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## REVIEW OF THE 2016-2017 EDUCATION PLAN OF ACTION

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Presented by:

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“Students today must function in an information-rich, knowledge-based society - one that requires advanced levels of literacy to perform their duties and obligations as citizens. They need literacy to cope with the flood of information. They need literacy to feed their imagination.”

*International Reading Association*

### **Emergent Literacies at a Glance**

Computer Literacy

Cultural Literacy

Game Literacy

Media Literacy

Multiliteracies

Multimedia Literacy

Network Literacy

Social Literacy

Visual Literacy

Web Literacy

Information Literacy

New Literacies

Digital Literacy

Dustin C. Summey (2013)

## **Introduction**

The Ministry of Education, Employment & Gender Affairs is focused on enabling the people of the Cayman Islands to realise their hopes and dreams of becoming productive and valued members of their society. The Ministry works assiduously to carry out its core functions including that of developing and utilising its human capital. The staff are focussed on implementing the Ministry’s objectives in line with public service values and with a particular emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness.

The focus on capacity building that enables staff to be successful in the global economy is well entrenched. There is an acute awareness of how the country fits into the global economy. The belief in the importance of advancing and improving 21st century skills such as critical thinking and global understanding undergird all that they do. This is a very laudable direction with the keen recognition that the children of the Cayman Islands must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions to enable them to compete with the graduates of any country in the world.

As are the objectives of countries across the globe, the Government of the Cayman Islands wants its graduates to thrive and develop a set of social, spiritual, intellectual and cultural anchors. The improvement agenda is focussed 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.

The Government of the Cayman Islands has a vision of schools as “dream factories where better futures are invented.” To make this possible, the Government acknowledges that they need world-class staff delivering world-class programmes. As a result, they strive to implement and maintain these international standards. They want their graduates to be inquisitive, innovative and productive citizens. The staff develops high standards for all their programs, policies and practices. Their ultimate goal is to create an education system that helps young Caymanians fulfil their aspirations and those of the society as a whole. Ultimately, one of the outcomes of the education plan is to ensure a high degree of congruence between the vision and plan for the education that students receive and the Caymanian vision for the future primary, secondary and tertiary education, for the future work force and for responsible, productive and engaged citizenship.

A fundamental question is whether or not the school system can achieve both excellence and equity. This can be realized if we raise the bar for all students and, simultaneously, work at closing achievement gaps. We cannot truly say that we have an excellent school system if there is a long tail of students who are failing and, when we disaggregate the data, those at the bottom belong to specific demographic or socio-economic groups. Depending on the countries or states in which I have worked, these clusters often include boys, immigrant students, children who live in poverty or children with mental health concerns, to name a few. If some or any of these groups are clustered at the bottom of the attainment ladder, we cannot claim that we have an equitable or inclusive system. Simply put, excellence cannot be achieved without equity.



“Analytical leaders speak the uncomfortable truth:

Poor students do not exhibit low academic achievement because they are poor but because of the way that we treat poor children. Female students do not lag in science and math because they are female but because of the way we treat female students.

What commentators call an “ethnic gap” is, in fact, a teaching gap, a curriculum gap, and an expectations gap.”

*Reeves (2006)*



## Feedback on the Education Plan of Action

The purposes of your Education Plan of Action 2016-2017, are indeed, comprehensive. They are also instructive. The words stand out, representing the story of what education innovation and reform looks like. The words also represent both means and ends. They include vision, purpose, direction, focus, alignment, coherence, transparency, collaboration, prioritization, cohesiveness, flexibility, commitment, context, data, research, resources, roles, responsibility, review, evaluation, professional development and celebration and communication. That page of your 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 this brainstorming demonstrated fidelity to the important tenets of good planning - one that depicts a clear pathway to continuous improvement

Your action plan is outstanding. It is cogent, coherent and comprehensive. I commend the collaboration among the Ministry, DES 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, behavior, special education needs, science and Technical and Vocational Education and Training are all important steps. Teamwork, which is necessary for system improvement 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 highly commendable.

