



Government of Bermuda
Ministry of Education

To the House of Assembly
By
The Hon. R. Wayne Scott, JP, MP
Minister of Education

Ministerial Statement

19th Conference of the Commonwealth Education Ministers

Friday June 26th, 2015

Mr. Speaker,

I rise this morning to inform the Honourable Members of this House of discussions held at the 19th Conference of the Commonwealth Education Ministers (CEEM) held from June 22nd to June 26th 2015 in the Bahamas. The event was hosted by the Hon. Jerome K. Fitzgerald, M.P., Minister of Education, Science and Technology for the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. I was accompanied to this conference by Dr. Freddie Evans, the Acting Commissioner of Education.

Mr. Speaker,

I will share my observations and takeaways resulting from presentations, discussions and meetings that we attended, participated in and contributed to during the course of this week. The Conference of the Commonwealth Education Ministers (CEEM) brought together Ministers of Education, senior officials, private sector stakeholders, technical experts, teachers and students to identify

challenges and decide on policies and programmes that support countries in building effective education systems.

The theme of the conference "*Quality Education for Equitable Development: Performance, Paths and Productivity*" reflects the Commonwealth Secretariat's post-2015 *development framework for education*, and echoes the international focus on educational goals that promote access, quality, and, equity and skills for employability which can produce measureable results.

Mr. Speaker,

I will highlight three main areas of discussions that I believe will be of interest to my Honourable colleagues and the people of Bermuda. These are:

1. Similarities with Small Island Developing States or (SIDS);
2. Capacity building in the Education System; and,
3. Transformation and sustainability in Education

Mr. Speaker,

I had the pleasure of meeting with Ministers and representatives from the Commonwealth Small Island Developing States (SIDS), who share common characteristics with its member states, including challenges experienced by Bermuda. SIDS have their own unique issues which are not just scaled-down versions of the issues experienced by larger states. In multiple sessions of the conference there was a reoccurring concern for SIDS that focused on: "Living with smallness of size". These discussions included determining the appropriate school size and the specific class sizes for each school system, in order to be effective.

Mr. Speaker,

The SIDS representative countries are making efforts to address how to effectively deliver education efficiently. In some small states, schools had been closed, classes were condensed and class size increased. The host country, Bahamas not only closed schools, but made a strategic decision to convert one of its closed schools into a professional development institution, for providing ongoing professional development to support its teachers and educators in the school system.

Mr. Speaker,

The second area of discussion focused on capacity building in the education system. A clear message was sent in that SIDS, as well as all Commonwealth countries must endeavour to leverage their best resource, its people, through both academic and technical education. It was mutually agreed throughout the conference that advancements in education must include advancements in teaching and to engage, support, develop and listen to teaching staff.

Mr. Speaker,

The Ministry of Education has certainly taken steps in this direction. During the past fiscal year, this Government invested in the professional development of our educators with the objective to build the capacity of teachers. The System Improvement Plan for the Bermuda Public School System successfully launched and implemented the Middle School Transformation Plan, and the National Strategies in Mathematics and Literacy.

The purpose was to improving instruction in literacy and numeracy; equip teachers with key teaching tools and encourage engagement and performance focused directly on student learning.

Mr. Speaker,

The third area of discussion at the conference that I would like to share focused on transformation and sustainability in the education system. There was much exchange during meetings from representatives on working through strategic plans to effectively transform, diversify or expand their respective school systems. A number of similar themes that surfaced repeatedly included: developing strategic goals and setting time frames; using data and publishing data to promote accountability; sharing goals and expectations; investing in visual and performing arts to give students the opportunity of performance and authentic assessment. Above all, the importance of recognizing that schools are the agents for change to shape a country's present and future paths.

Mr. Speaker,

We were pleased to discover that some of the strategic initiatives that the Ministry of Education is currently focusing on were shared as critical factors for successful transformation and sustainability in education systems. Increasing the levels of student achievement; reducing gaps in student achievement, and increasing public confidence in public education were amongst these factors. Similarly, emphasis was placed on the delivery of quality education for our young learners, early childhood and preschool levels. Early Childhood Education is one of the priorities for our public school system during the next school year. Finally, to accelerate the transformation and ensure global competitiveness education systems must use more technology in the classroom, which parenthetically supports efficiencies in the future.

Mr. Speaker,

In closing, participating in the 19th Conference of the Commonwealth Education Ministers proved fruitful and certainly provided a means to network and share educational strategies and policies. The Acting Commissioner and I took every opportunity to meet, exchange ideas and engage in dialogue with Ministers and senior officials from countries in the Commonwealth community. We left the conference both encouraged and challenged to continue raising the quality and delivery of education here in Bermuda, for the success of our students who are always our first priority.

Thank You, **Mr. Speaker**