

Organization of American States (OAS)

Hemispheric Project on Designing Policies and Strategies to Prevent School Failure

Report on

Policies, Programmes and Experiences.

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas

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May, 2005

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BACKGROUND

A commitment was made in a preparatory meeting for the third meeting of Ministers of Education in April 2003 in Argentina to strengthen and implement policies based on strategies that overcome social inequality and promote universal access to quality basic education which includes early childhood education. It is the general perception that early childhood is a critical time to begin preventing achievement gaps.

It has also been shown that early childhood education enhances school readiness, prevents stunted cognitive development, improves primary performances and lowers repetition and drop out rates. It is also believed that the single most effective intervention for helping poor children, families, communities and nations to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty is through early education.

It is for this reason that it was agreed that the guiding philosophy is to overcome social inequality and promote universal access to a quality basic education that includes early childhood. Thus it was agreed that all children, regardless of religion, socio-economic status and gender have a right to become all that they are capable of becoming.

The purpose of the paper therefore is to develop a framework for the formulation of policies, standards and strategies in the area of early childhood education that will improve equity and quality of early education development as a mechanism for mitigating school failure at each succeeding level of the educational system.

This paper will therefore examine:

- *The social and economic characteristics of The Bahamas*
 - *The characteristics of the Bahamian Educational System*
 - *The shape of school failure as seen through educational indicators as well as any relevant studies.*
- *The introduction of the policy /programme/experience aimed at addressing the selected problem*
- *Future challenges*

CHAPTER 1

Context, Social, Political and Economic Characteristics

Context

The Bahamas extends 760 miles from the coast of Florida on the north-west almost to Haiti on the south-east. The group consists of 700 islands and 2,400 cays with an area of 5,358 sq. miles (13,878 sq. km.). Thirty of the islands are inhabited. The principal islands include:



Figure 1

Abaco, Acklins, Andros, Berry Islands, Bimini, Cat Island, Crooked Island, Eleuthera, Exuma, Grand Bahama, Harbour Island, Inagua, Long Island, Mayaguana,, New Providence (where the capital, Nassau, is located), Ragged Island, Rum Cay, San Salvador and Spanish Wells. The highest point in The Bahamas is 206-ft. high, Mount Alvernia on Cat Island. Once known as Como Hill, Mount Alvernia overlooks The Bight.

At its closest proximity to The United States, the island of Bimini, on the northwest limit of the Great Bahama Bank, is only forty-six nautical miles from Miami. West End, Grand Bahama, is only fifty-five nautical miles from Lake Worth Inlet. This proximity greatly influenced the history and economy of both locations during the days of prohibition in The United States. The economic development of this region has been closely linked to that of South Florida.

Great Inagua, in the south, is situated directly north of the Windward Channel, only forty-eight miles from Cuba and sixty miles from Haiti. On the south side of the Great Bahama Bank, the archipelago is separated from the Greater Antilles by the Old Bahama Channel.

In between, exist over seven hundred islands and cays, not counting another two thousand rocks and small cays. The Little Bahama Bank in the north, is comprised of Grand Bahama Island and the Abacos. Most of the rest of The Bahamas, to the south, lies on the Great Bahama Bank. These two major collections of islands and cays are separated by the Northwest Providence Channel and the Northeast Providence Channel. The Cay Sal Bank is a third and “minor” bank of interest principally only to fishermen.

The isolated islands of San Salvador, Great Inagua, Mayaguana, Crooked Island and Acklins are exceptions to this general rule and are separated from the Great Bahama Bank by deep water.

The islands are therefore connected through a series of networks: by air transport, by bridges which connect settlements, good roads, by sea transport and by a very good telecommunication system.

The very scattered nature of the islands, nevertheless, pose a tremendous challenge to good governance and equality of access because whatever

programs, or policies are to be implemented, these must be replicated as many times as there are islands and on all inhabited islands however sparse the population.

The 2000 census revealed that the population of The Bahamas totaled 306,611, with 155,896 females and 147,715 males. Ninety percent of the total population lives on New Providence, Grand Bahama and Abaco. New Providence has 69.9 percent of the population, Grand Bahama and Abaco with 15.5 percent, and 10.3 percent are scattered on the remaining islands and cays.

Population in Islands Census Years 1970 - 2000

Island	1970	1980	1990	2000
New Providence	101,503	135,437	172,196	210,832
Grand Bahama	25,859	33,102	40,898	46,994
Abaco	6,501	7,271	10,003	13,170
Acklins	936	618	405	428
Andros	8,845	8,307	8,177	7,686
Berry Islands	443	509	628	709
Bimini	1,503	1,411	1,639	1,717
Cat Island	2,657	2,215	1,698	1,647
Crooked Island	715	562	412	350
Eleuthera	6,247	8,331	7,993	7,999
Exuma and Cays	3,767	3,670	3,556	3,571
Harbour Island	2,238	1,133	1,219	1,639
Inagua	1,109	924	985	969
Long Island	3,861	3,404	2,949	2,992
Mayaguana	581	464	312	259
Ragged island	208	164	89	72
Rum Cay	80	78	53	80
San Salvador	776	747	465	970
Spanish Wells	983	1,167	1,372	1,527

Source: Department of Statistics

Table 1

Additionally, The Bahamas has 600 miles of open borders beginning fifty miles off the coast of Florida and extending to the south of Hispaniola. This does not only present a challenge to the delivery of sustainable development and equitable basic quality education and social services, but it also imposes a tremendous burden on the state to protect its borders from illegal immigration by air and sea.

Political Social and Economic Context

The Bahamas is a constitutional representative democracy and was so prior to 1967, when the governance of the country was reposed in the United Bahamian Party (UBP) in what was a “White Minority Oligarchy” referred to as the “Bay Street Boys”. This group not only controlled the commerce but also the government.

By 1958 and with the struggle toward majority rule, the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) along with the Labour Movement organized a general strike to bring attention to the many political, social, educational and economic problems facing the country.

As a result of this general strike, the Colonial Government, through the Secretary of State for the “colony” called upon the then Minority government to pass various reform measures to address many of the inequities.

These reform measures resulted in electoral reforms, voting rights to all adults attaining the age of 21 years, educational reform by way of greater access and the construction of new schools as well as internal self government in 1964 introducing Ministerial government thus abolishing the Public Boards.

Resulting from these reforms was a change in government from minority to majority rule in 1967 when the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) with the assistance of two Independents became the government.

This change in the political structure heralded the advent of a new era of social, economic and educational development of the country, culminating with National Statehood in 1973.

Economic

The Bahamas is a stable, developing nation with an economy heavily dependent on tourism and offshore banking. Tourism alone accounts for more than 60% of GDP and directly or indirectly employs half of the archipelago's labor force. Steady growth in tourism receipts, and a boom in construction of new hotels, resorts, and residences had led to solid GDP growth in recent years, but the slowdown in the US economy and the attacks of 11 September 2001 held back growth in these sectors in 2001-03.

Financial services constitute the second-most important sector of the Bahamian economy, accounting for about 15% of GDP. Manufacturing and agriculture together contribute approximately a tenth of GDP and show little growth, despite government incentives aimed at those sectors. Overall growth prospects in the short run rest heavily on the fortunes of the tourism sector, which depends on growth in the US, the source of more than 80% of the visitors. In addition to tourism and banking, the government supports the development of a "third pillar," e-commerce.

CHAPTER 2

History, Organization and Structure of Education in The Bahamas

History of Education

The history of formal education in The Bahamas was spearheaded by the Church in the Bahamas. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (an Anglican missionary group) pioneered Bahamian education from 1722 but since 1746 the government assisted by paying teachers' salaries. The Baptists and Methodist were most instrumental in educating blacks from about 1800. Anglican, Methodist, Baptist and Catholic-run schools continue their tremendous contributions to Bahamian education even today but the government has also played a prominent role from the beginning.

The Education Act of 1836, shortly after emancipation, established a Board of Education to administer all schools in the colony. A later act, passed in 1878, made primary education compulsory. Secondary education was dominated by religious institutions until the establishment of the Government High School in 1925.