The purposes, timelines and expectations are well conceived and brilliantly articulated. There is also a need to expand the communication strategy to include media and the non-parent population.

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 system is about, its goals and priorities. If they can answer, even partially, the system is communicating well.


The need for celebration is rightly included in this plan.

Target setting is another important aspect of an improvement plan. Please ensure that the objectives and “targets” are stated in a measurable format. The fact that you are using a SMART goal setting approach means that your goals should be specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time bound. All goals must be measured against these clear and specific criteria. Some systems use rubrics to assist with this process.

It does appear that you are using the term target in a slightly unusual manner. Please review the use of terms so that there is no misunderstanding or inconsistency of use. In other parts of the plan, terms, like “balanced literacy” are referred to as ‘issues.’


The feedback you received on the process is very supportive. Participants state that their sense of ownership will increase. They say that they understand the big picture better and welcomed the opportunity to share ideas. Taking time to provide the opportunity to collaborate is already, and will continue, to bear fruit.

The actions in each of the key stages are appropriate and comprehensive. The review should include some rewording to ensure that the actions are measurable and verifiable.



“The size of the planning document is inversely related to the amount and quality of implementation.”

*(Reeves, 2006)*



“Plato recognized it when he crafted the Republic... our own experiment in democracy would succeed or fail depending upon the character of its citizenry. Education is vital to self-governance and the success of our form of representative democracy. Schools simply have to contribute to the formation of civic character if the nation is to survive ... The school stands as the most commonly shared experience and institution for our youth...”

*Berkowitz, (2012)*

## Specific Feedback

Unfortunately, I have one major concern with this plan. It is much too ambitious when measured against the stated timeframe for implementation. From my experience, this is akin to a 5 year plan for a system. And even so, there is enough included for it to be a 5-8 year plan.

Please do not for one moment think that I have low expectations or that I do not believe in getting thing 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 also understand that politically we always want the public to know that we are pressing ahead - we are not wasting time. But the content of this plan is unmanageable within the short time frame that you have included. I recommend that we strike a better balance between being ambitious and 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 unmotivated and demoralized. But, at the same time, they must have high expectations to help them expand the boundaries, constantly striving to reach higher.

## How can this be resolved?

Here are a few options:

1. Spread the content of the plan over a longer period of time, clearly identifying what must be achieved in Year 1, Year ... Year 5).
2. Identify three priorities, for example:
  - a. Literacy - possibly the reading or other component needed in your system
  - b. Numeracy - one component in which there is weakness in the system, and
  - c. One area that addresses improvement in discipline, behavior or school culture
3. Schools that are already doing well in these areas may choose areas of focus in collaboration with their parents and community, for the approval of their supervisors.
4. As soon as schools achieve their desired targets, there must be additional supports so that they can sustain the gain. So often we take our eye off the prize too soon and there is regression. It takes time and concerted effort to stay on an upward trajectory. What will happen is referred to the “implementation dip” in the literature. It takes a long time for some systems to recover from this dip.
5. I have also seen systems that focus on one priority - namely, literacy. They do this because of the importance of literacy in any curriculum. It is the gateway to future learning and springboard to all other subjects. I have also found that often, when children cannot do mathematics, it is because of low reading ability. They cannot read the problems. So the idea of having literacy as the primary focus while other subjects are simmering on the back burners, does not mean that we are not teaching other subjects. But there is a way of making both literacy and numeracy the foundational components of the curriculum, with more time on task to set children up for future success.



“We are learning more about large-scale change, making it less complicated by focusing on a small number of ambitious goals with a coherent strategy that attends in concert to half a dozen or so key factors: intrinsic motivation, capacity building, transparency of results and practice, leadership at all levels, and a positive but assertive stance on progress...I call this “simplexity”—a small number of key factors that must be made to gel with large groups of people.”

*Michael Fullan (2013)*

This often requires giving the schools the ability to vary their timetables to meet the needs of the children in the school. In some schools, you may need double the number of minutes on the timetable for reading, for example, while in others they may need that additional time for math. One rule of thumb should be that one size does not fit all. There should be some flexibility for schools based on their results of the common assessments that you are using. A needs- or assets-based approach can be useful.

