

**Press Conference Statement**

**The Hon. Diallo V. Rabain, JP, MP**

Minister of Education

**School Reform**

Wednesday, January 20, 2020

Good Morning and Welcome,

This morning I will provide an update on the following topics:

* Consultation on the Proposal for the Introduction of Parish Primary Schools
* Public and parish consultation meetings
* Ministry of Education 2021 scholarship and awards.

In mid-December, I gave an update on the status of Bermuda’s Education Reform and announced the beginning of the consultation of the Parish Primary School Proposal. This proposal suggested the potential reduction of our current system of 18 primary schools to 10 schools by having 1 primary school per parish with 2 primary schools in Pembroke. When I announced the consultation period for the proposal, the Ministry of Education committed **to run a fair, vibrant, transparent and engaging consultation.**

Our commitment to Bermuda is clear as we have stated in the [Parish Primary School Consultation Document](https://www.moed.bm/files/user/90/file/Consultation%20on%20a%20Proposal%20for%20the%20Introduction%20of%20Parish%20Primary%20Schools%20-%20FINAL.pdf).

*“Consultation is an important process because it gives all affected and interested persons and organisations the opportunity to learn and understand what the Government is proposing, and the opportunity to share their views and feedback. In turn, the Government and Ministry of Education (“the Ministry”) have a responsibility to listen and consider the views and feedback from the consultation as part of any decisions that are made. Together the Government, stakeholders and the community can transform public education to better serve our children for generations to come.”*

Our Primary School System proposal was accompanied with the very comprehensive [Parish Primary School Consultation Document](https://bit.ly/Primary_School_Consultation_Document), an [executive summary document](https://bit.ly/Parish_School_Proposal_Executive_Summary) and [feedback form](https://bit.ly/Parish_Primary_Feedback_Form). We are pleased with the members of the public who have read these documents and supplied feedback via the [feedback form](https://bit.ly/Parish_Primary_Feedback_Form). The public’s comments are critically important to help us make the best decisions as we reform education to create a world-class education system here in Bermuda.

While we encourage submitting responses using the [official response form](https://bit.ly/Parish_Primary_Feedback_Form), there has been no shortage of discussions via social media, emails received and comments to the local press. These forms of interaction are important as we have committed to and promised to have a robust and transparent consultation on all aspect of Education Reform.

We recognise the suggestion that we reduce our current number of 18 schools to 10 schools will evoke certain emotions within our community. However, as explained in the consultation document, there were 19 specific study factors used to rank the schools per parish. Based on careful examination of these factors, current enrolment prediction data, discussions with our highly capable technical team and input from our change management consultants, the current proposal creates the equitable system needed to ensure every student is given the opportunity to reach their highest potential.

Based on some of the more vocal public feedback received, some recurring themes have arisen. These being the historical relevance of some of the schools proposed to be potentially closed. There have been questions around the potential closure of schools considered “high performing” and how they operate being retained. More puzzling was a recent interview by the media in which it was suggested that more consultation was needed. However, the proposed consultation started in December and will continue until April. Another recurring theme most recently articulated in an email received on Monday was the concern of increasing the number of students per class with fewer schools. However, the proposal indicated a max student to teacher ratio of 15 to 1 would be achieved with the proposal.

Interestingly, most of these above issues raised and others that have been discussed in the public arenas, have already been covered in the [consultation document](https://bit.ly/Primary_School_Consultation_Document) that was issued when the consultation process started. It was expected we would receive feedback from people before they had a chance to read the consultation document fully and that is ok. As I stated, this is an open and transparent consultation process. One that requires, no demands, the public's input to help guide the critical and important decisions that need to be made. As I will discuss shortly, a series of public meetings will be arranged to allow for the proposal to be fully explained and people to ask questions.

As I have stated on numerous occasions and will repeat over and over, the proposal is just that, a proposal. We are committed to listening and using your feedback to guide the final decision. By example, already from the feedback received, it is clear that a better mechanism to record and preserve the historical legacy of all of our primary schools needs to be looked at. As the youngest school in our system is 46 years old, there are long and storied histories attached to all our primary schools that need to be preserved somehow, regardless of the final decision to be determined.

