

FEATURE ADDRESS

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE HAZEL MANNING  
MINISTER OF EDUCATION

PRESENTATION OF THE MID TERM REPORT TO INFORM THE DESIGN  
OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION COMPONENT  
OF A  
SEAMLESS EDUCATION SYSTEM PROJECT  
FOR TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

OCTOBER 22, 2007  
MARRIOTT HOTEL  
9.00 A.M.

Mrs. Angella Jack, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education

Deputy Permanent Secretaries – Mrs. Marlene Juman and Ms. Marlene Felix

Inter American Sector Specialists – Dr. Sabine Aubourg, Ms. Jenelle Thompson and Mr. Jorge Torres

Consultants of the Education Development Centre – Dr. Costanza Eggars and Dr. Sheila Shiffington

Dr. Ancilla Armstrong, Consultant, Presentation Facilitator and Project Preparation Coordinator

Members of the Seamless Education System Advisory Oversight Committee

Representatives of other Ministries and Agencies

Representatives of NGO's

Heads of Divisions and other members of the Ministry of Education

Members of the ECCE Division and the Technical Team for the ECCE Component of the Seamless Education System

Invited Guests

Madame Chairperson

I wish to begin my comments with an old cliché that says A people without a vision will perish. Fortunately, because of the astute governance of the Government of the day, we have a vision.

The government has enunciated its vision for the people and nation – that is to achieve developed nation status by the year 2020. This vision implies that we are committed to having well rounded citizens, innovative citizens and caring people - Well educated and productive citizens with a high level of commitment to nation and a strong sense of patriotism. This also implies the development of an education system capable of producing citizens who will be able to maintain and sustain the efforts required to maintain the status of developed nation. Thus all our efforts of the Ministry of Education are directed to this goal – putting the child first in the development of well rounded citizens.

Ladies and gentlemen, in a major sense our course of actions as we journey along the road to developed nation status of which a key ingredient is the development of the necessary human capital to drive the process, is the development of a system of high quality education. A system that characterised by excellence and which therefore reflects:

- ü High standards of teaching resulting in high performance by students, both by national and international standards;
- ü A research driven organisation with a strong research and evaluation thrust that allows us to be relevant and to be able to respond to the needs and directions of the learners, the economy and the society;
- ü Equity in the provision of access and opportunity for all to participate, to learn and to excel

History and experience have demonstrated that human beings create, invent and do. The technology is invented by man, innovations are developed by man and organisations are managed by our human resources. Hence our greatest asset continues to be our human resources. We at the Ministry of Education have recognised that the vehicle that best take us to our destination is A World class Seamless Education System, ranging from Early Childhood Care and Education through the secondary level to lifelong learning.

Chairperson, we have often been asked: What do we mean by a seamless education system? A Seamless Education System is recognised by certain characteristics. A Seamless Education System is one which among other things:

- ü Flattens the seams or boundaries in the dividing lines between the successive sectors/ levels of the education and training system;
- ü Is characterised by articulation in curriculum, management and certification among the different levels of the education system;
- ü Caters for multiple points of entry and exit at each level of the education system;
- ü Allows for openness and responsiveness of the various sectors/levels of education and training

to individuals from a range of educational backgrounds in ways which facilitate personal career development;

- ü Caters for Inclusiveness; and
- ü Facilitates universal certification.

This Seamless Education System must be, and indeed is being developed in the context of government's Strategic Plan , Vision 2020, which mandates the Ministry of Education to focus on the development of young citizens to become innovative, caring, entrepreneurial, civic minded and responsible citizens who will work towards the preservation of our democratic way of life.

Chairperson, I wish to remind our participants today that when we began this journey in November 2001, much less than one third of the projects and activities identified and recommended in the White Paper(1993-2003) was completed. Moreover they were being undertaken in an unstructured manner. Today, we can boast that 99% of the Action Plan of that White Paper has been completed and this has resulted in major change in the landscape of the education system. Concomitant with the will to implement the Action Plan of the White Paper, was our early recognition for proper planning; policies to drive

and guide the system, and the development of a new structure and novel systems to seriously engage in education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Very early we therefore established a Policy and Strategy Team in the Ministry of Education. Today we have policies in the areas of :

- ü A National Model for Education (ECCE through Secondary Level);
- ü Curriculum;
- ü Standards for the operations of schools and ECCE centres as well as Quality Standards;
- ü Information and Communications Technology;
- ü School Nutrition;
- ü Assessment and Evaluation of Teachers
- ü National Testing and Continuous Assessment of student through our CAP;
- ü Provision of physical facilities guided by briefs for architects and users
- ü Teacher education and professional development of teachers
- ü Reading

The landscape of education system is therefore thoroughly different from that of 2000. And in a major way we have actually begun to implement the Seamless Education System.

