



Press Statement

A Process for Introducing Signature Schools

The Hon. Diallo V. Rabain JP, MP

Minister of Education and Workforce Development

Wednesday July 11th, 2018

Good afternoon and welcome,

Another successful school year has come to a close and this would not be possible without the efforts and teamwork of students, parents, community partners, educators, and our leadership and support teams in schools and the Department of Education. Just as we are preparing for the next school year, we are also preparing for the future of our public schools and public education system.

Now, is therefore the right time to share with the education and broader communities that the Government's 2017 Election Platform commitment to "*Reform public education by phasing out middle schools and introducing signature schools at the secondary level*" is progressing forward.

We believe that in developing the future of our education system, we must consider the wants and needs of the community. We have listened to the community interest in phasing out middle schools, but are also aptly aware that school and system change is a sensitive and emotive issue for students, parents, families, alumni, unions and our staff.

Therefore the approach that the Ministry of Education and Workforce Development is taking is one in which we will collaborate within, and across education and broader communities, in order to bring forward change and transformation for our children.

The purpose of Signature Schools is to allow our children to have a specialized focus. Similar concepts can be found in magnet schools in the United States, specialized schools in Canada, and some academies in the UK.

Examples of specialized schools in other countries include:

- Afrocentric education;
- Career and Technical Education;
- Information and communication technology (ICT);
- Fine and performing arts;
- The International Baccalaureate; and,
- Science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)

There are also examples of all boys or all girls public schools, and schools for developing elite athletes.

While I'm highlighting examples from other jurisdictions, I would like to emphasize that we are embarking on a locally-developed process and project for change and improvement. It is our opportunity to work together as a community, so that in keeping with Plan 2022, we can build an education system that meet the needs of our students and prepares them to compete locally and contribute globally – this is the vision for public school education.

Within our public school education system, we are already providing more diverse programming, offerings and pathways, and these efforts will be further advanced through the development of Signature Schools.

With particular focus on those in the middle and senior years, we are respecting and responding to community desires for change. With students and families in mind, signature schools are intended to:

- Meet individual and diverse student needs and interests;
- Give students exposure and grounding in educational areas of interest;

- Prepare students for post-secondary education, training and the world of work and citizenship, both locally and internationally;
- Improve achievement and outcomes for all students; and
- Increase confidence in our public education system.

Therefore, with care and respect, we will institute a student, parent, staff and community-engagement process for the development and introduction of high-quality proposals for Signature Schools. And, because we value the social capital of our stakeholders, we will create opportunities for everyone to share their views, historical information, and proposals as we work together towards the introduction of Signature Schools. In support of our commitment and in the spirit of authentic community engagement, the Department of Education will undertake a process structured in three major phases:

Phase I will lay the groundwork. This includes engaging with our stakeholders, growing trust, putting together the right team and establishing the necessary elements to support the development of Signature Schools. The Ministry has already started to engage staff, parents and other critical stakeholders. Also, several persons have approached me during the past year to share their thoughts, positions and ideas relating to the phasing out of middle schools. Now is the time for those persons, to officially submit their positions. We welcome all suggestions, concepts and ideas from interested members of the public. We encourage you to email the Ministry at Signatureschools@moed.bm

Phase II will entail the development of proposals after taking into consideration feedback. This feedback will be used in the production of specific options for the introduction of Signature Schools and the phasing out of middle schools. At the end of *Phase II*, the Government will consider the recommended options, and determine which proposals will best meet the future needs of our students.

Phase III will review the final proposals with consultation key stakeholder groups and the wider community, before a final decision is made.

These three phases are expected to extend a minimum of 18 months. In the Government's 2017 Election Platform, the phasing out of middle schools and the introduction of signature schools is

stated as a long-term education objective. We understand that there are many questions about what this will eventually look like, and firmly believe that the answers are in our individual and collective voices. Therefore, the Ministry has determined to take a measured and public-informed approach to decide how this will take place and what it will look like. This 18-month period will provide the time for everyone to voice their opinion for or against, so that in the end, the final product is one that is in the best interest of our students and the future of Bermuda.

This process will not be easy and certainly will not happen overnight. Extensive consultation will be needed that is community-oriented, transparent, inclusive, engaging, and respectful of all our stakeholders. In this way everyone is well aware of what is being done at each step of the way. Bermuda has a great opportunity at this time, to chart its own course for the future of public school education.

In closing, I encourage everyone who is interested in helping to shape this transformative change for public school education, to participate in at least one or all three phases of this process for the introduction of Signature Schools. This Government has, and will continue to put the needs of our children and their future first.

Thank you