To deliver the education system, our students deserve that is being designed through our [**Learning First Programme**](https://www.learningfirstbda.com/); we must create the facilities to deliver this 21st Century Education approach. We need facilities where every child’s learning is designed around their strengths and interests, and their social and emotional needs. Our proposal is designed to help us achieve that goal; however, no final decisions will be made without your input.

Again, I repeat, no decisions have been made or will be made until the conclusion of the consultation process. Only after the completion of the consultation will a decision have been made about the Parish School Proposal. The consultation period is over a three-month period, giving people time to consider and respond to the proposals. All responses will be considered and analysed as part of the consultation and decision-making process.

The Ministry understands that not everyone will agree. That is precisely the reason why the consultation period is so important to us – so that we can gather and understand a diversity of views and perspectives centred on transforming public education for *all*students.

**Public and Parish Meetings**

Beginning next week, the Ministry will host public and parish meetings to discuss the [*Proposal for the Introduction of Parish Primary Schools*](https://bit.ly/Primary_School_Consultation_Document)*.*

Due to COVID-19, the first of the Public Meetings will be held virtually via the ZOOM video-conferencing platform on the following dates starting at 6:00 pm:

* Tuesday, January 26th, 2021
* Thursday, January 28th, 2021
* Monday, February 1st, 2021

To ensure wide access and participation, the public meetings on Thursday, January 28th and Monday, February 1st, 2021 will also be broadcast on CITV, YouTube and Facebook Live. People watching at home will be able to call in or message their questions and feedback.

These meetings are an important opportunity for the general public to learn more about the Proposal for the Introduction of Parish Primary Schools, to share their views and ask questions.

While the public meetings will be focused on the proposals more broadly, the Ministry will also hold parish meetings for persons interested and/or who may be affected by proposals for individual parishes. Those who wish to attend parish meetings should include parents, staff, alumni and other community members. There will be 2 meetings per parish that have more than 1 primary school.

In addition to being hosted on ZOOM, parish meetings will also be broadcast on CITV, YouTube and Facebook Live.

ZOOM registration is required for security reasons to safeguard meeting attendees from inappropriate content and disruptions. People are encouraged to register early and can do so up 3:00 p.m. on the day of the meeting they wish to attend. The dates and times for the upcoming parish meetings are listed at www.moed.bm

The Ministry of Education understands that education reform is an issue of significant national importance, which is why we want public input and feedback over the next seven weeks, before determining the next steps forward.

**Ministry of Education Scholarships and Awards**

Each year the Ministry of Education provides scholarship and awards to Bermudian students to pursue higher education. In 2018, the Government announced a new award, the Bermuda College Promise Programme for students graduating from public schools. To date, 70 students registered and benefited from this initiative that provides free tuition to attend the Bermuda College for any public school student graduating with a 3.0 GPA.

Education is and will continue to be a top priority for this Government. Our students and their ability to pursue post-secondary education is an integral part of the continued development and success of Bermuda. We recognise the importance of providing our people with opportunity and will make no apologies for doing so.

Scholarships on offer are:

The Bermuda Government Scholarships

The Teacher Education Awards

The Non-Traditional Student Awards

The Minister’s Achievement Scholarships

The Minister’s Exceptional Student Awards

The Minister’s Applied Science Scholarships

The Minister’s Technical and Vocational Awards

The Minister’s Bermuda College Book Awards

The Further Education Awards

We will soon begin a marketing campaign targeting all students, and I am encouraging students to visit bermudascholarship.com to review the criteria for all awards and scholarships. Also, I am urging more students to take advantage of the College Promise Programme. It is an excellent opportunity to begin your college career and have fees covered at The Bermuda College.

These awards and scholarships demonstrate our commitment to Bermudian students to further their education at Bermuda College or overseas institutions.

Before I take questions, I would like to show 30-sec social media ad featuring our 2020 Teacher Education Scholarship recipient, Chiante Roberts.

Thank you, and I will now take any questions.