Statutory Reform

According to Miller and Bethel in Educational Reform in Bahamian Education, the report of a study of Bahamian education commissioned by the Colonial Office in 1958 (later known as the Houghton Report) highlighted the many deficiencies of the system and pointed directions that should be followed to achieve needed improvements. The 1960-1961 Interim Report of the Board of

Education articulated the Board's recognition of the inadequacies of the existing educational provision to meet the needs of the people of The Bahamas "either in range or quality" and outlined plans to remedy those deficiencies (Miller and Bethel 2005).

They also pointed out that a number of significant reforms ensued:

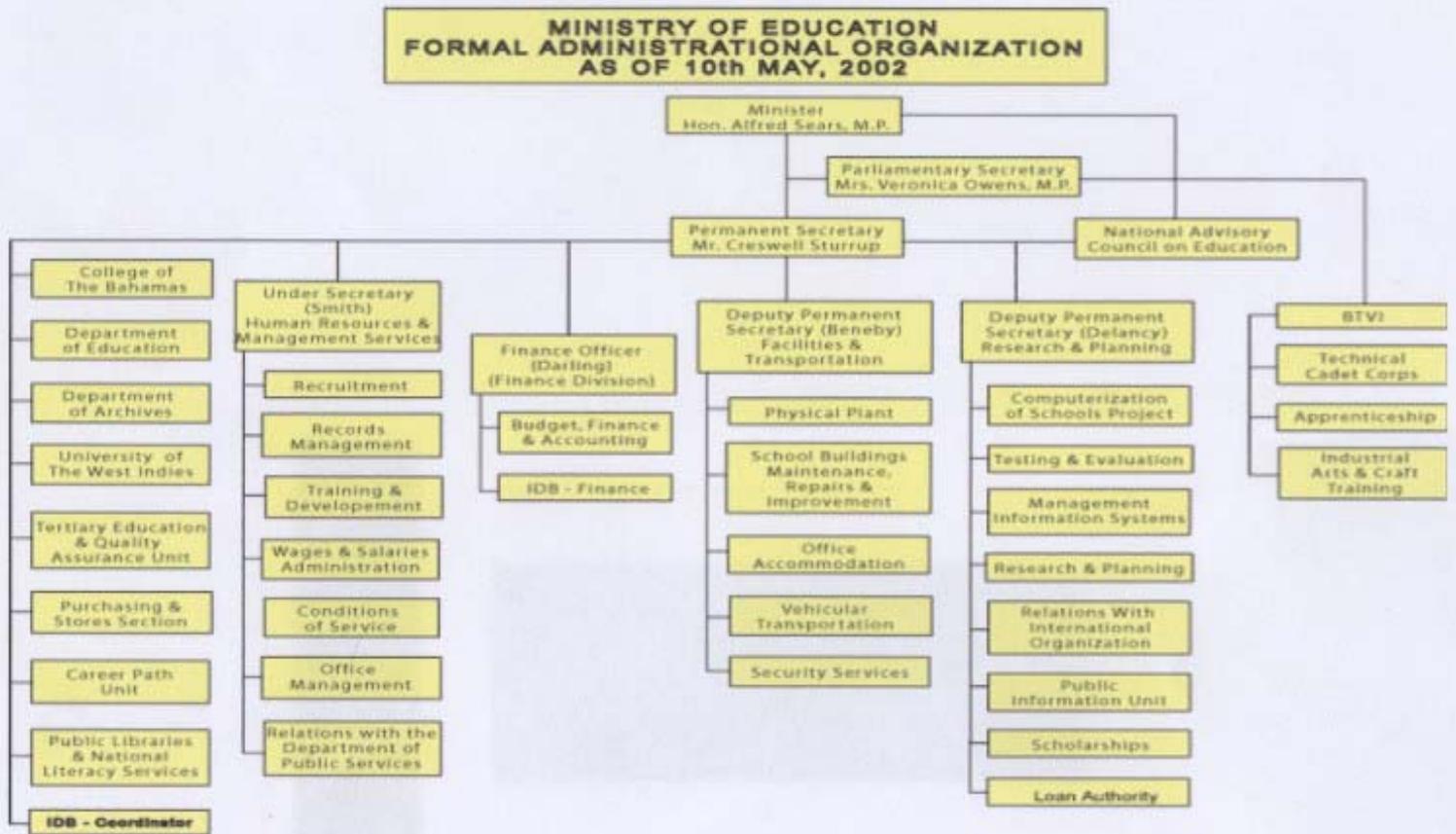
- A new Education Act came into effect in 1962 and this greatly extended the powers of the Board creating for the first time a unitary system of education to cover the compulsory period of formal schooling that was now to last nine years instead of eight, beginning at age five and ending at fourteen.
- Under the provisions of the new Act, the Board was empowered to the responsibility for secondary and further education, as well as libraries and other affiliated educational services.
- The Act also mandated the establishment of a Central Advisory Committee whose members were to be drawn mainly from the independent school systems and whose function was to advise the Board on education matters (ibid).

Establishment of the Ministry of Education

Ministerial government was introduced in 1964. It brought with it change and expansion in the central organizational arrangements of the education system. Further expansion took place after 1967 with the change of government.

The Ministry of Education replaced the Board of Education. With it came the separation of the administrative and professional aspects of duties, earlier initiatives to provide more structured supervision and support of the work of the

schools were greatly strengthened by the appointment of District and Subject Inspectors, whose emphases shifted from reporting on schools to providing



1c. Structure of the levels and cycle

Pre-higher education:

Duration of compulsory education:

Age of entry: 5

Age of exit: 15

Structure of school system:

Primary

Type of school providing this education: Primary School

Length of program in years: 6

Age level from: 5 to: 11

Table 2

Source: Ministry of Education Planning Unit

assistance and guidance to them.

Education began to receive the “lion” share of the national budget.

Thus with the opening of the San Salvador Teacher’s College for Family Island prospective teachers and the Bahamas Teachers College in New Providence, the teaching force was remarkably improved by the participation of more teachers who had received training at the local training colleges, many teachers were also given full In-Service awards to pursue further studies abroad.

The Challenges of providing Quality Education for All.

The Bahamas is an archipelago of small Island states consisting of some thirty plus inhabited islands. These islands not only vary in size but even more acutely in population. According to the IDB summary Demographic Data for The Bahamas, the population increased from 70,498 in 1950 to 301,790 in 2005 (U.S. Census Bureau. International Data Base, April 2005).

The significant increase in population had a corresponding increase in school attendance over the same period. An amendment to the Education Act raising the compulsory school leaving age from 14 years to 16 years had a tremendous effect on school size. Concomitantly, the education policy of instituting social promotion as oppose to promotion by merit had a deleterious effect on the quality and standard of educational attainment. Thus, many of the students who would have otherwise left school at age 14, or who were not qualified by virtue of passing the required number of examinations to move on to secondary schools were now, instead of going on to vocational programmes or some apprentice scheme, found themselves going on to secondary schools for which they were ill prepared.

The safety net was removed, social promotion took root. Consequently, many students merely went 'through' school. Schools it was felt were no more than an "assembly line" graduating in many respects functionally illiterates.

School Statistics

Ministry of Education Enrolment of Teachers and Students in Public and Private Schools, by Island and Gender/Sex.

