

STATEMENT TO THE SENATE ON THE NATIONAL MODEL FOR EDUCATION IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO (Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary)

Mr. Speaker,

It is my pleasure today to inform this Honourable House that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has approved a National Model for Education in Trinidad and Tobago 2007- 2015.

Over the past five years, the Ministry of Education has been able to implement the recommendations of the White Paper on Education 1993-2003, as well as address current challenges and needs and in so doing, change the landscape of our education system.

The National Model incorporates these changes and sets the compass for the journey to 2015 by creating a seamless system of quality education in keeping with the Vision 2020 mandate for education.

The Ministry of Education has developed two separate documents setting standards for the operation of all schools and standards to guide the thrust towards quality education for all.

In order to achieve this goal, The Ministry of Education, on behalf of the Government, recently signed an agreement with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) for assistance with the establishment of our quality assurance unit.

During the period 2002-2006, the Government's approach to educational planning and development was based on:-

- (a) The Implementation Plan in the White Paper 1993-2003
- (b) Current and projected needs
- (c) The Millennium goals and Vision 2020.

Our approach to educational planning and development has been:-

- a) Research driven
- b) Holistic in nature - encompassing the early childhood, primary and secondary sectors and
- c) Supportive of adult and lifelong learning.

Consequently, we have been able over the last five years to create a National Model for Education that now provides for:-

- 2 years of early childhood care and education
- 7 years of primary schooling
- 5 years of secondary schooling and where available an additional 2 years at the Sixth Form level. A total of 14-16 years of formal education for every citizen, which brings Trinidad and Tobago on par with countries in the developed world.

The **intention** of the National Model is three fold:

Firstly, it addresses social cohesiveness through the creation of an education system which serves as a unifying force by its promotion of:-

- Good citizenship and democracy
- Human capital development through providing a blend of academics, physical education and The Arts and Technology Education
- Patriotism, Nationalism and respect for law and order
- Appreciation of diversity, through the transmission of culture and values that leads to respect for each of the multifaceted strands that make up our Nation

Secondly, the intention of the National Model is to produce innovative and caring citizens with appropriate labour skills and attitudes in keeping with the mandate envisioned in national planning to the year 2020 and

Thirdly, the National Model addresses the major challenges facing education in Trinidad and Tobago today such as:-

- School management
- Issues of equity and inclusiveness
- Behavioural issues of staff and students that affect quality education and
- Relations with denominational boards and stakeholders.

Mr. Speaker, one may therefore ask:

What is the National Model?

The National Model for Education is a framework for the education system for 2007-2015. It is designed to give life to the intentions I have just outlined by:-

1. Ensuring that there is a common core of programmes within the new national curriculum, which all students will pursue regardless of group or type of school. But, beyond this core of programmes, the national model provides for a comprehensive range of subjects, including both general and technical/vocational subjects that satisfy the various aptitudes, interests and ambitions of our students, to enable them to fulfill their economic, civic and social roles.
2. Providing adequate opportunity for appropriate assessments and examinations for all students, so that on leaving school, they are certified and provided with a transcript that indicates their level of achievement and potential to inform prospective employers or providers of further education and training.
3. Implementing a wide ranging series of new policies that support the changes towards school based management, inclusiveness, behavioral issues and relations with denominational boards.

Mr. Speaker, having heard this, one may also ask: How then, is the National Model different from what we already know and understand about education?

The difference lies in the **major shifts** that the National Model makes to education in Trinidad and Tobago.

The first significant shift reflected in the National Model, is the **shift** to **School Based Management**. The National Model puts the locus of school management in the school and its community.

This shift is reflected in the following ways:-

- 1) **Administration** – a school based system that strengthens decision making at the school level and expands the career path of teachers with the introduction of Senior teachers, Heads and Deans, incorporating them into the management of the school
- 2) **Curriculum delivery and instruction** now has wider possibilities for teachers through the system of Master Teachers, Mentor Teachers and Curriculum Developers
- 3) **A strong emphasis on Community Involvement** – through the establishment of Local School Boards. These Boards provide the flexibility that a school management committee needs to develop meaningful community partners to improve school life. The involvement of the community is being fostered through promoting:-
 - (i) The institutionalisation of a practice of teachers meeting parents on a one-to-one basis
 - (ii) The establishment of Parent Teacher Associations in all schools
 - (iii) The establishment of Local School Boards
 - (iv) The participation of the National Parent Teacher’s Association and the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers’ Union (TTUTA) in the planning and implementation of all Government education programmes carried out by the Ministry of Education
 - (v) The inclusion in the school calendar of _____ days for visits by parent
 - (vi) The development of community _____ programmes such as Open Days, Sports Days and other related activities that enable the school to play a pivotal role in the creation of a learning community in which there is positive feedback between school and its environs.

The National Model for Education therefore brings a new culture of management for schools by empowering, restructuring and re - culturing of our schools so that every aspect of school operations is located within the sphere of operations of each individual school’s community.

