which will shortly commence its deliberations to review and advise on modification of school uniforms during the hotter temperatures in the school year so as to ensure greater comfort.

We expect their work to be completed expeditiously so as to allow sufficient time and preparation for the new proposed designs and consultation with parents and all stakeholders.

Additionally we will begin consultations with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Energy to procure cost efficient solutions for cooling classrooms nationwide during summer months.

The Ministry has created a first time ever Parent Unit which seeks to enhance and grow Parental Engagement.

An online portal is being developed to allow exclusively for parents to interact directly with the Ministry and at appropriate times monitor their children's progress.

We have held several virtual meetings with hundreds of parents attending at a time to discuss a variety of matters of concern including parenting and most recently preparation for GLAT and national exams.

Madam Speaker,

We seek to incentivize a greater number of our graduates attending tertiary institutions.

One such institution is our very own

### **THE UNIVERSITY OF THE BAHAMAS**

- This year, The University of The Bahamas celebrates its 50th anniversary in as the nation celebrates its fiftieth year of Independence.

- The University of The Bahamas celebrated its most recent 654 graduates at its commencement exercises and awarded an honorary doctorate to His Excellency Gerry Deveaux, Bahamian songwriter / producer, fashion style innovator and creative director, globally famous for his music and creative style.

Dr. Deveaux delivered an inspirational message to UB graduates, a message of pride in Bahamian excellence, a message of the importance of determination, courage, resilience, and kindness.

- The 2024-2025 University of The Bahamas budget is designed to meet the objectives in its Strategic Vision as it prepares for its submission for national accreditation from the National Accreditation and Equivalency Council of The Bahamas (NAECOB) and for international candidacy for accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC).

- UB's Strategic Vision is framed within the following pillars:

- Expanding Excellence
- Community and Economic Impact
- Supporting Student Success
- International Outlook
- Research and Innovation
- Institutional Leadership Growth

- The \$12M allocation provided will allow UB to start to address

1. Expansion across the academic areas,
2. Educational expenses,
3. Maintenance expenses
4. Capital expenses to facilitate broad campus improvements and start to create Sustainable maintenance and refurbishment planning
5. Technology/equipment upgrades including an IT network upgrade
6. Upgrades to campus security infrastructure

## **Scholarships Division**

Post-secondary educational attainment and success is integral to producing a prosperous nation and a globally competitive citizenry. The Scholarship and Educational Loan Division engaged in a public relations campaign year-round to raise awareness of the government's scholarship offerings.

The information of scholarship offerings will continue to be released through:

- Live-streamed information forums
- Virtual and face to face information sessions
- School visits
- Youth organization and civic organization meetings
- Billboards
- Pamphlets
- bookmarks
- Signs
- Commercials

The National Scholarship Advisory Committee has made a concerted effort to focus more on granting scholarships that align with the Government's career and national development goals, awarding 665 new scholarships during the 2023/2024 scholarship cycle.

We anticipate an increase in the number of qualified public school students vying for and awarded scholarships.

The Public-School Scholarship Programme (PSSP) was launched in 2014 to assist deserving high school graduates of the public school system with the access and opportunity to pursue a postsecondary education. The Programme offers both Academic and Technical Scholarship Pathways. To this end, we have enlisted a new Public-School Scholarship Programme (PSSP) Consultant and a guidance counselor to assist with the coordination of the Public School Scholarship Programme (PSSP) to provide a wide variety of college and career planning, and admissions guidance, to public high school students.

Through the efforts of the Programme, the Ministry partners with International Colleges and Universities in the United States and Canada to decrease the overall cost of attendance for Bahamian Public High School graduates to obtain a college education abroad.

Applicants must meet the program's minimum scholarship criteria and participate in an interview process with a family member /guardian.

Budget 2024-2025

## 1. Importance of Trades Education

Madam Speaker you would be aware that applied education and polytechnic institutions have gained a considerable reputation vis-à-vis traditional research universities. Governments have realized that the invention and engineering of new technologies do not boost the national economy unless complemented by a strong workforce that builds and maintains the infrastructure. Technical vocational education and training (TVET) is a sine qua non, especially for emerging economies, because it creates the foundation for development and attracts investments from global industries.

In this regard, the value proposition in BTVI actively pursuing high-quality technical vocational training and recognized national and global accreditation, grounded by internationally recognized certifications, is clear. Realization of such a proposition will allow employers to hire Bahamian graduates rather than import labour. It will encourage Bahamians to stay in The Bahamas and contribute towards increased national economic independence. Decisive investment will generate self-sustaining momentum as industry will recognize BTVI as a trusted and reliable training partner for work-ready graduates and on-going professional development. It will also make BTVI a desirable partner for international peer institutions to share programmes and credentials and exchange faculty and students. All of this will create a vibrant engine to power a diversifying and growing Bahamian industry.

BTVI began a revision of its Strategic Plan in 2020, completing the process in 2023, and is on the precipice of launching its new five-year strategy, charting a Course for Success.