September 2003 - June 2004 - Table 3

1	ISLAND		STUDENTS		TEACHERS	
			MALE	FEMALE	MALE	FEMALE
NEW PROVIDENCE	PRIMARY		9,023	8,482	58	815
	JR HIGH		3,920	3,519	113	386
	SR. HIGH		3,301	3,240	151	360
2	ABACO		1,293	1,247	40	116
3	ACKLINS		84	50	4	9
4	ANDROS		1,143	1,126	45	119
5	BERRY ISLANDS		79	84	4	6
6	BIMINI		105	117	6	12
7	CAT ISLAND		218	229	21	21
8	CROOKED ISLAND		46	41	2	10
9	ELEUTHERA		1,037	1,037	1,080	40
10	HARBOUR ISLAND		187	177	9	11
11	EXUMA		463	435	13	58
12	GRAND BAHAMA		4,321	3,995	103	392
13	INAGUA		105	103	7	10
14	LONG ISLAND		362	350	20	57
15	LONG CAY		4	2	-	1
16	MAYAGUANA		42	37	1	7
17	RAGGED ISLAND		4	7	1	1
18	RUM CAY		12	9	1	1
19	SAN SALVADOR		148	105	5	16
TOTAL			25,897	24,435	644	2,540
			50,332		3,184	

TEACHER STUDENT RATIO = 1:16

Source: Ministry of Education

What is more telling however; is that there has been over that fifty-five year period, a migration from the remote rural islands to the two urban population centers: New Providence and Grand Bahama, thus causing a very uneven distribution of the population.

This phenomenon combined with the distance of islands from one another, and the remoteness, small size, and scattered nature of the settlements within each island, unreliability of transport and communication between islands, historically has been difficult and costly to render and sustain an even delivery of educational and other social services.

As early as 1931, a Board of Education Report detailed the enormity of these challenges:

Of the many educational problems that confront the Board, the most formidable is that of the Out Islands. It has remained unsolved for close upon a century. No other colony in the British Empire would appear to be faced with proportionate difficulties (Board of Education 1948, 29).

These factors have also impacted upon the equality of access to the full range of formal education that Bahamians throughout the country have historically been able to enjoy, as well as upon the consistency of the quality of education provided in all parts of the country (Miller and Bethel 2005).

These difficulties notwithstanding, education in The Bahamas has progressed dramatically in the years since World War II, and the consequential social, economic, and political developments that have occurred over that same period have had a major influence upon that progress. These serve, therefore, as

an essential backdrop to the educational reforms including the provision of Preschools and Early Childhood education in the past five and a half decades.

Development of Education

Up to 1945, the progress of education in The Bahamas was closely tied to that of the economy. Periods of economic prosperity saw attendant progress in education, while lack of progress or even regression was, in part, the result of economic stagnation. Additionally, the period was characterized by the existence of poorly equipped teachers and the non-existence of a system for upgrading teaching skills. The late 1950's saw the development of tourism and with it some advances in education.

A positive step was taken to improve teacher training in 1950 with the opening of a Teachers' Training College. However, this was short-lived and the College closed its doors in 1957. Teachers were then sent to the United Kingdom for training. A new Teachers' College was established in 1961. The establishment of The Training College was one of the many recommendations of the 1958 Houghton Report, which also led to the passing of the 1962 Education Act.

Education Act

Internal self-government was achieved in 1964 and in 1967 majority rule was ushered in. This political change had far-reaching effects on the development of education. With the achievement of full internal self-government in 1964, the Government embarked upon a determined course of assessment and reassessment of its educational system by local and foreign experts. The

Hope Report of 1968 considered the development of secondary education in The Bahamas; the Leys Report of 1968 examined the development of The College of The Bahamas and the Williams Report of 1969 produced a document on the future direction of technical education in The Bahamas.

Early Childhood Education

Despite the many challenges facing the delivery of education to the people of The Bahamas, it is noted that Preschool education began in The Bahamas informally around the 1920's. While the compulsory school age for the start of formal schooling was 5 years, during this period, three and four year olds were allowed to attend school as "sit ins". Sitting in was particularly peculiar in the family islands as it permitted younger siblings to go to school with the older ones so as to accommodate working parents in the nearby and surrounding communities.

Generally however, nurseries or preschools for children below the age of six were not maintained by the Board of Education and approaches made to the Board to take responsibility for this level of education were consistently rejected (Board of Education 1945 and 1957). Therefore, nursery or preschools, as were available, were operated by churches or private individuals.

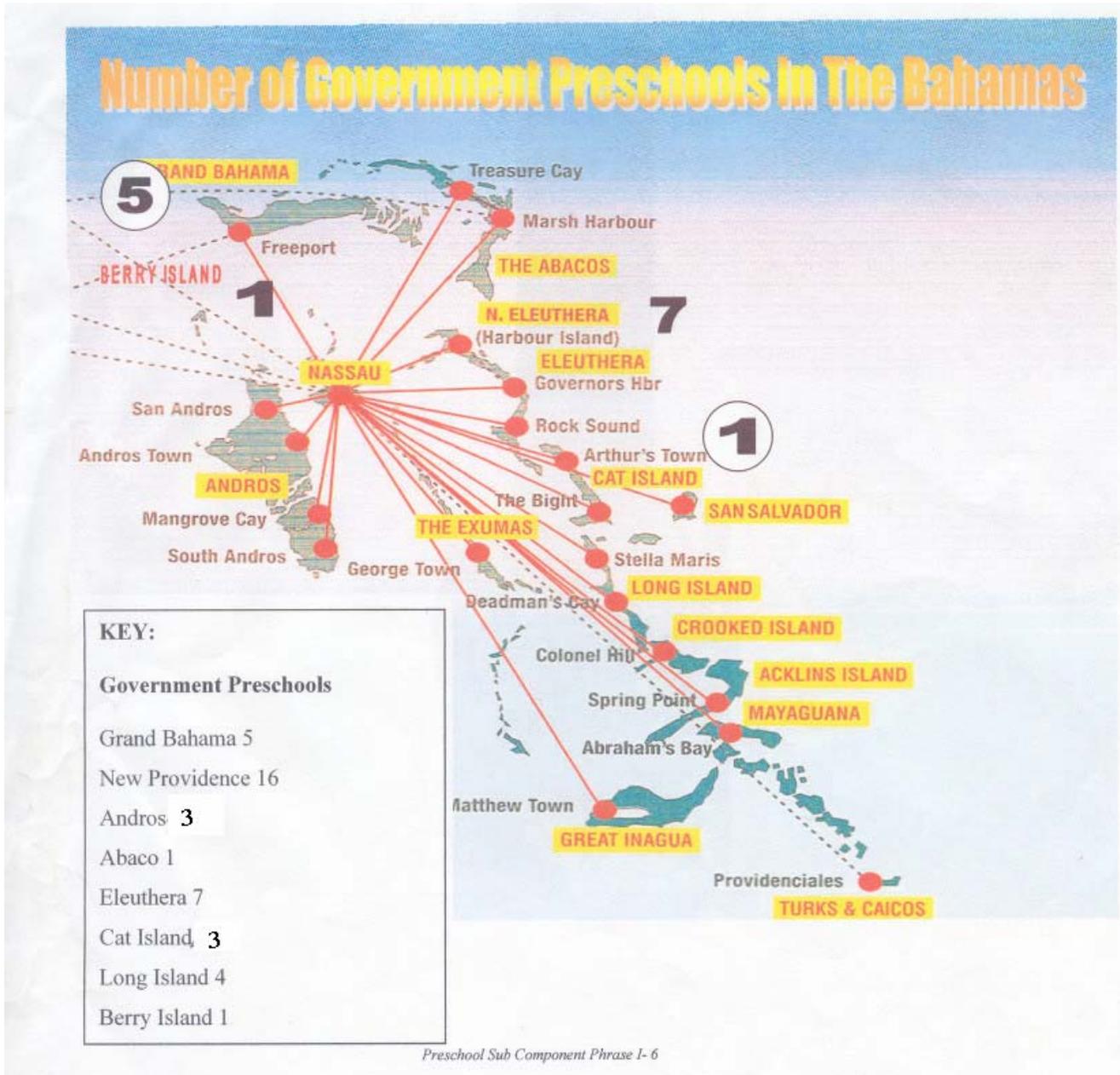


Figure II

According to Archer et al by the early 1950's formal independent preschools were established first in homes and on front porches, and later in stand-alone-centers. These facilities accommodated approximately 25 -30

children and provided half-day care (Unpublished report: The Bahamas Participation and Design of Preschool Education 2004, 4).

