



Ministerial Statement
To The House of Assembly

By

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Minister of Education

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Middle School Transformation Update

Friday June 14th, 2015

Mr. Speaker,

The highest priority of the Ministry and Department of Education is to raise achievement and learning outcomes for all students in the Bermuda Public School System. And, as expressed previously by this Government, nowhere in our education system are the concerns of parents, educators and the larger community, greater, than at the middle school level.

During the 2014/2015 school year, following an audit of middle schools, the Department of Education undertook an ambitious plan to implement a ten point transformation plan for all five of our middle schools. The following ten key actions were developed as part of the transformation plan:

- i. Develop a 21st century vision for middle school education;
- ii. Provide school leadership teams with specific training to lead school improvement;

- iii. Provide common times and opportunities for student learning, intervention, teaming and advocacy;
- iv. Utilize a common framework to ensure effective teaching across all schools and subjects;
- v. Remove ability tracking;
- vi. Provide focused professional development to all teachers and leaders;
- vii. Ensure all students have academic interventions if they fail classes;
- viii. Establish a mandatory standard which clearly defines readiness for and transition out of middle school;
- ix. Establish comprehensive behavior intervention programs in every middle school; and
- x. Raise the qualification standard for all middle school teachers within three years.

Mr. Speaker,

The Middle School Transformation Plan was developed to improve the quality of teaching and learning at the middle school level and to increase public confidence in our middle schools. While the improvements are a continuous work in progress, there is much to celebrate about the improvements made throughout the 2014-15 school year. To date, five of the ten key actions have been completed, four are continuing and the last one to raise standards of teacher qualifications is still under development, and will be implemented over time.

Mr. Speaker,

Let me now share with the members of this Honourable House, some of the key actions which deserve celebration. In June of last year, the Department of Education partnered with Consultants NCS Pearson to provide the first phase of

training for principals and their leadership teams which culminated in the creation of a new vision for middle schools. That vision is as follows:

We see middle schools as first class centers of learning, where everyone is held to high standards for quality teaching and leadership. In our schools students are challenged to inquire, ask critical questions and become empowered, caring citizens. In every classroom, every day, we envision students who are actively engaged and challenged, where all students experience positive relationships and receive support when needed.

Mr. Speaker,

In the second phase of professional development training, which was launched in September 2014, middle school leaders and other middle school teachers were oriented to the Middle School Transformation Plan and received extensive training between September and March of 2015. Each middle school was given 30-, 60-, and 90-day goals to guide the improvement work in their schools. Observations, walkthroughs, and coaching sessions with teachers and leaders were held to assess understanding of the transformation plan and what was required to ensure success. Additionally, checkpoint progress reports were completed and disseminated to leaders in September and May.

Mr. Speaker,

This phase of work has been the most comprehensive of the transformation plan so far changing the look, sound and feel of everyday classroom experiences for our students has been the priority.

Based on the March checkpoint report on teaching and learning, middle schools showed gains in four components of instruction (instructional boards, rituals and routines, formative assessment and 3-part lessons) ranging from +16% to +39% between September and March.

- i. Firstly, we introduced instructional boards into all middle schools. So in every middle school classroom you will see a posting of the purpose and outline of learning that will take place. From September to March of 2015 the number of classrooms with full implementation grew by 25%.
- ii. The second area was in the area of rituals and routines. This meant ensuring that all classrooms established clear routines and procedures for learning so that students know exactly what to do each day in order to be successful. By March 2015, the number of classrooms effectively doing this grew by 16%.
- iii. **Mr. Speaker**, a third area was formative assessment. This involves teachers constantly assessing how much their students know before, during and after the learning experience. The number of classrooms utilizing effective formative assessment practices increased by 17% over the 7-month period.
- iv. The last goal of improving classroom teaching, centered on implementing a teaching framework that provides a structure for every lesson. In this structure, there are clear opportunities for students to practice and apply their learning for every lesson, and opportunities for teachers to engage students with rigorous tasks and questioning. Classrooms with full implementation of that framework increased by 39% over the course of the school year.

Mr. Speaker,

Transformation efforts also focused on decreasing the number of students who were failing throughout the year and implementing proven interventions for all

students who need it. I am pleased to report that 7 of the 12 targeted subject areas have shown a decline in the percent of students who have failed at the middle school level as of April 15th , 2015. To state positively, more and more of our middle school students are passing and showing deeper knowledge of their subject areas.

Mr. Speaker,

We culminated the successes of our first year of middle school transformation with a Middle School Expo. This was held last week Thursday at the Cedarbridge Academy. It was a fantastic opportunity for middle school staff and students to highlight their accomplishments with comprehensive exhibits of student work and a performance showcase filled with all areas of the performance arts. I am pleased to report that this event was a resounding success. I encourage everyone to make an effort to attend next year which promises to be even bigger and better.

Mr. Speaker,

As part of the Department of Education's commitment to continuous improvement, just as it is important to share our progress, it is also useful to share the challenges. As we continue with middle school transformation, these include:

- i. Ensuring that the improvements made over the last school year are sustained as we move forward and over time;
- ii. Continuing to monitor and provide professional development for teachers and leadership teams with a focus on effective teaching;
- iii. Implementing proven interventions in mathematics, as has been the case in literacy; and,

- iv. The need to fine-tune class schedules so that schools have adequate time for the arts and other comprehensive offerings, as well as interventions.

Mr. Speaker,

During the next school year, parents will be regularly updated on the progress of the Middle School Transformation Plan. Their questions, concerns and support will help to ensure that middle schools and the Department are held accountable for carrying out their assigned roles and responsibilities to make this Plan a success. Our students are first and represent our most precious resource. As such, this requires that the Bermuda Public School System is very intentional about its vision - *to ensure that all children receive a first class education based on global standards where they can reach their highest potential.*

Mr. Speaker

In closing, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to principals, teachers, students, staff at the Department of Education, the greater community, and of course the parents of our middle school students who have continued to press for improvements in our schools.

Thank You **Mr. Speaker**