



**MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND CULTURE
HON. LLOYD BLACK'S
STATEMENT ON THE STATUS OF EDUCATION AT THE BEGINNING OF
THE 2005-2006 SCHOOL YEAR**

Parents
Principals and Teachers
Students
Ladies and gentlemen

Each new school year marks the advent of new opportunities and challenges within the Education System. To launch the school year 2005-2006, a Summer Institute was held during the last week in August. The theme for the Institute, “Education and Change”, was a very apt one for this time of the year. As in the words of the educator, Tanika Tikaram, ‘we should give children the chances and changes they need to win at life’. Over three hundred teachers participated in the activity for which I commend them. The Institute provided the forum for educators to exchange ideas and experiences and to gain insights into trends in education as well as wellness, history and curriculum issues. Here I publicly wish to thank the officers within the Education Department for successfully organizing and orchestrating this event.

Ladies and gentlemen, quality leadership within our school system is essential to schools’ effectiveness. It is thus with pride I congratulate the new acting principal, Mrs. Barbara Turnbull, and the new assistant principal, Mr. Arthur Selwood on their respective appointments at the British Virgin Islands High School. I must also congratulate Ms Elena Fahie on her appointment as acting Principal of the Francis Lettsome Primary School and sincerely thank Ms. Janice Lettsome the former principal who is on secondment with the Department of Education and Culture. For the schools to continue to progress, there must be a collaborative effort between parents, teachers and students. Best wishes for a successful school year to all.

Ladies and gentlemen, our government's Legislative Agenda to provide a world-class system of education for our Territory continues to receive top priority. I am pleased to announce that significant progress has been made in several areas.

- The Education Act 2004 was enforced with the exception of part 8 in January of this year. This Act gives guidance as to how the Education System should function in our contemporary community. As educating children is a partnership, and really a community affair, we sensitised many of our partners to the content of the Act; these efforts are ongoing. During this school year, our intention is to establish a committee to assist in formulating the necessary regulations to support the Act.
- Ladies and gentlemen, the Ministry and Department of Education are constantly initiating and implementing new and improved strategies and programmes to enhance the quality of education provided for our students. I remain sensitive to the challenges faced by our students from Jost Van Dyke and their parents to access secondary education. With that in mind, the first two years of secondary education will be offered at the school on Jost Van Dyke as of September 2005. My ministry's long-term goal for this initiative is to reduce the dropout rate and the many other challenges these 11 and 12 year-old students face who commute daily from Jost Van Dyke to attend school on Tortola as opposed to students who are more mature at age thirteen (13) or fourteen (14).
- On Anegada, a Head Start programme for pre-school students was introduced. The Head Start programme provides opportunity for students to develop readiness skills thereby enhancing their learning. This service, which is primarily provided through private enterprise, was not previously offered on Anegada. This is

another example of the good relationship between government and the private sector and I commend them for this support in helping to develop our students.

- With our continuous focus on technical and vocational education, at the BVI Technical Vocational Institute, additional space is being provided to facilitate the delivery of practical work-shop activities.
- Ladies and gentlemen remember that our technical and vocational institute is in its infancy so let us be patient and give it time to develop to the great institution we all envision it to be.
- Ladies and gentlemen, although in its infancy, early signs indicate the positive impact this Institute can have on our students. The school's exhibition mounted at the end of the last school year, showed the potential of the students who are enthused and motivated to learn various skills. The additional space allows for the proper implementation of planned skilled programmes.
- Beginning this school year and continuing over the next two years, the National Literacy Intervention Programme will be implemented. It has been said that literacy is the development of a continuum of skills and attitudes that prepare all of our learners for life in a changing world community. It begins with the fundamental acquisition of skills in reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, representing and responding. It becomes the ability to understand, think, apply and communicate effectively in all subject and program areas in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes. Consequently, this Literacy Intervention Programme is intended to be the backbone of our education reform process in addition to the national curriculum project, and will include all school aged students in the territory.

- In our education reform, we must ensure that all of our students can read and write at a functional level. Being able to read and reason are fundamental to all our students acquiring a quality education and to being able to make a worthwhile contribution to the community. Thus the Programme's primary goals are to improve reading and alleviate reading problems. Moreover, emphasis will be placed on early literacy intervention to minimize the literacy gap after Grade 2.
- One feature of The National Literacy Intervention Program is called "First Readers". This program with the assistance of private funding will distribute books free of charge to all nursery school aged children in the territory. The National Literacy Programme is designed in such a way as to use a combination of strategies inclusive of some technology that will help to ensure its success.
- Ladies and gentlemen, thus far in 2005 the National Curriculum Redesign Project [NCRP] has made great strides forward in its quest to significantly improve the national curriculum's quality, accountability, conversion to standards and the capacity to be continuously improved. By following its design, the curriculum project was able to determine through research means, which education systems throughout the world are showing the best student performance results, as well as obtain the education standards they are using to attain and maintain those results.
- Moreover ladies and gentlemen, the NCRP was also able to extract the best education standards for the various subjects from those countries to come up with the first draft of BVI's education standards for its various subjects on all class levels- from primary through senior secondary.