Of the individually run private preschools, most existed in the homes of their proprietors, often in less than desirable physical surroundings (Board of Education 1948, 85). The quality of education provided varied widely and depended entirely upon the competence of the persons responsible for the schools, most of whom had little or no formal training in the area. The importance of the early years of schooling was recognized, however, and the Board did take measures to have some of its teachers specially trained in infant methods for posting in preparatory schools in New Providence. Efforts to introduce similar provisions in Out Island schools were entirely dependent upon the availability of suitable accommodations for separate infant classes and of teachers who would volunteer for the work (Board of Education 1948, 30).

Despite the Ministry of Education's recognition of the importance of preschool education, problems of staffing, accommodation, and material resources continued to militate against the provision of public pre-schooling during this period. The numbers of private institutions offering this level of education continued to increase, especially after the Ministry's accepted responsibility for the supervision of such schools, for the provision of assistance in the upgrading of the skills of preschool operators, and for encouraging the community at large to recognize the importance of pre-schooling.

By the 1970-71 school year, preliminary surveys indicated that there was a proliferation of privately run unregistered preschool with some forty-five of

these institutions in New Providence. It was estimated that by that time approximately one-third to one-half of all children three to four years of age were in attendance in such schools. This level of participation resulted from both the desire of parents to give their children better educational opportunities and from necessity arising from the greater involvement of women in the workforce.

POPULATION OF 5 YEAR OLDS

1990 – 1997 SUMMARY

Table 4

YEAR	THE WHOLE BAHAMAS			NEW PROVIDENCE			REST OF THE BAHAMAS		
	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1990	2656	2569	5225	1766	1696	3462	890	872	1763
1991	2766	2673	5439	1827	1770	3597	939	903	1842
1992	2778	2881	5659	1871	1834	3705	907	1047	1954
1993	2739	2682	5421	1825	1802	3627	914	880	1794
1994	2791	2730	5521	1851	1821	3672	940	909	1849
1995	2854	2874	5521	1896	1966	3862	958	908	1866
1996	2792	2792	5584	3023	2220	5243	231	572	803
1997	2867	2798	5665	1898	1881	3779	969	917	1886

Source: Department of Statistics

Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)

(Total enrolment in primary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the eligible official primary school-age population in a given year).

The total enrolment in primary education, regardless of age is reflected in Table 4. The eligible official primary school age population for the years 1990 –

1997 is shown in Table 3. The Gross Enrolment ratio for the years 1990 – 1997 were derived from these data which are summarized in Tables 4.

The **GER** yielded by these data range from 97.4% in 1990 to 99.2 in 1997 indicating that the country is able to accommodate all of its primary school age population.

These high **GERs** also imply a high degree of participation in primary education and are consistent with the demand made by parents for education at both the secondary and primary levels.

Net Enrolment Ratio (NER)

(Enrolment in primary education of the official primary school age group expressed as a percentage of the primary school population)

The NER attempts to determine the extent to which the official school age population are enrolled in primary school. It is a measure of the degree of participation in primary education of the official primary school age group.

PRIMARY SCHOOL POPULATION

1990 – 1999

Table 5

ALL BAHAMAS			NEW PROVIDENCE			REST OF THE BAHAMAS			
YEAR	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1990	16472	15947	32419	10735	10432	21167	5737	5515	11252
1991	12652	16093	32745	10941	10601	21542	1711	5492	11203
1992	16797	16237	34034	11104	10754	21858	5693	5483	11176
1993	16889	16362	33251	11223	10894	22117	5676	5468	11144
1994	16939	16467	34406	11339	11049	22388	5600	5418	13018
1995	16988	16567	33555	11532	11278	22810	5456	5289	10745
1996	17150	17185	33885	11901	11650	23551	5249	5535	10784
1997	17338	16919	34277	12425	12152	24577	4913	4767	9680
1998	17600	17107	34707	13095	12771	25866	4505	4336	8841
1999	17844	17270	35124	13820	13432	27262	4024	3838	7862

Improving Accessibility

In order to give practical effect to the compulsory clause in the Education Act, the Government of The Bahamas was compelled to establish schools

throughout the archipelago, in every settlement (town), wherever a relevant population resided. In some circumstances it was not unusual to find in the less populated areas the full range of classes/grades represented in a one-room school house being taught by one teacher, who in good times may have had the benefit of the assistance of a monitor. Nevertheless, the clause fostered a tradition of expecting an education.

By the decade of the nineties when countries were being encouraged to make the universalization of primary education a priority, it had already become a reality in The Bahamas. The Government could, therefore, turn its attention in the area of primary education to making schools more physically accessible and improving the instructional programme.

In respect to improving physical accessibility the intention was that schools should be located within a three-mile radius of children's homes, thereby making it unnecessary for any child to travel more than three miles to school.

In the urban centres of New Providence and to a lesser extent Grand Bahama, this objective was achieved such that primary schools are now neighbourhood schools and are generally located within a three mile radius of children's homes. Except in the case of team teaching schools, classes are held in self-contained classrooms with one teacher being responsible for one class, at one grade level.

Establishment of a Preschool Unit

As a result of this proliferation and the overall unevenness of provision and the differential access to early childhood education with the increasing

numbers of these institutions, the government found it necessary and expedient to appoint an officer to closely monitor these schools.

The involvement by the government in preschool education nevertheless continued to be minimal. In 1975, however, a community-run Day Care Center and Kindergarten was established and was staffed by three teachers seconded from government schools (Johnson 2000).

Later, a second community initiative to develop a preschool center was successfully implemented with assistance from the government. All other institutions at this level were privately operated.

In 1980, one of a group of five teachers from Ministry schools who had previously been granted in-service awards to pursue degree courses in Early Childhood Education was appointed preschool coordinator in the Ministry of Education. This officer assumed responsibility for:

- Designing an appropriate program for preschool education, for
Supervising preschools in the country.
- And for offering training workshops for operators and teachers of preschools.

By 1982, the record shows that eighty-nine preschools in New Providence and sixteen in the Family Islands were registered with the Ministry of Education. It was acknowledged, however, that many more unregistered schools existed. By the beginning of the 1990s, these numbers had multiplied significantly, even though the Government's own provision was limited to 235 positions and was

confined to the two units in New Providence and three small units in Grand Bahama (National Task Force on Education, 25).

The National Task Force on Education discovered in 1993, moreover, that the curriculum guidelines developed by the Ministry of Education in 1985 had still not been implemented, although the numbers of institutions trading under the misnomer of “preschool” had so expanded that the Ministry of Education preschool coordinator was unable to provide a reliable estimate of their extent (National Task Force on Education, 26). The 1995 figures indicated, however, that there were one hundred and seventy-nine registered preschools and day-care centers. Operators of these facilities were perhaps persons of limited or no training, despite the availability of programs in Early Childhood Education at The College of The Bahamas.

While there were a few privately run preschools in some of the more developed Family Islands, access to this level of education was not generally available in islands outside of New Providence and Grand Bahama, although there existed significant parental interest and demand for its provision throughout the archipelago (National Task Force on Education, 46, 48-49, 52). In the last few years of this period, however, deliberate policy decision was taken to extend the access to public preschool facilities by the inclusion of such provision in six new primary schools that were or were due to be constructed in New Providence, Grand Bahama, and several Family Islands. In addition there existed the intention to develop such centers in a number of existing primary schools in New Providence and Grand Bahama and in certain community facilities.

Concerns persisted, therefore, that many of those establishments did not conform to desirable standards and there was still no legislation in place to ensure their compliance. By 1998, however, draft legislation had been developed and was being reviewed for future approval and implementation.

Gross enrolment in early childhood development programmes expressed as a percentage of the official age group.