The National Model for Education gives the school community of students, teachers, principal, parents, and other critical stakeholders a voice on issues related to:-

Curriculum
Instruction
Assessment
Governance and management
Parent and community involvement

This **major shift** in school governance and management has been achieved through the involvement of principals, teachers, students and parents and the Restructuring and Decentralisation Unit of the Ministry of Education continues to develop this activity.

Another major **shift** that the National Model 2007-2015 makes to our education system is an increased emphasis on ***Inclusiveness and Equity***. The National Model makes provisions for mainstreaming challenged and gifted students with a focus on student-centered education supported by:-

- Appropriate screening and diagnosis
- Provision of physical facilities
- Equipment and effective curriculum delivery mechanisms for the challenged as well as the gifted students in all schools.

This shift towards greater inclusiveness is supported mainly through:-

- (a) An expanded Student Support Services Division and its re-organised Special Education Unit
- (b) A strong partnership with the Ministry of Health for diagnostic services
- (c) The establishment for the first time of an Educational Facilities Company charged with the responsibility of constructing and upgrading the physical infrastructure in the education system.

A third major **shift** incorporated in the National Model is the emphasis on improving student behaviour to strengthen the security and stability of our schools and by extension our communities and our country. Some of the elements in the National Model that support this shift are:-

- A special component in the Social Studies and History curricula on **DIVERSITY**
- A special **PEACE PROMOTION** programme, which deals with conflict resolution, self- esteem and other related initiatives and
- For the first time the presence of school psychologists and school social workers in our education system can be found within the Student Support Services Division.

Perhaps the most far reaching implications of the National Model are the steps that must be taken to maintain harmonious relationships with our valued partners in education, especially the representative bodies for our staff and teachers and the denominational boards of education.

The Ministry of Education consults with the denominational boards and its other stakeholders on a number of different levels through ongoing and regular dialogue.

This has resulted in very positive outcomes on the policy changes made over the last five years that are now incorporated into the National Model. These changes are reflected in:-

- Curriculum and curriculum implementation
- Formalisation of the early childhood care and education sector
- Student Learning, Assessment, Testing and Examinations
- Physical facilities
- Management and Leadership and Teacher Performance
- Staffing and
- School security

As the Ministry of Education continues to work with the denominational boards, the Government is aware of the fact that more than 70% of primary schools in Trinidad and Tobago are denominational schools.

The Government is also acutely aware of the sensitive history of Church-State relations in our education system. We remain committed to upholding the Concordat that since 1960 set out the guiding principles regarding the right of the Church to its property and the affairs of its schools. However, as we move forward to upgrade the primary level, preliminary research shows that:-

- In some instances the robust communities that many denominational primary schools once served have dwindled
- In other instances, the existing denominational primary school is sometimes on land size that is inadequate for present day standards required for curriculum delivery and
- In some cases the religious persuasion of the majority of staff and students in some of these denominational primary schools, no longer reflects the particular religious persuasion of its school board.

The primary school level therefore requires us to engage not only the denominational boards, but also other stakeholders in education: -

- The National Parent Teachers' Association
- The Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association
- The Association of Principals of Primary schools and
- Representatives of school communities in the interest of all students to better equip them for the demands of the 21st Century.

The National Model clearly sets out the guidelines for each level of the education system – early childhood, primary and secondary – outlining the requirements to ensure effective social and cognitive development of our young citizens.

It is estimated that the Government spends approximately \$10,000.00 per year per primary pupil and \$14,000.00 per annum for each student at the secondary level, while the estimated cost for the construction programme to build, upgrade, furnish and equip ECCE centres, primary and secondary schools over a nine year period (2007 – 2015) is two billion dollars (TT\$2b.)

For this investment, it is anticipated that by 2015, early childhood pupils will be better prepared to benefit from primary schooling and that students at both primary and secondary levels will be able to:

- Read proficiently upon leaving school and also be sufficiently equipped with the numeracy skills so as to cope with the demands of continuing education and the workplace
- Think analytically and critically
- Be scientifically and technologically oriented
- Display enquiring and innovative tendencies
- Appreciate our rich diversity and demonstrate qualities of tolerance, good citizenship, with a sense of discipline, order and love for country.

Moreover, our schools will be staffed by teachers recruited from a pool of professionally qualified personnel who would have undergone pre-service training. This means to say that all

teachers at all levels will be required to be professionally qualified upon entering the teaching service.

Mr. Speaker, the Government wishes to assure you and by extension, the Nation, that the National Model for Education 2007-2015 has been developed in collaboration with the principals, teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders in the education system.

Moreover, the National Model for Education 2007-2015 is in harmonious alignment with the Government's Strategic Plan - Vision 2020 and the mandate given to education to develop a quality system capable of producing innovative and caring citizens who will preserve the democratic way of life in our multi-cultural, plural society.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

July 06, 2007