### **Key Questions to Support Planning and Improvement**

The following questions are being recommended to help guide and support the planning process. The questioning, reflection and sharing of perspectives can strengthen collaboration and build trust. People leave these sessions feeling a sense of ownership for the plan and the process used to identify the focus and direction. The steps include, but are not limited to:

#### **Diagnosis: Where are we now? Where do we want to be?**

- What do our student data tell us?
- Have we disaggregated our data to identify individual students and groups of students who are not being successful?
- Are there differences in achievement among similar schools or populations?
- What trends or patterns in student achievement do we see that we are trying to support or alter?
- Have we “drilled down” to identify underlying causes of strengths and weaknesses
- What improvement targets have we set?

#### **Key Priorities: What should we focus on?**

- Based on our diagnosis and data, what will we focus on to raise student achievement?
- What are the few priorities that will mobilize the school to ensure student success?
- Have we included the improvement of instructional and leadership practices as overarching goals of our improvement agenda?
- Will these priorities address both short-term needs and actions as well as what it takes to achieve long term sustainable improvement?
- What barriers need to be addressed?

#### **The Plan: What will we do?**

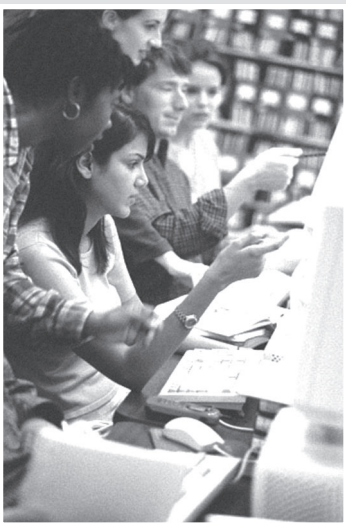
- What are the specific strategies and actions that will ensure we achieve our priorities?
- How will we support and engage all staff in this process?
- Does the plan delineate roles, responsibilities, expected outcomes, measures, indicators of success, timeframes, and resources to support implementation strategies?
- How does the plan provide for professional learning and capacity building?
- Have we drawn on research and evidence to select the best strategies to maximize student learning?





The Ontario strategy is perhaps the world's leading example of professionally-driven system change. Through consistent application of centrally-driven pressure for higher results, combined with extensive capacity building, in a climate of relative trust and mutual respect, the Ontario system was able to achieve progress on key indicators, while maintaining labour peace and morale throughout the system.

*OECD (2010, p. 75)*



- How will we communicate the plan and our progress to our school community?
- Are we doing what we said we would do?

### **Action, Monitoring and Evaluation: Is our plan making a difference? How do we know?**

- Do we have the capacity for continuous improvement?
- What are the criteria for measuring ongoing progress and impact?
- What are the gains in student achievement?
- How are we addressing low performance?
- What intervention strategies are we using?
- How will we address changing needs or issues that may be identified in the monitoring and review process?
- Is there a need for or have we built in strategies for mid-course corrections?
- How will we utilize what we have learned in our diagnostic and monitoring information to support future improvement planning?

*Adapted from: Glaze, Mattingley, Andrews (2013)*

### **Additional Insights**

Recently, I was asked for my opinion on what makes a school a good school. My response included the following:

#### **1. Schools (and school systems) are good when:**

- ✓ There is a moral imperative to educate all children successfully.
- ✓ High expectations for learning and achievement are internalized regardless of the background or personal circumstances of the learners.
- ✓ There are no limitations placed on students based on factors such as race, gender, socio-economic status, among others.
- ✓ Barriers are systematically removed to enhance life chances.
- ✓ There is a holistic approach to education with a focus on cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects of education.
- ✓ Policies, programs, practices and interactions do not truncate life chances or future career or life possibilities.
- ✓ They prepare students for responsible citizenship characterized by qualities such as altruism, volunteerism and philanthropy.
- ✓ They enhance creativity and an entrepreneurial spirit.
- ✓ They solicit input from all sectors of society - business, labour, industry.
- ✓ The leadership assumes responsibility for creating conditions to ensure success.
- ✓ They are inclusive, empowering all children to learn and achieve.
- ✓ Variations in learning are not attributed to background factors.
- ✓ Educators achieve success for all students to the maximum of their capabilities.