The available data on early childhood development programmes do not account for all facilities in the country. Such data as exist indicate the following:

- 200 private facilities operating in The Bahamas were registered with the Ministry of Education during the 1998 – 1999 school year.
- Government maintained facilities numbered 15 and offered places at that time to four year olds only. Students enrolled equaled 505 with the average school population being 33.
- Table 1a provides data for a sample of institutions that offered preschool education during the 1997/1998 school year. It shows that the average number of places offered by registered schools for both three and four year olds in 59.
- 200 private school and 12 public schools each offering 59 places yield a total of 12,508.
- The population of the official age group in this category for the years 1990 – 1999 is reflected in Tables 1. It shows the population of the relevant category to be 12,494 in the 1997/1998 school year.
- The GER for the year 1997/1998 is, therefore 100%.

Given the Government's commitment to the provision of Pre-school education.

(Government owned pre-schools increased by three between 1997/1998 and 1998/1999), the presence of schools that are not registered, and the need for parents to have care for children while at work, it is likely the resulting GER is not unrealistic. This conclusion is confirmed by principals of primary schools in the capital. They say that few pupils who have not been exposed to pre-school experiences, enter grade one. Nevertheless, it is recognised that counted among the enrolled population are some children who fall outside the relevant age boundaries.

**ENROLMENT IN PRE-SCHOOL FACILITIES
BY TYPE OF ADMINISTRATION & LOCATION**

1997/1998

Table 6

	New Providence	# of Schools	Grand Bahama	# of Schools	Family Islands	# of Schools	Total	# of Schools
PUBLIC	375	7	114	4	00	1	489	12
PRIVATE	671	8	72	2	64	0	807	10
TOTAL	1046	15	186	6	64	1	1296	22

	New Providence	Rest of The Bahamas	Total
PUBLIC	375	114	489

PRIVATE	671	136	807
TOTAL	1046	250	1296

Source: Ministry of Education, Planning Unit

POPULATION OF 3 & 4 YEAR OLD

1990 – 1999 SUMMARY

Table 7

The Whole Bahamas			New Providence			Rest of The Bahamas			
Year	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1990	5842	1702	11544	3916	3844	7760	1926	2142	3784
1991	5872	5748	11620	3996	3939	7936	1876	1809	3684
1992	5926	5798	11724	4152	4094	8246	1774	1704	3478
1993	6008	5858	11866	4384	4306	8691	1624	1552	3175
1994	6114	5936	12038	4685	4572	9256	1429	1354	2782
1995	6230	5997	12227	1939	1903	3842	1198	1125	2323
1996	6240	6062	12402	5269	5070	10340	971	992	2062
1997	6396	6100	12494	5367	5153	10520	1029	947	19744
1998	6424	6108	12513	5345	5134	10478	1059	974	2035
1999	6378	6100	12476	5236	5042	10278	1142	1058	2198

Source: Department of Statistics

Percentage of New Entrants to Grade 1 who have attended some form of organised early childhood development programme.

Given the GER above and the trend characteristic of this area it follows that the percentage of new entrants to primary grade 1 who have attended some form of organised early childhood development programme will parallel the number who have had exposure to some form of early childhood education. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that at least 90% of the relevant population would have had exposure to a pre-school curriculum. In the established church schools, for example, where the inclusion of kindergarten classes has been institutionalised, it is highly likely that most children in grade one would have had exposure to a pre-school curriculum.

Policy Implications

Exposure to pre-school experiences is increasing. The concern, however, is with respect to the maintenance of standards and the broad area of quality assurance. In this context, attention to the implementation of the policy regarding registration and monitoring is critical.

By the end of 2002, some 40 preschools were added to primary school facilities. This enabled parents who could not afford a private preschool, access to pre-schooling free of charge (Foulkes 2005).

CHAPTER 3

Educational System Failure: Factors and Indicators

During the 1950's, according to Miller and Bethel (2005, pg, 3) the mark of successfully completing one's schooling was determined through the sitting of the local "School Leaving Certificate," which at this time was issued by the then Board of Education. The results of this examination was not normally very good. Students had to sit all subjects and pass them in one sitting, if this did not happen the students failed and was expected to re-sit the entire examination the following year. In 1950, only 38% of a total of 658 students received certificates. Much effort was made to improve upon the quality of instruction in the public school system. By 1958, only a slight increase of 3% was realized.

Those students who were more capable also wrote the University of Cambridge Junior Certificate examination which was later replaced by The Bahamas Junior Certificate examination - another local examination. The results of this examination were even less impressive. By 1958, only 212 or 31% of students writing the exam passed. This trend continued over the years. Less than 10% of the students nationally were experiencing reasonable success in these examinations.

BJC – All Bahamas Male/Female Comparison

Table 8

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U	Total Sat
MALE	608	1788	2872	2368	2039	1546	1006	961	13195
%	4.4	13.6	21.8	18.0	15.5	11.7	7.6	7.3	D
FEMALE	941	2664	3769	2829	2284	1595	937	752	15775
%	6.0	16.9	23.9	17.9	14.5	10.1	5.9	4.8	D

The comparison above shows that the female entrees, outnumber the male entrees by approximately 2000. More importantly, it also shows that the females are out performing their male counterpart in each category of the grading scale. In the higher scales (ABC), the females have approximately a 2 percent difference in each scale than their male counterpart. Additionally, at the lower end of the scale, the females have a smaller percent than the males.

The results of the 2004 BJC examination continue to reflect the disappointment and lack of success among this cohort. Out of a total of approximately 20,000 subject entries more than 60% received a 'D' grade or lower, while 12% received unclassified scores or "U" grades.

A similar pattern of scholastic failure among 12th graders sitting the 2004 examination also emerged.

BGCSE – MALE/FEMALE COMPARISON

Table 9

ALL BAHAMAS	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U	
MALE	471	769	2094	2060	1381	879	633	454	D-
%	5.4	8.8	24.0	23.6	15.8	10.1	7.2	5.2	
Cum. %	5.4	14.2	38.2	61.7	77.5	87.6	94.8	100.	
ALL BAHAMAS									
FEMALE	886	1482	3575	2995	1973	1220	834	562	D
%	6.6	11.0	26.4	22.1	14.6	9.0	6.2	4.2	
Cum.%	6.6	17.5	43.9	66.1	80.7	89.7	95.9	100.	

The statistics show that females have out performed their male counterpart at every grade point. The number of A's and B's obtained almost doubled that of the male candidates despite the percentage points being less than 2 at the A, and less than slightly more than 2 at the B. However, a greater number of females are operating at the lower grade points than the males

despite their smaller percentage at these points. The number of male entries in contrast to female entries are as follows:

Males – 8,745

Females – 13,350

This accounts for the greater number of female entries at the lower grade points.

Out of a total of 22,095 subject entries, better than 60% received “D” grades or less. Schools were being accused of graduating functionally illiterates. These so called illiterates were unable to find meaningful gainful employment. Thus, they became deviant and posed a social risk to society.

Youth at Risk.

A range of growing social issues – school dropouts, violence, gang involvement, AIDS, drug abuse, incarceration, unemployment, and teenage pregnancy – became associated with those youth who were in the bottom quartile of scholastic performance.

As a means to address these perceived shortcomings, the Ministry of Education introduced a National Standardised Assessment (GLAT) at grade 3, 6, and 8 to address the perceived weakness in the school system especially at the primary level. The GLAT is a customized version of the Stanford Achievement Test series. The results of these Assessments were able to pinpoint nationally, individually, by school and by island how the students were performing against their peers.

While recommending corrective measures to ensure they succeed at the Junior and Secondary level of schooling .

The results revealed consistently, annually, that nationally, private schools were out-performing the public schools and that those students who had pre-school experience or participated in some Early Childhood activities did better than those who did not.

What was also revealing was that between grades 3, 6, 8 & 12, there was a sharp decline in the number of students enrolled in these grades and fewer were entering to sit the BJC and GCE examinations. The schools were either not entering them for their examinations or they were dropping out prior to reaching grades 9 and 12.