It is regarding the above that the following strategic priorities are highlighted:

- Institution-wide accreditation candidacy - Submission of the Candidacy Application to the National Accreditation and Equivalency Council of The Bahamas and Council for Occupational Education (COE) – July 2024. Anticipated site visit by COE in August 2024, with candidacy decision by COE in September 2024. Assuming the candidacy application is successful, the full accreditation process begins, and the institution must satisfy full requirements by December 2025.



- Master Plan for the New Providence Campus – There is an urgent need to move this goal forward not only due to the state of the present campus but also in pursuit of national and international accreditation and the ability to offer the best possible training, including certification. This is a crucial metric in readiness for a site visit in August 2024 – Candidacy Application – BUDGET APPORTIONMENTS –3111209 - \$4,208,233 (an increase of \$2.2M)

- Expansion of Access

In addition to serving existing students, BTVI continues to focus on increasing student registration and completion numbers. The Institute continues to expand its capacity to develop and deploy innovative services for students and partners by adopting work-based learning, apprenticeship, and career guidance to anticipate the changing needs of the labour market, communities, and individuals.

These efforts have included expansion into the Family Island Footprint/Facilities. Family Island sites are at the advanced stages of renovation—Eleuthera was completed (April 2024), Exuma will be completed this month (June 2024), and Abaco and Grand Bahama will be completed by August 2024.

- Establishment of an inventory and replacement plan for industry-standard tools, equipment and, media and learning resources

Use of current technologies and exposure to industry standards (software and devices to support construction and mechanical trades, salon management and garment factory setting, etc.; assistive technologies; examinations and assessment tools to ensure integrity; new programmes such as robotics, etc.); a replacement plan for tools and equipment

In summary, the BTVI budgetary allocations are intended to provide for the financial requirements for BTVI to build and ultimately demonstrate

- Its capacity and to ensure staffing of administrative and instructional needs;
- Responsible financial and facilities management; and
- Support for the institution’s programmes and services

Madam Speaker, there are a number of what I will call vexing Human Resource matters in the Ministry of Education which are compounded by antiquated systems and too many manual processes all of which we are expectant will be resolved by the implementation of the Oracle System which will digitize operations and we pray create greater efficiencies

**Appointment to the Permanent and Pensionable Establishment of Miscellaneous Staff appointed on Contract and temporary month to month terms:** In collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and the Public Service, we are continuing with our efforts to bring financial relief to this group of employees. Those who were successfully transitioned from contract status to temporary month and appointed to the Permanent and pensionable establishment can now benefit from establishing loans from lending institutions for homes, tuitions etc. We are hopeful to accomplish another significant amount by the end of this current budget and complete the process in the upcoming budget for individuals who are eligible to become permanent employees of the Government.

We currently have some 214 recommendations for appointment to the Permanent and Pensionable Establishment under consideration. This process will also include the 225 former National Job Creation Skills Enhancement Program (NJCSEP) participants were appointed on Temporary month-to-month terms by the Ministry of the Public Service in June, 2020, and assigned to The Ministry of Education. As previously stated, their permanent and pensionable status along with the recent increase in minimum wage bring essential value to their lives.

**School Board Employees, Library personnel & Weekly Paid Employees:** The regularization of school board employees, library personnel and weekly paid employees remains a critical commitment for this Ministry as many are geared to retire or die without benefits after working all of their adult years within our schools and libraries, if we do not take action now. As stated earlier, there are more than 200 persons working within the school system via the School Boards as janitresses, yardmen and security assistants. Additionally, another 52 individuals are currently working in our public libraries (outside the Public Service).

We have begun to collect the requisite documents to make the appropriate recommendations to accomplish this goal. We acknowledge that it will take significant funding in our upcoming Budget to carry out this initiative on a phase basis.

**Promotion of Security Personnel:** The promotion exercise of security personnel is also underway and is expected to be continued during this Budget Year. Initially, Seventy (70) security personnel were recommended to be promoted to the next level and some are being recommended for two promotions based on current policy. A second exercise will begin in the new Budget.

**Promotion of Janitresses:** This Budget Year we hope to also address the absence of promotions of our support staff. A recent look on our pay sheet revealed that we have some 686 employees who all have the responsibility of ensuring that we all work and play in a clean sanitized environment but are being overlooked for promotions. Many were hired for more than twenty years without a single advancement. This is a critical issue for us.

**Completion of Career Paths:** We have commenced discussions with the Ministry of Labour and the Public Service in bringing completion to the career paths for School Psychologists and Librarians. We anticipate that the processes will conclude during the new Budget Year.

**Service Wide Promotion Exercise:** We congratulate our more than 250 clerical and administrative officers who were successful in the Service Wide Promotion Exercise. We will continue to do our part to ensure that all of our employees receive the recognition they deserve for their commitment, diligence and hard work that keep this Ministry responsive and progressive.