“The first three years of a child’s life have enormous impact on the development of basic language and cognitive skills and lay the foundation for early literacy development.

As parents are their children’s first teachers, they need to be aware of the importance of creating a language- and literacy-rich environment in the home.”

*Jamieson (2009)*

- ✓ Staff at all levels model, teach, expect and insist upon the demonstration of character attributes such as respect, responsibility, honesty, integrity, fairness, empathy, perseverance, optimism.
- ✓ Excellence and equity go hand in hand.

We can describe schools and systems are effective when students are motivated to learn; teachers are supported in their efforts to teach effectively; principals lead with passion and intentionality, and parents are encouraged to participate fully in their children’s education. As we develop plans of action in order to improve the schools, it is important to be mindful of the confluence of factors that contribute to improvement.

### High Impact Strategies to Improve Achievement

In a recent book (Glaze et al. 2012), we identified 21 high impact strategies that have been shown to improve student achievement, and recommended what teachers and administrators can do to implement each of the strategies. They include:

1. Have high expectations for all students.
2. Build relationships to harness support for improvement.
3. Help student feel safe and respected at school.
4. Offer flexible programming.
5. Establish career development as an integral part of the curriculum so that students see the relationship between learning and earning.
6. Focus on literacy across all subjects.
7. Develop oral language skills.
8. Differentiate instruction.
9. Emphasize higher order and critical thinking skills.
10. Make formative assessment integral to learning.
11. Integrate the arts into the curriculum.
12. Practice culturally responsive teaching.
13. Make classroom teaching culturally responsive.
14. Select culturally reflective learning materials and resources.
15. Implement early and on-going intervention strategies.
16. Provide tutoring for students at all levels of the spectrum.
17. Support summer learning opportunities.
18. Strengthen access to guidance and counselling.
19. Identify character attributes in consultation with a wide cross-section of community and infuse them into the curriculum.
20. Promote inclusive practices.
21. Maximize student engagement bearing in mind the statement, “Engage me or enrage me”.



“Every dollar we invest in high-quality early education can save more than seven dollars later on-by boosting graduation rates, reducing teen pregnancy, even reducing violent crime. In states that make it a priority to educate our youngest children, like Georgia or Oklahoma, studies show students grow up more likely to read and do math at grade level, graduate high school, hold a job, and form more stable families of their own.”

*President Obama*

## **The International Competitiveness Imperative**

Andreas Schleicher of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2007) recently said:

The capacity of countries - both the world's most advanced economies as well as those experiencing rapid development - to compete in the global knowledge economy increasingly depends on whether they can meet a fast-growing demand for high-level skills. This, in turn, hinges on significant improvements in the quality of schooling outcomes and a more equitable distribution of learning opportunities.

As well, Schleicher & Stewart (2008) also said:

“Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn from international comparisons is that strong performance and improvement are always possible. Countries such as Japan, Korea, Finland and Canada display strong overall performance and, equally important show that a disadvantaged socioeconomic background does not necessarily result in poor performance at school.”

(Schleicher, Andreas; Stewart, Vivien. “Learning from World Class Schools”. Educational Leadership. October, 2008.)

In Ontario, we utilized a combination of prescribed actions and flexibility to meet local needs in order to improve student outcomes. It can be said that we included both top down and bottom up strategies. Every school was required to have a school improvement team which was responsible for the development of a collaborative school improvement process. A Planning, Implementation and Monitoring (PIM) process was an essential component. It was important to provide a common framework but also to allow flexibility to meet local needs.

## **A Few Non-Negotiables**

In bringing about improvement in school systems today, there is a need to establish some non-negotiables. These non-negotiables should be based on school needs and learner expectations. These help to create a focus for the system to enable them to move forward in a systematic way and to ensure that scarce resources are spent well.