At the ECCE level, we note that the ECCE sub sector is now a formal part of the education system with world class facilities and managed by professionals in Early Childhood education. This achievement is unprecedented in our history and in this region and many are the accolades we have received from the pundits in early childhood education. We have developed a world class model through an eclectic approach. We took our time. We were criticised, wrongly so, for being too slow. But we adopted an approach based on research, study tours and acting in partnership with other agencies. We are happy that we took that approach for indeed it has paid rich dividends.

Our goal is to universalize high quality ECCE. We intend to build, furnish and equip 600 ECCE by 2010. We intend that some thirty thousand 3 and 4 year olds will benefit from public provision of ECCE and that these early childhood learners will benefit from publicly provided school transport, nutrition, health and psycho social services and learning materials.

So far the Educational Facilities Company has handed over eight centres to the Ministry of Education. We expect that by the end of the calendar year that we will have some forty one of these avant garde ECCE facilities on stream. Each one of the centres will be managed by a staff of four, including an administrator. It significant to note that even though the staff of the ECCE centres are trained in Early Childhood Education, the Ministry of Education has engaged the services of the University of the West Indies to provide continuous support to the programme and to engage in a hand holding training exercises and guidance in the early days of the implementation of the programme.

The Ministry of Education has identified 110 sites and approximately 300 areas in general in which to construct ECCE centres.

We have worked out the mechanisms for a sustainable supply of appropriately early childhood educated staff to conduct the teaching and learning activities of these centres. We intend to use the three institutions of tertiary level education in Trinidad and Tobago. At the primary level the new landscape says to us that we are almost there. The system now requires that all teachers entering the profession will be required to pre trained and be in possession of a Bachelors in Education or its equivalent.

We have revised the curriculum in some areas and have introduced new subjects – History is now to be taught as a subject of its own, we have included Morals and Values Education, Visual and Performing Arts and Health and Family Life. The upshot of the revised curriculum and methods of curriculum and instructional delivery is the necessity for improved or enhanced physical facilities. We now have modern primary schools with all facilities – spacious general classrooms, science laboratories, computer laboratories, resource rooms, music, dance and drama spaces, library and media facilities. We have built or rebuilt some thirty modern primary schools so far. We have in the pipeline another sixty one to build. In addition to this we are continuously upgrading schools to meet the standards necessary for appropriate pedagogy. This year our programme includes some 227 primary schools and the estimated cost for the upgrade programme is \$281m.

An important component of our future work is to ensure proper articulation with the ECCE and secondary levels.

We have instituted Continuous Assessment at the primary level. We conduct National Tests in Language and Mathematics at the Standards 1 and 3. Soon we will introduce Science and Social Studies at the Standards 2 and 4. Moreover the appointment of deans and senior teachers in primary signals a new approach to school management. The proposal and intention is that each school should have administrative which will leave the Vice principal free to manage the core functions of the school – the curriculum and instructional and learning activities. Our focus is on a robust system of support for this level through:

- a. Teacher training and curriculum support
- b. Audiological testing and vision screening in a school health partnership with the Ministry of Health. Some forty one thousand six hundred and thirty two (41,632) students have already been screened.
- c. Psychosocial support
- d. Enhanced Provision of Textbooks
- e. Increased Provision of School meals
- f. Centres of Excellence for Teacher Training in reading in all schools. Centres of Excellence have already been established in some 61 primary schools.

At the secondary level the scenery depicts a modernised sub sector. We have virtually overhauled the curriculum which now includes Physical Education, Technology Education, Visual and Performing Arts and the Caribbean Vocational Qualifications. All of the subjects are examinable by the Caribbean Examinations Council. The Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations has replaced the traditional Advanced Levels Programme.

