



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

ADDRESS BY

**The Honourable Clifton De Coteau
Minister in the Ministry of Education**

**at the
Mayaro Past Pupils Association Eight Annual S.E. A.
Award Ceremony.**

Saturday 10th July 2010.

SALUTATIONS

I wish to thank the Mayaro Past Pupils Association for the invitation to speak here at your eight annual S.E.A award ceremony.

This ceremony is important because it honours and rewards the top students in your community and is geared towards promoting excellence among the young people of Mayaro.

The ceremony is in keeping with the objectives of the People's Partnership Government which has said in no uncertain terms that it is committed to the transformation of the country's economy into a knowledge driven one and in order to achieve this education is a key, particularly as it relates to Math, Science and Technology.

There is no doubt that over the years we have made progress in the education system. In the former UNC government the then Minister of Education who is now the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago democratised the education system by ensuring that all our young people were able to move from primary to secondary schools.

By doing this we were able to stop a system that told children at the tender age of 11 and 12 that they were failures and denied them an opportunity to attend secondary school unless their parents had the ability to pay.

We have also converted all our secondary schools to five year schools and importantly to full day schools. This was designed to ensure that all our students have the same length of teacher interaction and also remove the situation where students were leaving school at late hours in the evening and a situation where those, particularly in remote areas like Mayaro, had to get up as early as 3am to get to school if they were in the morning shift.

So we have made progress, but there remain significant challenges to ensure that the education system prepares our children adequately to meet the challenges of the technological age where information, communication technology and science play significant roles.

Ladies and gentlemen, education must be one of the major pillars of our economic development given that knowledge, information and human capital are the main economic assets of advanced nations. We have to ensure that our young people are literate, numerate and possess critical thinking skills. To achieve this we will embark on reform of the school's curriculum to address the needs of 21st century development and the labour market needs of the society.

At the pre-school level, self-confident, creative, enterprising children must be the goal. As they learn and play, work independently and with others to make progress, we must build the foundation for personal achievement, as well as co-operation and collaboration with others to achieve mutually satisfying goals.

We will rework curricula for the early childhood care and education and the primary school to prepare the ground for seamless transition between the two. The focus will be on building self-confidence, the development of social skills, strengthening attention span and on promoting creativity at the early childhood level to build the foundation for 21st century literacy, critical thinking, creativity and entrepreneurship through general knowledge at primary level

At the primary school level we must ensure that our children are literate, numerate, and aware of e-learning and internet-based opportunities. The foundation must be laid so that they will have a love of learning and become critical thinkers, use their creativity and have an entrepreneurial outlook. In short ladies and gentlemen there must be a paradigm shift in our education system.

When we look at the results in Science at the Primary school level we see a disturbing trend in students performances. For example the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the standard required for Standard 2 in 2009 decreased from 49% in 2008 to 39% in 2009. The Percentage of Students in Standard 4 also decreased from 42% in 2008 to 36% in 2009.

We are also concerned about the performance of students in the annual SEA examination because too many of our children are not scoring at the desired levels.

Results from this year's SEA exam show that 11.6 % or a total of one thousand and eighty students scored between 0- 30 percent in the exam. That is unsatisfactory and we have to change that.

When you look at the overall results you will find that the performance of students in Mathematics, Language Arts and Creative Writing was consistent over the last three years even though performance was minimally higher in 2009.

The percentages of students scoring above the mean also showed small variation over the three years with a small increase in Mathematics in 2010 while small decreases were obtained in Creative Writing and Language Arts also in 2010. In other words we are basically marking time with no real improvement in student's performance.

Perhaps this may be an appropriate time for me to say that we are giving serious consideration to changing the date of the SEA examination from the month of March to possibly May.

We are concerned that students who write their SEA have almost two months in school in which little work is done. If the exam is pushed back we eliminate this problem but also give the students and teachers more time to prepare for the examination and hopefully begin the process of improving the results.

Let me add that no final decision has been taken on this matter because we would first want to consult with stakeholders before such a major decision is taken. But I am putting the national community on notice that a change is a real possibility.

At the secondary level, skills learnt in primary school will be strengthened and enhanced and a more participatory education strategy that is problem-based and dedicated to producing problem solvers and solution providers will be introduced.

You would be aware that this government has committed itself to providing each child entering secondary school with access to a laptop computer. This is a tangible example

of our commitment to the connected classroom which will be central to educational transformation, as well as teacher education. Connectivity technologies will be tapped to link teachers with teachers, teachers with students, and students with students. In other words a revolution in education is about to happen.

Special attention will be paid to Mathematics, language skills and competence in English, as well as Science and Technology.

But for all of this to work we must also invest in our human capacity with increased teacher education to support a curriculum for transformation. We will work with higher educational institutions to strengthen teaching quality and relevance in the secondary and primary systems.

We will strengthen the teaching system by working with the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association on professional upgrade and professional standards and offer a system of incentives to attract the best teachers to the system.

There is much work to be done. I have noticed that this educational district as a whole performed below the mean average in this year's SEA. We will have to find out why this is so and what remedial action needs to be taken.

I wish to congratulate all tonight's winners and all the students who will next term make their way to secondary schools.

As a former Secondary School Principal I wish to urge the young people to recognise that this is just the beginning and that hard work and discipline are important to future success.

I congratulate the organisers and the corporate sector in Mayaro for contributing the development of the young people of this area.

I thank you.