Examples of Non-Negotiables for Schools

- Few priorities or areas of focus, done well, instead of many priorities, often done poorly.
- School leadership teams to drive improvement.
- Research-informed improvement strategies.
- Ambitious targets.
- High expectations for learning.
- A focus on higher order thinking skills.
- A common diagnostic tool (to ensure consistent interpretation of improvement gains).
- Job-embedded professional learning.
- A focus non-fiction reading and non-fiction writing.
- Early intervention for struggling students.





“The two most important reasons why employees fail to implement a strategy are unclear expectations and failure of the leaders to check for satisfactory implementation.”

(Benjamin 2011)

- Uninterrupted blocks of time for literacy and numeracy
- A balanced literacy program
- Rich classroom libraries
- Careful monitoring of student progress
- Timely and consistent feedback on performance
- Community partnerships and alliances to support learning
- Character education embedded in all policies, practices, programs, and interactions

Recently, I was asked to do a TED talk on the question: **What does it take to improve student achievement?** I identified seven of the strategies that contribute significantly to improving student outcomes. These are, in random order:

1. High Expectations for Learning with Growth Mindsets
2. Effective Instruction in the Digital Age
3. Early and On-going Assessment, Interventions and Support
4. Inclusive, Culturally-Responsive Pedagogy
5. Innovation, Creativity, Entrepreneurship and Career Education
6. Leaders as Co-Learners, and
7. Character Development

### Other Important Considerations

There are many other important factors that contribute to student outcomes. I would like to add another to the list above. It is the issue of **teacher quality**. We know from many years of solid research in education that the strongest factor in determining student achievement is not school size, accountability measures, standards, social-economic status or even the aptitude of students. In fact, researchers such as Wise and Liebrand (2000) have concluded from their meta-analysis of standards and teacher quality that well prepared teachers have a greater impact on student achievement, are more attuned to students' needs, and are better able to devise instruction to meet individual needs. Another popular researcher, Linda Darling Hammond (2000) in discussing the notion that investment in teacher quality pays off, concluded that greater predictor of student achievement is not student demographics, overall school spending, class size or teacher salaries. She asserts that teacher quality is the variable that most influences student achievement. Another group of well-respected researchers, Leithwood et al. (2004) said that that leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning. So let us continue to invest in and build teacher and principal capacity in order to improve our schools.

I hope you share my optimism for the future of education in the Cayman Islands and the confidence that today's educators will achieve both excellence and equity. It takes both will and skill to realize this promise. I encourage you to draw upon your rich repertoire of knowledge and expertise that you have been nurturing through your emphasis on professional development and to focus on what works. So many systems cut back on professional development when resources dwindle. Smart systems see the relationship between adult learning and system improvement.





“Communities which succeeded socially and economically did not become civil because they were rich, but rather, became rich because they were civil.”

*Robert Putman*

“There should be no throw-a-way kids ... we need all our children to be contributing members of our society”

*Glaze (2014)*

“Five years of effective teaching can completely close the gap between low-income students and others”

*Marzano, Kain & Hanush (2005)*

It is now important to redouble your efforts to build upon your successes and continue to improve your schools - with a sense of urgency. Parents are expecting it; politicians are demanding it; the community-at-large deserves it. But most importantly, as educators, we want the best for our students. We do not want to truncate their life chances or future possibilities. That's why we accepted the challenging roles of teaching and leadership. The major task at hand is to make every school an excellent school in every neighbourhood. The children cannot wait.

To reiterate, we want all students to be successful so that they live happy, productive and self-sustaining lives. We want to improve our schools and ensure that all students, especially the most vulnerable or disadvantaged, graduate from our schools with confidence, high self-regard and concern for others. These imperatives are grounded in moral, demographic, enlightened self-interest, community health, social justice, global competitiveness and human rights expectations. We want to unleash student potential and motivate them to do their personal best regardless of the background factors that locate them in society. We want to build teacher and principal capacity leading to the instructional and leadership effectiveness that are necessary for systems to thrive. Our goal must be to work quickly and effectively while always being mindful of the fact that we will not achieve excellence without equity.