Table 10

BAHAMAS GRADE LEVEL ASSESSMENT		GRADE 3										BAHAMIAN NATIONAL TESTING PROGRAM			
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CORPORATION HARCOURT BRACE JOVANOVIICH, PUBLISHERS		TEST DATE 5/ 2/90										DEMOGRAPHIC REPORT			
												PAGE 3			
	WORD STUDY SKLS	READ- ING COMP	VOCAB	LISTG COMP	SPELL	LANG- UAGE	CONC OF NUMBR	MATH COMP	MATH APPL	TOTAL READ- ING	TOTAL LISTG	TOTAL LANG- UAGE	TOTAL MATH	BASIC BATT TOTAL	
PARTICIPATION IN SPECIAL ED PROGRAMME = NO RESPONSE															
N-COUNT	5040	5041	4941	4936	5045	4944	5038	5025	5034	5028	4933	4892	4946	4780	
MEAN RAW SCORE	27.7	24.3	21.2	19.9	17.6	20.4	16.0	20.8	15.9	52.1	41.1	38.2	53.0	186.1	
STANDARD DEVIATION	9.4	10.5	6.6	5.1	8.1	8.7	7.3	10.5	7.8	18.4	10.9	15.7	23.4	62.1	
PERCENTILE RANK-STANINE OF THE MEAN NCE	61-6	62-6	63-6	63-6	60-6	65-6	63-6	64-6	57-5	62-6	64-6	64-6	62-6	64-6	
MEDIAN RAW SCORE	26.1	25.8	21.0	20.1	17.7	19.0	15.0	19.5	14.3	51.9	41.0	37.1	49.5	182.7	
ATTENDANCE IN A PRESCHOOL PROGRAMME = PARTICIPATED IN A PRESCHOOL PROGRAMME															
N-COUNT	2469	2473	2431	2432	2469	2432	2471	2464	2470	2467	2430	2409	2440	2377	
MEAN RAW SCORE	30.1	26.7	22.8	21.2	19.5	22.2	17.1	22.6	17.4	56.9	43.9	42.0	57.3	201.3	
STANDARD DEVIATION	9.3	10.1	6.3	4.7	7.8	8.5	7.1	10.5	8.0	17.9	10.1	15.1	23.3	59.8	
PERCENTILE RANK-STANINE OF THE MEAN NCE	69-6	70-6	71-6	71-6	69-6	73-6	69-6	70-6	64-6	70-6	73-6	73-6	69-6	71-6	
MEDIAN RAW SCORE	28.9	29.8	22.7	21.4	21.2	21.6	16.5	22.2	16.0	58.6	44.3	43.4	55.2	202.6	
ATTENDANCE IN A PRESCHOOL PROGRAMME = DID NOT PARTICIPATE IN A PRESCHOOL PROGRAMME															
N-COUNT	759	758	729	727	756	730	759	751	746	755	726	715	729	689	
MEAN RAW SCORE	24.2	19.5	18.7	17.9	13.7	16.7	13.5	16.8	13.2	43.8	36.6	30.6	43.8	156.1	
STANDARD DEVIATION	8.5	9.8	6.1	4.9	7.3	7.2	6.3	9.5	6.7	16.8	9.9	13.5	20.1	54.1	
PERCENTILE RANK-STANINE OF THE MEAN NCE	47-5	44-5	49-5	48-5	41-5	48-5	51-5	50-5	44-5	46-5	49-5	45-5	47-5	49-5	
MEDIAN RAW SCORE	22.9	17.2	17.9	17.8	11.5	15.0	12.1	14.3	11.8	40.0	35.6	26.8	39.0	144.3	
ATTENDANCE IN A PRESCHOOL PROGRAMME = PARTICIPATION UNKNOWN															
N-COUNT	324	324	306	305	321	306	322	321	319	323	305	303	315	296	
MEAN RAW SCORE	23.5	17.8	18.6	17.7	13.3	15.4	12.0	15.3	11.5	41.3	36.4	28.9	39.1	146.9	
STANDARD DEVIATION	7.6	9.5	6.3	4.8	6.9	6.1	5.4	8.2	5.5	15.4	10.3	11.9	16.8	47.3	
PERCENTILE RANK-STANINE OF THE MEAN NCE	45-5	39-4	48-5	47-5	40-5	43-5	42-5	46-5	36-4	42-5	47-5	42-5	40-5	44-5	
MEDIAN RAW SCORE	22.2	14.2	17.3	17.5	11.1	14.3	10.5	13.1	10.5	36.9	34.8	25.0	34.5	135.5	
ATTENDANCE IN A PRESCHOOL PROGRAMME = NO RESPONSE															
N-COUNT	1679	1676	1654	1652	1688	1656	1674	1678	1688	1672	1651	1640	1645	1586	
MEAN RAW SCORE	26.0	23.5	20.3	18.9	16.8	20.0	15.9	20.4	15.4	49.6	39.2	37.0	52.1	179.9	
STANDARD DEVIATION	9.4	10.2	6.9	5.4	8.2	8.9	7.6	10.6	7.8	18.1	11.5	16.0	23.7	63.1	
PERCENTILE RANK-STANINE OF THE MEAN NCE	54-5	59-5	57-5	56-5	56-5	63-6	62-6	62-6	54-5	57-5	57-5	61-6	60-6	61-6	
MEDIAN RAW SCORE	24.3	24.1	19.6	19.0	16.4	18.4	14.8	19.4	14.0	48.9	38.5	35.2	48.7	175.9	

Source: Examination Technical Report

These educational and scholastic failures manifested themselves in many students dropping out of school before 12 grade and getting involved in anti-social and deviant behaviours.

According to the IDB report 2004:

The co-existence of acute skills shortages, notably in trades, and unemployment rates consistently above 7% raise questions about the relevance of education, particularly for males. Although core curricular subjects have been revised at the primary and secondary levels, the delivery and content of vocational education remains outdated. Of particular concern, male underachievement has resulted in about 40% of all boys dropping out of the education before graduation. Notwithstanding, girls were out-performing their

counter parts, the statistics nevertheless revealed that over half of the births in The Bahamas occurred out-of-wedlock, 70% of the youth come from single parent homes, and in 90% of these cases the single parent is a teenage girl.

Given these social and scholastic indicators with respect to students' progress and achievement, the government was forced to provide means to redress these problems.

One of the main focuses was to address the issue of early schooling among the general population and make such accessible throughout The Commonwealth of The Bahamas, as it was established that those students who had early childhood experiences performed better than those who did not.

Equally as important, it was not sufficient to provide access, but the standard of the curriculum and the training of teachers were also paramount.

CHAPTER 4

Structures and Policies Implemented to Combat School Failure

Fuelled by the United Nations declaration of 'Education for All', the educational agenda of the governing party and the recommendations of the National Task Force on Education, the Government of The Bahamas sought to bring structure, coherence and legitimacy to the area of early childhood education in the decade of the nineties and articulated an initiative which had the following objectives:

- Increase the participation of the relevant population in approved early childhood care programmes by:
 - i. establishing Pre-school Centres at all Government maintained Primary Schools by the year 2000;
 - ii. encouraging civic groupings such as churches and unions to establish day-care and pre-school Centres;
 - iii. providing subsidies to those centres which care for the children of low-income families so that no child need be refused admission solely on the grounds of inability to pay, and
 - iv. extending subventions to a limited number of approved private establishments involved in the delivery of pre-school programmes.
- Devise processes and structures that will establish minimum standards and monitor quality by:

- i. promulgating legislation to govern the operation, regulation and standards employed in pre-schools and infant care facilities.
 - ii. licensing all Early Childhood Care Centres according to an approved grading system.
 - iii. implementing an early childhood education curriculum that would guide the activities of all child care centres;
 - iv. developing policies and establishing guidelines for Early Childhood Care Centres.
 - v. establishing a support system to include health, education and social welfare specialists to provide guidance and assistance to and evaluation of Early Childhood Care Centres.
- Institute an approved training programme for all proprietors and operators of early childhood facilities to ensure minimum standards of care.

Increasing the Availability of Approved Early Childhood Education Programmes

The direct involvement of the State in the provision of early childhood education programmes began in earnest around the beginning of the decade. At that time two pre-schools, fully maintained by the Government and offering a total of 30 places to four-year-olds were opened in the capital, New Providence. Around the same time the Government began to advance subventions in the form of providing teachers, to three independent facilities. Since that time there has been a gradual increase in the number of places made available by the

Government. These places add to the number offered by private entities which proliferated as a result of the void created by the failure of the Government to become more actively involved, earlier.