#### E. Uniforms for Security Staff

The ministry in conjunction with the BPSU have agreed to a number of improvements including

#### F. Regularization and Promotion Of Officers

During the last fiscal period, attention was given to completing an audit of the personnel within the Security Division. This audit revealed that there were no promotions within the Division for the past thirty (30) years, and there are officers who have done over eighteen years (18) of service but are still not permanent and pensionable. We note that recommendations for promotions have been made and if approved, these deserving officers will be promoted and receive financial benefits as it is deemed practical for the entire Public Service. During the 2023/2024 budget, the Ministry of Education Human Resources Department and the Public Service Commission have done a commendable job in ensuring that over 100 officers have received their permanent and pensionable letters confirming their status. It must also be highlighted that some officers who were considered School Board Officers have also been made permanent and pensionable.

Determine if they are roadworthy.

#### H. Communication

#### G. Training

## Infrastructure

Minister the budget for the 2024-25 fiscal period will seek to address the following:

**A. Repairs to the decaying physical plants in the system, the majority are in excess of 40 years old. There are structural, plumbing and electrical concerns.**

**B. Proposed Extension Projects:**

Phase 3 redevelopment at GHS, inclusive of an athletic track and swimming pool.

Classroom block extension at Patrick Bethel High school.

Classroom block extension at Arthurs Town Comprehensive School.

Classroom block extension at Emma Cooper primary school.

Classroom block extension at Coopers Town primary.

Six classroom block at Harbour Island All Age School.

Renovations to the MOE warehouse storage facility.

Extension to the Examination and Assessment building.

Construction of a covered pavilion at Central Andros High school. And Palmdale Primary School

Construction of a covered pavilion with changing rooms at D W Davis Jr. High school.

**C. New Schools:**

Completion of the following schools: Staniel Cay All Age, Holmes Rock Jr. High and Lowe Sound

CR Walker lab

Primary. McClain's Town

Construction of San Salvador High, George Town primary and Inagua All Age.

Construction of the Polytechnic Accreditation and Training Hub.

Construction of the East Grand Bahama Comprehensive School.

This past fiscal period, huge amount of funds were spent on:

Uriah McPhee primary. Structural and plumbing problems.

GHS, phase 2 redevelopment.

Woodcock primary, phase one redevelopment.

RMB pavilion

Since taking office some \$50 million has been expended in redeveloping and repairing schools nationwide

Madam Speaker, our goal is to build strong, articulate, thinking young people who see their external reality as critical to their own reality.

On 15th March 2024 thousands of young people from Pre Primary to Grade 12 from every public school across the nation and from independent schools assembled in solidarity protesting violence in this country and advocating for peace.

After the March rallies were held across the country and only the voices of young people could be heard as they made salient, compelling and powerful presentations on the issue of violence in their country.

We believe in our young people and our efforts are aimed at producing articulate and thinking young people who will excel beyond our wildest imagination.

This event proves that the nation is well on the way to producing a youth population which meets that criteria

The final issue I wish to speak to is the development of a National Museum which work is now underway

**Committee**

**National museum**

In closing madam speaker -

We know the importance of the educational experience as preparation of our young people either for the furthest stage of education or in preparation for careers and the workforce

We know of its importance to assuring a life of dignity for emerging generations

We know of its direct correlation to the qualitative state of our national development

This is why we must as a first step reinforce the fundamentals of literacy and numeracy as our young people should not leave the educational system fundamentally disadvantaged

But we also want them to possess critical thinking skills, possess emotional intelligence and be equipped to compete with anyone, anywhere in anything on the global stage

We must give support to children at risk and encourage high-performing students to accelerate into their boundless potential

We must engage in a comprehensive

and strategic design of curriculum to respect student diversity and emphasize the importance of extracurricular activities, to recognize the power of the human spirit and to believe in the Bahamian child

We have Sought to be more intentional in exam preparation as a result during this period many of the extracurricular activities were curbed

The Ministry provided online revision classes in core subject areas and individual schools provided extra classes during lunch time and after school

in preparation for GLAT a committee was formed to review prior results over a ten-year period and to devise strategies that provided for greater communication with classroom teachers including those who taught the cohort being tested and those in the succeeding grade to ensure tracking , appropriate interventions and continuity of the monitoring process

We have determined that policy must be based on research and best practices and empirical data compiled and analyzed to form the basis of decision making and to monitor for quality assurance of implemented policies.

In this regard the ministry has already engaged a data analyst and intends to engage a statistician full-time as we build our research division we are also in search of an Education research leader to oversee the entire regime.

I have been told that in the field of education the impacts of reform will take years to fully manifest.

I pray that as we move forward the incremental improvements we are seeing increase and are sustained.

I must thank the Ministry of Education team

I trust my outline of some of the work underway demonstrates how incredibly hard everyone is working - teachers, administrators, district superintendents, the team at Headquarters and leadership all over the nation

Our HR, Accounts, Physical Plant and Procurement divisions

I thank the Permanent Secretary who leads the charge and the newly confirmed Director of Education, our support staff at all levels

I thank the stakeholder unions and parents all over the nation

The volume and quality of work being undertaken simultaneously is phenomenal and demonstrative of a culture of excellence and dedication.

I am proud to say that progress is being made but we still have a very long way to go,

The nation should be proud.