We have entrenched the continuous assessment programme and introduced the National Certificate of Secondary Education. This year over fifteen thousand students took Part 1 of this examination last year. They will sit Part 2 in Form V.

We continue to give support to what we call the enabling factors in the teaching/learning process.. We therefore continue to provide textbooks and learning materials, meals, transport and health services to our students.

We have accorded highest priority to the deshifting of Junior Secondary schools and their conversion to full day five or seven year secondary schools. Already some four schools have been deshifted providing some four thousand (4,000) children more with full whole day schooling. At present eight more are in the process of being converted to five year schools. The remaining junior secondary schools will be deshifted by 2008/9 when twelve thousand (12,000) more children will benefit from all-day schooling, and the shift system will become a thing of the past. The projected capital cost for school construction and rehabilitation works in this regard is estimated at \$1.8B. In all of this the Ministry of Education has recognised the need for continuous professional development of teachers. Therefore some 2,368 secondary school teachers and administrators benefited from high level programmes in management and leadership over the last five years.

As a support mechanism we have established a Student Support Services Division. This Division is now staffed with school psychologists, school social workers and counsellors. When fully on stream it will have a staff of 390 professionals. We have established Local School Boards in all Government Secondary Schools..

We have developed a new administrative and staff structure for the operations of the Ministry of Education as well as for schools. This new structure speaks to a decentralised Ministry of Education in which the Central Office of the Ministry of Education will assume the role of macro planning, research, policy formulation and strategies. The District Offices will assume the responsibilities of a Command Centre where it will oversee the implementation of policies and the schools will act as transactional centres where all the transactions of teaching and learning will take place. At the school level, the approach is to have each school with two vice principals, one of whom will assume responsibilities for the curriculum and instructional activities and the other to assist in the other school supporting activities.

Ladies and gentlemen, in this scenario true school based management is essential. Each school, at whatever level will be required to have a school management team. This school management team will be responsible for the development and implementation of a school Plan. Already secondary school principals are being provided with sums of approximately \$1m. The provision for funds for primary will begin its roll out in the immediate future..

Ladies and gentlemen, no one can deny that we are living in exciting times, to be part of the actual reform and transformation of the education system.

What I have sought to do is to put on canvas the new landscape of the education system of Trinidad and Tobago, so that we may better understand the context in which the development of our world class seamless education is taking place. And this brings me back in focus to what is at hand today. This presentation and the group discussions, are intended to assist in the design of a Seamless Education System Project. It is what we refer to as A Mid Term report. Our discussions will help to clarify matters and to inform how we should design the project. Our day's proceedings are to be guided and facilitated by Dr. Ancilla Armstrong, whom we have hired as the Project Preparation Coordinator. The project is to be partly funded by the Inter American Development. Trinidad and Tobago has had a deep and longstanding relationship with the IDB spanning over forty years, and we have benefited a great deal from our partnership with the IDB.

I want to implore you to participate with passion and to contribute freely.

At this point I am reminded that one of the set of criteria by which we judge a developed country is to assess how do they care for the very young and what vision they have for their early learners. We can now boast that we take care of the young through the many provisions of the Ministries of Health, Social Services and Community Development. We have a vision for the early learners. Our vision is to develop them into well rounded citizens who are innovative and caring and who would be able to access and benefit from the opportunities in a developed nation.

We are indeed that there is a general national satisfaction with the system.. This satisfaction is communicated to us through both written and verbal/oral expressions. Indeed it is on record that such organisations as the NPTA has expressed its satisfaction with the progress of the Ministry of Education while polls conducted by the MORI shed similar light.

As we continue with the reforms outlined in this paper aimed at widening access and institutionalizing quality and equity, it is anticipated that student and parental expectations will be highly satisfied and that the economy will benefit from a firm resource base that is equipped for the competitive and complex environment of the 21<sup>st</sup>

Century. All of this will be done through an effective and high quality education system characterized by EXCELLENCE.

Once more I urge you to come on board with us on this exciting journey. We understand too well that education is an unending business and quality education can only be built by eternal efforts and partnerships.

May I thank you for your presence, interest and participation.