In its attempt to increase the number of places for early childhood education, the government instituted a policy that all new primary schools to be constructed would include provision for pre-school units and that it would provide subventions to all churches who wanted to open and run pre-schools. Ministry of Education in the implementation of this policy decided on a three prong approach:

- Constructing/refurbishing facilities for the exclusive use as a pre-school/early childhood centres;
- Appending kindergarten classes to existing primary schools, and
- Extending subventions to particular independent institutions to facilitate the attendance of under-privileged children,

Islands have had kindergarten classes added to their structure.

Standardisation and Quality Assurance

The completion of a standardised curriculum and the licensing of facilities were the major achievements realised in the area of standardisation and quality assurance development.

The Development of a Standardised Curriculum

Prior to the Government's intervention, entities offering education and care services for pre-school children proliferated throughout the country. A number of these entities particularly those associated with religious groups traditionally

involved in education, follow a pedagogically sound programme and operate in appropriate facilities. On the other hand, there are those, some of which exist without the knowledge of the responsible authorities, whose understanding of the relationship between programme design and psychological and physical development, is limited. In order to reduce the debilitating impact of an inappropriate grounding and introduction to school and to assist these institutions, the Pre-school unit of Ministry of Education began the process of designing a curriculum, subsequent to the recommendations of the National Task Force on Education. The curriculum, "The Readiness Programme" is available in schools having been introduced in September of 1996.

Licensing and Monitoring

Legislation, to provide for the Regulation and Management of Day-Care Centres and Pre-Schools came into force in June 2004. Further, the employment of additional professionals is an effort which will positively affect the supervision of pre-schools.

As a result of the new legislation, all organisations offering educational services to children of pre-school age are monitored by the pre-school unit. The staffing situation in the unit, however, has worked against the full impact of this facility being experienced. Many institutions still are not registered, and those that are registered are not monitored as closely as the unit would wish.

The Provision of Training for Teachers and Operators

The College of The Bahamas introduced an Associate Degree and Teacher Certification Programme in Early Childhood Education, designed for

persons having the academic qualifications that would satisfy the entry requirements into the Associate Degree Programme, it excluded the vast majority of persons operating and working in Early Education Centres. As a consequence, The Centre for Continuing Education, a department of the College of The Bahamas (COB) collaborated with the Teacher Education Division to develop an Upgrading Programme that would improve academic efficiency, provide exposure to necessary skills and enhance understanding of child growth and development. The first intake into this programme was in 1993.

Pre-School Auxiliary Programme:

Subsequently in 1994 the Teacher Education Division developed and implemented the Pre-school Auxiliary Teachers' certificate programme as a preparatory one for persons who with some remedial assistance would be able to pursue a college level programme. Successful completion of this programme would, therefore, enable matriculation into the Bachelor of Education Primary Certification programme, which leads to an academic credential and professional certification.

In more recent times, the Bahamas Baptist Community College, a private denominational school, began offering a certificate programme for operators of and workers in pre-schools. This course of study is at the pre-college level and employs a flexible, open system of admission. Other private tertiary institutions are also offering short-term training programmes for operators of pre-schools and child care centres.

Social Programmes

Programmes S.U.R.E. (**S**uccess **U**ltimately **R**eassures **E**veryone) and P.A.C.E. (**P**roviding **A**ccess to **C**ontinued **E**ducation) are two of the social programmes implemented by the Ministry of Education to address and ameliorate the social dislocations that existed among primary and secondary students.

In 1992 Programme S.U.R.E. was launched for the purpose of catering to the academic and psycho-social needs of those students who displayed chronic disruptive behaviour and were pre-disposed to violence. The participants were mainly male students of secondary age who may have been suspended or expelled from the regular classroom because their behaviour was adversely affecting their academic achievement as well as the learning environment of the other students. The main focus of the programme is on Behaviour Management and Modification Techniques. Its main objectives focus on:

- I) improving skills in interpersonal relationships
- II) developing self-esteem and respect
- III) encouraging decision-making and conflict resolution without violence and stimulate academic and vocational interest so that students would eventually be mainstreamed.

P.A.C.E.

This programme was implemented in 1970 to address social issues relating to teen-aged mothers. Initially, P.A.C.E. was a Student Mothers Clinic established to assist student mothers who displayed a strong interest in

continuing their education. It was felt that, they would benefit from returning to the normal classroom. Participants in this programme range from age twelve to nineteen. It assists these students in preparing for re-entry into high-schools, further education or employment.

The programme integrates educational, social, cultural and ante/post natal care in its offerings. Students are expected to take Mathematics, Language Arts and Science and participate in courses for personal and professional development, nutrition, parent craft and spiritual enrichment.

The third programme, a fairly new venture is the National Youth Service under the auspices of The Ministry of Youth Sports and Culture. This programme has been

Implemented to meet the young people where they are and to assist them in becoming responsible citizens who will make meaningful and positive contributions to society. According to The Ministry it has completed its first pilot. However, for the programme to be successful it will require the assistance as well as cooperation of parents and benefactors.

CHAPTER 5

Future –The Challenges

According to The Bahamas country's report for the meeting of Chief Education Officers and Senior Teacher Educators held in Tobago March 2003, it was opined that in order to ensure that quality education is delivered to all of the schools in the nation, efforts must be made to strengthen the teaching force and its capabilities must be put in place. It further stated that reform is necessary in the content area standards, the curriculum content and the pedagogical skills, teachers are expected to acquire.

The Ministry of Education must provide teachers with more time as well as opportunities to work with colleagues, to assist with the revision and development of curriculum as well as allow them to reflect on the current trends in education. However, being able to provide the necessary time and opportunities are challenging. It also suggests a shift towards standards and an integrated approach to instruction. The Ministry is in agreement with teachers being involved in the initial articulation of standards and in the development of policies and practices as well as in recognising and rewarding teachers for excellent work.

The way forward for the Ministry to prevent school failure the following are recommended:

Establishment of Preschool Councils

Enactment of the Pre-school and Day-Care though laudable, is insufficient to ensure that there will be access to pre-schools and that all pre-schools will exhibit quality in standards and consistency across schools in the islands. The Council envisioned in the Act must now be established and become operational. Its functions will be to register day-care centres and pre-schools; regulate and inspect day-care centres and pre-schools; appoint qualified persons other than those managing a day-care centre or pre-school to be inspectors; to govern, discipline and regulate the professional conduct of operators and employees of day-care centres and pre-schools; to issue annual licences to operators of day-care centres and pre-schools; establish standards of qualifications for and to regulate the professional conduct of operators of any day-care and pre-school among other things. The national standards for Daycare and Preschool centres have already been approved.

Better supervision of Preschools.

It means therefore that the council with its complement of professionally trained staff, if not satisfied with a particular institution ought, after giving it time to improve, close down such institutions if they are void of the standards set for such institutions. (Official Gazette 17th June, 2004).

Access to Early Childhood Education

Since 1992, the government has made a conscious effort to ensure that every child have access to early childhood education. In May, 2005, the Minister of Education in a press release reiterated the government's commitment to

providing preschool facilities for every child on every island, and on every cay in The Bahamas with trained teachers demonstrating best practices in early childhood education (The Bahama Journal, May 17th, 2005).

One of the major challenges of providing access and equity in Pre-schools is the geography of The Bahamas. The sparsely populated islands and far flung settlements mean that the government has to replicate many times over the preschool programmes in all islands and in all schools. The government policy therefore was to attach pre-school units to existing primary schools and where ever, and when new primary schools were constructed, they will have pre-school units attached. To date, despite its best efforts, the government , out of a total number of 113 public primary schools, only forty (40) preschools have been so far established. This is less than 45.2% of the total primary schools. What is more telling is that public pre-schools do not exist in several of the other developing population centres.