To this point ladies and gentlemen, approximately 70 % of the first drafts of our education standards for the various subjects have been developed. Several of these first drafts are with the editors before select education standards are field tested in some of our primary and secondary schools. Resources permitting, it is my ministry's projection that the remaining education standards will be developed by the end of this year.

At the same time ladies and gentlemen, the next phase of the curriculum development exercise will commence in late September to early October of 2005, and that is the preparation of the principals, teachers, parents, students and education system for the field-testing of the core subjects. Given the fact that the BVI is converting to the more effective and efficient education standards based curriculum development system, which is new to us, it is of utmost importance that the **“pre education standards field test preparations”** are both thorough and best practice oriented.

In fact, these preparations should result in each principal, teacher, parent, and student- fully understanding his/ her role, function and responsibility.

On behalf of the Ministry and the Department of Education, I thank you, the community, for your demonstrated interest in the project and encourage you to get more and more involved in its development as opportunities present themselves in the near future.

- Ladies and gentlemen, the school computerization project, which addresses the technological needs within the schools, is on target. To date, sixteen of our schools received, on an average, ten (10) computers to start off the new school

year. Two additional schools will soon receive regular desk-top computers while each school will also receive one multimedia projector and a net-work printer.

- Further, policies involving computer technology are being drafted, and with the assistance of IBM, a technology assessment profile will be conducted during the first term of this new school year. To facilitate the use of the technology within the school, the Ministry and the Department will provide in-service training opportunities for the integration of technology in the teaching and learning process.
- The modernization and upgrade of our schools' physical plants to make them more conducive to learning and the holistic development of our children continue. Construction continues at the Alexandrina Maduro Primary School. Repairs occurred at the Bregado Flax Education Centre- Secondary Division where there was extensive replacement of windows among other smaller maintenance projects. Construction of the new administrative building at the Willard Wheatley Primary School will go out to tender shortly.
- At the B.V.I. High School, ladies and gentlemen, work is in progress. This work includes a complete refurbishing and renovation of Block C to ensure the safety in the use of the classroom space, covered walkways and the pavement of the yard and designated parking areas. I am pleased to announce that this government remains committed to our promise for a second high school. The final designs will be available once we decide on the proposed site, which has been narrowed to two locations in Brandywine Bay. Negotiations are currently ongoing in this regard.

- The water drainage problem at the Leonora Delville Primary was addressed and several classroom floors tiled. At the Enis Adams Primary School, the completion of an expanded covered walkway facilitates the ease of access to rest room facilities in all weather conditions.
- Ladies and gentlemen although some inroads were made in the modernization and upgrade of our school facilities, there is still much to be done and we are cognizant that it will be difficult to do all at the same time.

In addition to the aforementioned, a comprehensive review of our ability to meet the needs of our special education community is underway. I anticipate that this review will highlight the need for a new direction and will report back on its findings before the end of the school year.

- During this school year, half a million dollars will be spent to purchase much needed sporting equipment for all schools, provide formal training for young BVI islanders as Physical Education teachers, as well as upgrade the playground of 5 primary schools with new equipment. Additionally, the fencing programme will continue at the Jost Van Dyke and Willard Wheatley Primary Schools, and three schools (Ivan Dawson, Ebenezer Thomas and another to be named) will be provided with gazebos, which are designed to provide an outdoor classroom environment.
- Ladies and gentlemen, for us to develop a “world class” education system, our professional staff must be on the cutting edge of education. They must continually upgrade and be a flexible community of learners.

- Thus we are in the process of drafting professional development policies. In addition, this school term we will reconvene in collaboration with the H. L. Stoutt Community College and the support of the University of the West Indies, the Secondary Teacher Training Programme. Up to about 25 teachers will be participating. This is a mandatory two-year part-time/in-service programme aimed at increasing the cadre of professionally trained secondary school teachers.
- Moreover, leadership development for Principals started earlier this calendar year will continue, as central to the effectiveness of schools is leadership/management.
- In regards to our students' performance, I am pleased to report that the regional examination validates our students' performance on the school leaving examination. The 2005 Caribbean Examination Council exam results show that students ranked in the top percentile in our school leaving exams maintained a high level of performance. Most of them received five (5) or more general and technical passes. On behalf of the Ministry and Department of Education, I extend congratulations to the students, parents and teachers for this success story in our education system. Congratulations!

Finally ladies and gentlemen, the new initiatives, professional development, curriculum reform, school computerization and the modernization and upgrade of school facilities are to develop a school culture that will promote and enhance the development of a caring community of learners. The school culture is the set of norms, values, beliefs, that make up the persona of the school.

A healthy school culture, according to research, is a school environment marked by attributes such as collegiality-teamwork, high expectations of students and staff, experimentation, trust and confidence, appreciation and recognition, protection of

what is important, caring and involvement in decision-making. A collaborative culture, within schools, among schools, between schools and the community as well as the Department and Ministry of Education and Culture can only fuel the achievement of the goals of education.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to all Ministry and Department staff, Principals and teachers and all who work tirelessly on a daily basis to meet the needs of our education community.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for listening and partnering with us in the development of our education system.

Before I close let me commend all the parents and guardians who put in the extra time to study with your children to help them excel and succeed. 2004-2005 was a great year academically for our students in both primary and secondary. I therefore challenge the classes of 2006 to surpass your peers and set a record of academic excellence of which we can all be proud.

Thank you for listening.