

Feedback on the Education 2016-2017 Plan of Action

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Summary Report

Introduction

The Plan of Action developed by the Government of the Cayman Islands clearly reflects a strong resolve to archive its educational outcomes and ensure that its graduates develop the necessary social, spiritual, intellectual, and cultural anchors. The improvement agenda is focused on helping students become self-sustaining members of society with the ability to think critically and analytically, to feel deeply and empathically, and to act wisely and ethically. To make this possible, the Government acknowledges that it needs world-class staff delivering world-class programmes. As a result, the Government has taken decisive action to achieve international standards through a systematic review of the development and implementation of strategies that work, and capacity-building of staff to sustain the gains being made. The 2016-2017 Plan of Action is a convergence of the government's philosophy and directions and its commitment to marshal the required human and material resources to bring about the desired change and improvements. Ultimately, the outcome of the 2016-2017 Plan of Action depends upon a high degree of congruence between the education plan and the Caymanian vision and overarching goal of developing a responsible, productive, and engaged citizenship.

Feedback on the Education 2016-2017 Plan of Action

The purposes of the Education Plan of Action 2016-2017 are comprehensive and instructive. The key words stand out, telling the story of education innovation and reform in action. The words and concepts used represent the essential components of the systematic planning processes used internationally in the best performing systems. Words such as collaboration, prioritization, cohesiveness, flexibility and commitment reflect the way you will harness the energies and expertise of the system to achieve your goals. Professional development reflects the means by which you will achieve your goals and celebration speaks to the way you will engage your staff in savouring and reflecting upon their hard work. The plan paints a vivid and vital picture of who you are, what you are about, and what you intend to do. Those who contributed to the brainstorming sessions that produced the final document not only demonstrated fidelity to the important tenets of good planning, but have also created a clear pathway to continued improvement.

The Education Action plan is an outstanding document. It is cogent, coherent, and comprehensive. I commend the collaboration among the Ministry, DES, principals, and the Inspections Unit. You have used an excellent process to arrive at your conclusions. Using your inspection data, determining avenues to continue your work on the priority areas of literacy, numeracy, behaviour, special education needs, science, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training, are all important steps. Teamwork, which is necessary for system improvement and for embedding the research-informed strategies, is being emphasized. Tasks are clearly delineated in your efforts to be more inclusive. I have noticed, as well, that you are taking the issue of careful monitoring, reporting, and feedback very seriously. This is commendable. World renowned researchers such as John Hattie state that these are, indeed, the hallmarks of effective planning and implementation processes. As I have said on many occasions, the work that you produce reflect the effective practices that are being used in high performing systems.

✓ Challenging Minds ✓ Engaging Hearts ✓ Inspiring Will ✓ Strengthening Skills ✓ Achieving Results

Recommendations for Improvement

1. The breadth and depth of the Plan of Action is impressive; however, my major concern is that it is too ambitious when measured against the stated implementation timeframe. Please do not, for one moment, think that I have low expectations or that I do not believe in getting things done with a sense of urgency. I do. My common refrain, “the children cannot wait’ is testimony to my own modus operandi. But I also know people well and what it takes to motivate or to demoralize; to be bogged down or to thrive.

I recommend that we strike a better balance between being ambitious and being realistic, knowing what we know about the need for deep implementation of a few goals rather than tinkering superficially with many goals. As we all know, we do not get the best results in education if people are overworked, unmotivated and demoralized. But, at the same time, they must have high expectations to help them expand the boundaries, as they constantly strive to reach higher and to ensure that all students are performing at their maximum potential.

2. There is a need to expand the communication strategy to include the media and families who do not have children in school. I cannot emphasize enough how important communication is. One test that I suggest that a system should use in determining how well they communicate is to ask any student or parent or community member what the education system is about –including its key goals and priorities. If they can answer, even partially, the system is communicating well. It is recommended that you meet regularly with the education reporters and newspaper editors to ensure that they understand the work being done across the system. If ever there is a new initiative or direction, face to face communication with the media is an important component. I have long recognized in my own work the important role that the media plays in providing accurate and timely information to the public. It is one way of improving public confidence in the education system.

3. The need for careful and systematic monitoring and evaluation has been stated on many occasions in your documents. It is important that during the review process, some rewording be done to ensure that all the actions are measurable and verifiable. I also encourage you to develop a self-assessment tool for your system which schools can use to identify their successes and where they need to go next. From my experience, this promotes deeper learning and more long-term improvement as the entire system engages in a non-threatening exercise. This approach builds employee commitment. It works very well and is consistent with our goal of ensuring meaningful participation.

4. I also encourage you not to adopt strategies that do not work and that are still being used in some countries. They will simply demoralize your staff and fail to get the results you desire. Producing league tables or comparing schools publicly is one case in point. Utilize internationally recognized research and the data you have in your own system to drive the reform agenda. This strategy, though, will require parents, business and individuals outside your system to be a part of the school improvement processes. They will help to provide the objectivity that you need and will be able to validate the steps that you are taking towards system improvement. We should never forget that they have a vested interest in having excellent schools and graduates for their workplaces.

Conclusion

Congratulations on the calibre of the Plan of Action and the expertise of your staff members who devised it. It is obvious that they are on the leading edge of educational thought and practice. Their thinking and rationale are current and defensible. It is my opinion that the Plan of Action is an internationally competitive and of the highest calibre. The challenge you now face is to engage in **deeper**

implementation, careful monitoring, and providing consistent feedback in order to get the results you deserve.

Your quest for educational excellence with equity must be relentless. Building and developing a robust publicly funded education system is a challenge I know you are committed to and are prepared to embrace. This, to my mind, is your best guarantee for realizing the future you all envision. Working towards the goal of providing children, their parents and the community-at-large with a graduation guarantee is a vision and a mandate that must become reality.

I commend you for having high expectations for your students, your teachers, administrators and all those who are engaged in the educational enterprise. Along with the high expectations is the notion that schools cannot do it alone, improving student achievement and wellbeing needs to be everyone's primary purpose. However, true collaboration with all those who have a vested interest in improving the education system of the Cayman Islands is a goal that must be embraced with a sense of urgency.

The Plan of Action and the process you have used to forge consensus while developing your priorities is a significant step in creating the world class educational system to which you are aspiring. With your persistence, continuous capacity-building, commitment to continuous improvement and recognition of the need for deeper implementation, I am quite confident that you will achieve your goals. It is a widely accepted belief that given time and proper support, all children can learn and achieve.

Respectfully submitted by:



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