

Education Reform

5th November 2008

Bermuda is less than half as good as the United States when it comes to high school education, the United States are 21st out of 30 in the OECD school ratings (2006), and we are using some of the very people that put the United States in that position to overhaul *our* school system? Now Canada on the other hand is 5th in the OECD school ratings, and the UK 9th.

We will just complicate this a little more and keep changing our Minister of Education, exclude the Head teachers and teachers from the reform talks and actions, and expect this to become a world class education system?

In 2006 I wrote a book called “Collaboration *the pathway to a brighter future in Public Education*” and in that book (page 179) it was stated that “The extensive research has shown that involvement by ***parents, industry, education departments, and governments can turn problems into success stories***” and a few illustrations were included. We have failed in our attempt to “***include***”, it is as if one force is dictating the reforms and if *the* path is deviated “you are out.”

Our schools and school children are in deep trouble, the ship is sinking, money is going to be TIGHT, and we are no further forward in our quest to reform the school system amicably to all parents, teachers and head teachers than we were in 1998 despite all the money that has been thrown at it. It is not the money, it is not the buildings, it is the cooperation and desire of the people, it is the desire of industry, and it is the necessity for Bermuda that our education improve, but everyone MUST have buy-in or it won't work. Technical education on the other hand needs expertise, the desire from the parents and industry to work together so that the result is what the students, parents and industry want. It is a win-win set-up but this too will not succeed unless the educators produce students that are compatible with the industry needs. Students must have buy-in knowing they will be able to command a very good salary once they are qualified and fulfill the needs of the industry, but they must also have the dream and determination to elevate to those top positions. That is why we are trying to establish a technical school devoid of the turmoil that exists in Public education, and we need to move on it fast.

Bermuda cannot be independent unless we have a handle on our infrastructure, education, and industry. We have to break the “public education culture” by offering an alternative that everyone is comfortable with. High school education should be preparing our youth for life after school and the truth is we are not. I strongly believe this technical school model is a formula for success. We need to give our youth back some hope and ambition that has been taken from them in the public pipeline education system.

It does not matter who thinks of it first, as long as everyone is included. Put the cards on the table, there must be buy-in across party lines, racial lines and any other lines that might

prevent us putting country first.

I am looking for those of you reading this that will support the idea, the concept and the necessity to our island. We need to make technical education a reality soon. All I am asking is your endorsement, your buy-in, your opinion, your ideas, and your expertise.

There are few countries with a really good education system without problems but their standards are a lot higher than we have in Bermuda. If we keep bringing in the expertise to repair our technical infrastructure, which is definitely not cost effective, and with the economy slowing dramatically we will have our workforce (largely untrained) out of work and guest workers being brought in to do our work, not a good political strategy or a good morale booster.

We almost all agree education reform is necessary, but some thought as to where our advice should come from and an outline of the intended reform should be issued to the public, industry and teaching professionals who should have the opportunity of buying-in. This is certainly not happening at the present time.

Leadership does not work this way. Leaders sound out the people affected by the change, get their buy-in and reform using that buy-in. Keep changing the Minister and playing with our youth's education is sending the wrong message. We need leadership. We need a plan that everyone can endorse and then get on with it. If the right "change" was endorsed by the teaching profession, parents and students, and of course industry whether technical or exempt company businesses the change would happen and be made to happen. Resistance to change comes about when the stake-holders are forced into the unknown and "left out in the cold". Leaders understand that change takes time but must be endorsed by all concerned or it won't happen. Throw all the money you like at it, push as hard as you will, but it still won't happen – a leader understands this, everyone needs buy-in.

We have wasted millions of dollars in sending our youth overseas unprepared and this cannot continue. We have basically closed the college technical centre. The courses are so basic they are telling our youth that a properly qualified guest worker will always be their boss. What we want to do is put the wheels in motion to encourage our youth to work towards higher and higher levels in stages until they are qualified to be the boss and in their working life gain the experience required to be the boss and become leaders.

In this way, it is then possible to control the standards on the Island, raise the educational levels required of school leavers, create jobs for technical instructors once qualified, and work with industry to ensure they are being serviced with the correct training of employees.

If your child is in public education is he/she receiving the quality education they should be? Are they being counseled about the type of work available? Are they being prepared for the workforce or college?

In our proposal it can be seen that the terms are shorter, the exposure to the fields of technical companies is a huge part of allowing our youth to have an understanding of the work they may wish to follow. They will certainly know what they do not want to do and they will know how to get where they do want to go. Yogi Bera once said "If you don't know where you are going you may not get there", we want our students to know where they are going and how to get there – do you? Please let us know how you feel about the

model we are proposing. Let us know how you feel about another private school, but one with a strong link to industry, so that we may be able to get bursaries and scholarships linked to performance.

We would also propose a voucher system whereby the government supports the students that wish to attend because the taxpayers already pay for their child's education. In the case of private schools they pay twice because the public system doesn't offer technical education and what they do offer is sub-standard.

We would love to hear from anyone with any ideas or comments either use the blog or the e-mail address. We will also answer any questions you might have.

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