Recommendation was made and there has now been established a Pre-School Unit headed by a Deputy Director of Education to over see the implication and the day- to- day running of the programme.

Preparation and Professional Development for teachers

Another challenge is the professional development of a cadre of teachers to work in these schools. The previous reports have shown that because of the lack of training, the quality of the instruction offered by these institutions were less than desirable. Many of the teachers were untrained and the curriculum non-standardised and inappropriate. The ministry must therefore ensure that all

preschools teachers are qualified. The Pre-school Unit and the Ministry must offer scholarships to want-to-be preschool teachers to address this perceived problem. Additionally, the College of The Bahamas, as well as any other recognized tertiary level institution operating in the Bahamas ought to offer specialized training for such prospective teachers. Presently, The College of The Bahamas offers a Certificate for Pre-School teachers, which qualifies persons working in pre-schools. Further, it offers an Early Childhood option in the B.Ed, Primary Programme for persons wishing to teach in the area of early childhood.

Presently The School of Education is developing an Early Childhood programme at the Bachelors level to meet this challenge.

Parenting Programmes

Our research indicates that about one half of the births are from single parents and 70% of these are born to single un-wed mothers who themselves are teenagers. This highlights the seriousness and perhaps the lack of parenting skills of these teenaged parents. Thus there is the problem of the high incident of school dropout before secondary school, male underachievers, gangs and many other social misfits in the society. It is necessary therefore for the government through its agencies, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of Youth to come together in a tripartite arrangement to sponsor and mount appropriate parenting programmes to address this challenge. Such a programme could have the effect of also addressing the issue of skills shortages, especially as The Bahamas moves closer to participating in the WTO and CSME.

This is an area that carries a good deal of political pressure and sensitivity.

Such a complex issue cuts across many sectors -- like education, health, justice, the safety net and community development -- and one that usually calls for an integrated and participatory approach. In dialogue with government, the key will be to help construct a framework through which this issue can be addressed efficiently and effectively over the medium to long term, while also undertaking at the same time some initiatives that may have a positive impact in the shorter term (or at least provide some experience for possible replication later) (IDB 2004).

Immigrants Language Barrier

Statistics revealed that the immigrants of Haitian extraction are the single largest immigrant population in the Public School system. The results as shown in the GLAT indicate that this group because of the language deficits experienced in first three grades in the primary school accounts for their lack of appropriate educational development among this age group.

Further more, recent indications are that these students are also poorly socialized and thus are among the group that drop out of primary and secondary schools early, thus forming the gangs and causing social dislocations within the communities.

As a means of addressing the issue of equity and access it is necessary for the Ministry to introduce early intervention programmes for this segment of the population and to ensure as far as possible that this group participate in pre-

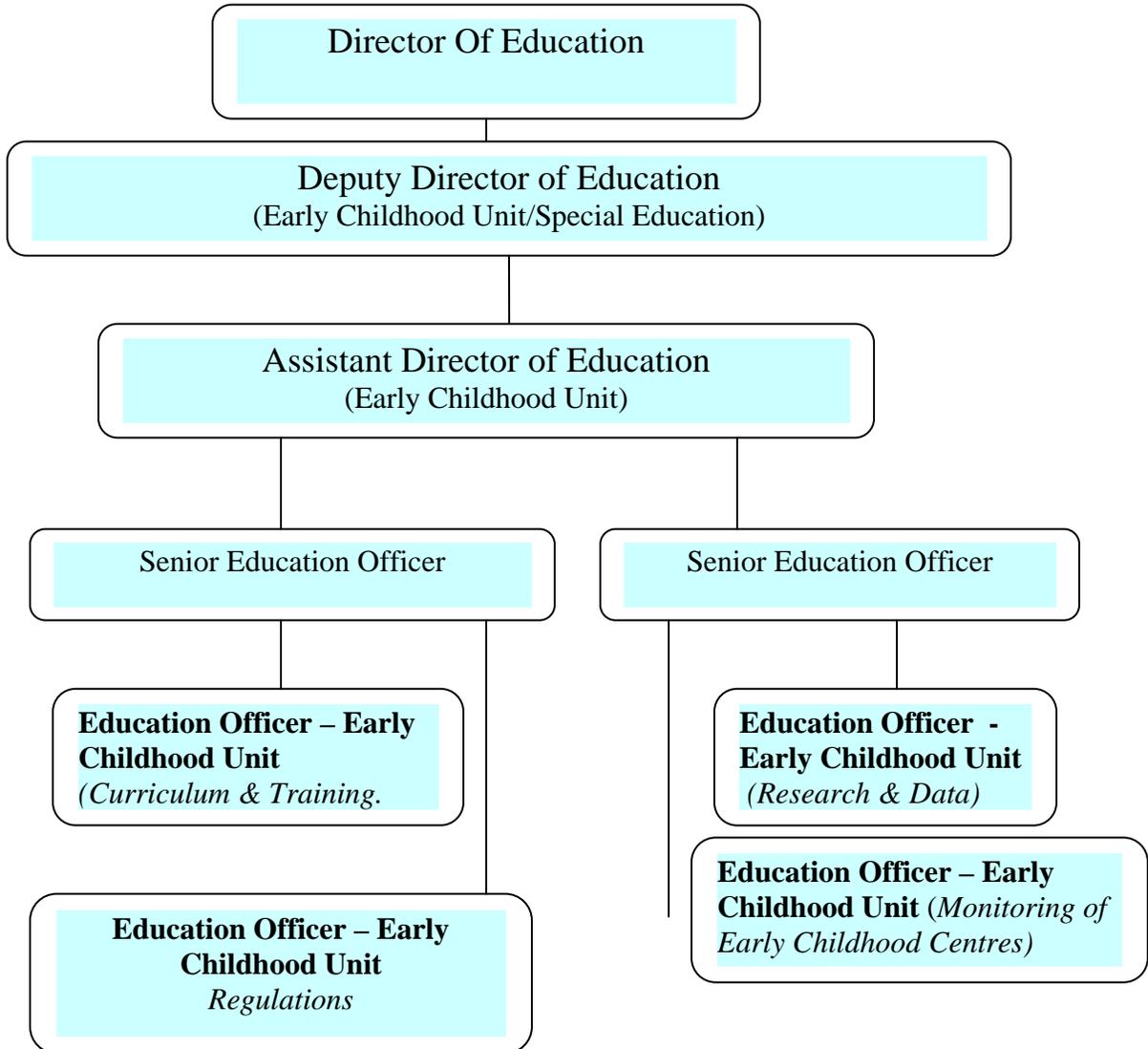
school and early childhood education. The earlier the intervention, the easier the language development and language transition from the mother tongue to Standard English. It is critical that the ministry establish some mechanism to enable this to take place.

I endorse the sentiments expressed in an unpublished report (2005) “The Bahamas Preparation and Design of Preschool Education: Education and training for competitiveness Project” by The Ministry of Education’s Preschool Education Team. The recommendations if and when implemented will go a long way in bringing equity and access to all students throughout The Bahamas as well as ensuring that all preschools and early childhood centres no matter where they exist in The Bahamas will be in compliance with the national pedagogical standards. The recommendations are summarized in the tables below.

Table 12

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Proposed Structure of The Early Childhood Unit



Source: Ministry of Education – Unpublished Report 2005

Conclusion

School failure has been largely attributed to the lack of access to quality education, notwithstanding, The Bahamas has had universal access to education since the late 1960's.

Even though the dropout rate is not very high the achievements in the national assessments and examinations are less than desirable. As a measure of prevention and to improve the quality and standards of education, the government has put much focus on Early Childhood Education. Having established this unit within the Ministry of Education, it must be adequately and professionally staffed. They must without delay implement the setting up of the Council to oversee the compliance to the curriculum and standards, training, registration and administration of all pre and early childhood centres.

Finally, given the geography of The Bahamas and the relative well developed communication infrastructure, the government should take advantage of this technology to introduce virtual classrooms and distance education training for teachers and students particularly in the more remote islands

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