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Move to take trades back into Island's high schools

By Sam Strangeways

Students could get the chance to try their hand at 12 different trades in their first year at senior school if an idea for a more "blended" education system is adopted.

A working party advising the interim executive board on education has proposed that Bermuda consider adopting a system that blends both academic and technical learning.

Construction chief Alan Burland, chairman of the working party, told the parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Education that his group was tasked with looking at how to get students ready for industry.

They studied three methods used overseas: Expeditionary Learning (EL) Schools and Enrichment Clusters in the US and Global Dimensions in the UK.

Mr. Burland said his team was especially impressed with EL and had visited a high school in Rhode Island where the students got an academic qualification and a taste of 12 locally relevant trades.

"Children here could be exposed to 12 trades relevant to Bermuda and then pick a handful at the end of senior one," he said.

Committee chairman Neletha Butterfield asked what progress had been made with the idea on the Island. Mr. Burland said the TN Tatem cluster of schools had begun investigating EL Schools and that the "fantastic principals" had told the Ministry of Education they wanted to start implementing some of the learning mechanisms. "They've said they would treat this as a pilot," he said.

Mr. Burland added: "I don't know what the current thinking (is) at the board level for evaluating the three models. There is good support for the EL model and good support with the TN Tatem cluster."

He said he'd like to see things happen "more quickly", adding: "There is a feeling we need to get something going. It's proven itself enough."

Ms Butterfield said it was important to have consistency across the public school system and suggested that a pilot could benefit all schools.

The meeting at the House of Assembly yesterday also heard about the success of the Bermuda Sloop Foundation, of which Mr. Burland is also chairman, with middle school students.

Youngsters take a four or five day voyage on the learning vessel *Spirit of Bermuda*, gaining skills in many subjects and learning about teamwork.

Committee member Lovitta Foggo said: "Here we have a model of success already. If you already have data that speaks to success we could just come and remodel what you have to fit other areas."

Mr. Burland said he believed that a teaching system aimed at all ability levels could be successful. "That's what communities are," he insisted.

The interim executive board is implementing reform in public schools following last year's Hopkins report. The cross-party Joint Select Committee on Education is reviewing progress in order to report back to Parliament.
