



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

BERKELEY INSTITUTE INCIDENT

THE HON. K. H. RANDOLPH HORTON JP, MP

MINISTER OF EDUCATION

Monday, October 27, 2008

Good Afternoon everyone, I thank you and the members of my senior team for attending this press conference today.

I have asked that you come today in order for me to inform you, the parents, the principals and teachers and the general public that I, along with the Ministry of Education, School Administrations throughout the system and this Government take the most recent of events involving acts of violence very seriously.

When one of our students or any member of our staff is the subject of attacks by other students or faculty, which result in personal injury, I will state categorically that such actions will not be tolerated. I wish to make clear that all those who would want to engage in actions designed to interrupt or disable any of our students, staff or programmes they will be stopped. Their actions will be pursued to the fullest extent of the codes governing our schools and the laws governing our country. Our schools must be sanctuaries of learning for all of our students. If we allow these destructive forces to prevail, any advance we make in the

restructuring process will be reversed. We will run the risk of system-wide failure. Enough is enough.

I have spoken with the parent of the student who was injured over the weekend and our Director of Educational Standards and Accountability, Mrs. Wendy McDonnell and others are working closely with the Principal and Board of Governors of the Berkeley Institute to assist the student in his recovery. We are helping his parents, as well, in this most difficult of times. The Ministry of Education is working closely with the School Administration to investigate the incident. It is likely that the investigation will result in the students involved being referred to the Berkeley Institute Disciplinary Panel. The Panel, comprised of representatives from the Board, the Berkeley Educational Society, the Parents Teachers Students Association, and two Student Representatives has handled serious disciplinary matters in the past resulting in positive outcomes.

Meanwhile, the Student Services Department at the School is called upon to step up their efforts to affect positive behaviours and attitudinal improvements in the student body generally; and parents are encouraged to take an active role in teaching positive values and non-violence. The prayers of the entire Ministry go out for the speedy recovery of one of our own and also for the offending students as we work to help them become better citizens.

Therefore, I have asked that a full inquiry into the events of the weekend commence immediately with a view to not just identifying the facts surrounding this incident but also how we can further sharpen our system-wide efforts to tackle this challenge.

Now let's talk about solutions.

As you are all aware, in September of this year, I informed the Honourable House of Assembly of the efforts being made by the

Ministry's principals, teachers and support staff to tackling antisocial challenges within our schools. The Ministry is moving with deliberate strides to use Ministry-wide initiatives that encourage resistance to gangs, violence prevention, conflict suppression and resolution, mentoring and cultural awareness. That work is in full train.

It is my firm belief that the schools join a Government that has both recommitted and redoubled its efforts to find meaningful solutions through cross-Ministry initiatives.

The introduction of system-wide meetings between principals, teachers and parents will serve to bring the school family together. We will also encourage school clusters to have regional town meetings that unite principals, teachers and parents with the community so that the challenges our young people face are met by a community that cares.

The Ministry of Education is working to review and strengthen activities and programmes that already exist such as Life Skills and Character Education. In addition, we plan to have an all out assault on gangs. This initiative has been introduced to Bermuda by Sgt. Delacey Davis, who, on his last visit to the Island, held discussions with principals of the senior and middle schools. The plan is to enhance existing strategies which deal with anti-social behavior in schools.

Members of the media,

The events of the weekend, while isolated, offer reminders of just how hard we all need to work to overcome the challenges that face us in our society. The principals, teachers, support staff, parents and students can be sure that we will work tirelessly to find the solutions that will bring an end to these senseless acts of violence carried out by students calling for our help.

In closing, I would like to thank the Bermuda Police Service for helping us to get to the bottom of this incident and I would like to acknowledge the staff of both the Ministry and the Berkeley Institute who has collaborated to resolve the issue.

Thank you.

I will now take questions.