### **No More Excuses for Low Performance: We Have the Skills - Do we have the Will?**

I have long felt that the days of making excuses for low performance are long gone. With your current knowledge and expertise, the question I ask you to confront is this: Do we have the will? We know what works. It is now necessary to build upon what we already know and have already done in some of our schools, to take the education systems as a whole, to new heights. There has to be a commitment to continue to learn with and from our colleagues. In every system in which I have worked, there are some schools that are achieving the expected outcomes. They are closing achievement gaps. But so often there is not much communication within and between schools nor are there opportunities built into the schedule for principals and teachers to share their learning and insights on a regular basis. Only in a few systems do we see job-shadowing initiatives or time included in the schedules for educators to observe one another at work. Teachers in China, for example, regularly observe their colleagues teach and provide feedback on how they can improve their craft. There is a strong need to establish networks so that we can spread successful practices across schools. A recent article which I wrote - how Ontario spread successful practices across 5000 schools - provides some example of networking at its best.





There is also a need to focus on working with the media so that they can communicate accurately what you are doing ... It is because we do not take media relations seriously enough ... This means that your communication about the education directions and priorities must have special strategies to reach the non-parent population.

(Glaze 2016)

## The Future Bodes Well

I am confident that both excellence and equity can be achieved in education in the Cayman Islands. I encourage you find out from teachers and principals the areas in which they need professional development both on an individual basis and on a whole school basis. In my experience, when all members of the staff are engaged in collective learning, there is a greater likelihood of school improvement.

There is also a need to focus on working with the media so that they can communicate accurately what you are doing. When I was a school superintendent and later Chief Student Achievement Officer, media relations was high on agenda. I met regularly with the education reporters to ensure that they understood what we were doing. If ever there was a new initiative or direction, face to face communication with the media was an important component. It is little wonder that, despite all the good that we do in schools, when people are asked about the quality of their education systems the results are often negative. It is because we do not take media relations seriously enough. We focus on the parent population who already get their information directly from the school. We often leave out the non-parent population who depend on the media to get their information about education. This means that your communication about the education directions and priorities must have special strategies to reach the non-parent population. They pay taxes. They often constitute up to 70% of the population. They care about the quality of education. They know they will benefit ultimately from the graduates you produce - the doctors, accountants, chefs, to name a few. They want to be confident about how your graduates will serve them later on in the professions or occupations they choose.

I also encourage you to establish education goals for the primary schools and also for the secondary schools. Some may overlap, but some will be different. For example, the foundational skills that must be mastered in primary schools and the school-to-work or post-secondary education transitions of secondary school graduates. Their career development needs, for example, should be clearly stated and promulgated. What will your graduates know, be like or be able to do? The community needs to know that.

The need for careful and systematic monitoring and evaluation has been stated on many occasions in your documents. I 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 in engage in a non-threatening exercise. This works. Teachers and principals said that they would and could never go back to where they were before. After they were exposed to this process in Ontario, they grew so much as a result of the self-assessment tool that we developed collaboratively. It is time that systems focus less on external evaluations and focus more of assessments that build internal capacity and enhance professionalism.

Congratulations, once again, on the caliber of this Education Plan and the expertise of your staff members who devised it. It is obvious that they keep them themselves on the leading edge of educational thought and practice. Their approach to their own learning is bearing fruit. The work that I receive from them is always praiseworthy because the thinking and rationale are so current and defensible. It is my opinion that the documents you produce and the strategies you use in your educational reform agenda are truly internationally competitive.





“Why is the “entrepreneurial mindset” missing in our society in general and among our youth in particular?”

“Our schools don’t teach entrepreneurship seems to be a logical answer. It is generally true that “entrepreneurship” has not been a part of formal curriculum in the majority of schools around the world. Even in the United States, a country that has been typically or stereotypically viewed as the land of entrepreneurship, “there is not a system in place that offers Entrepreneurship Education as an option for all students.”

*Aspen ... (2008)*

“... Entrepreneurs ... are what the world wants to solve the unemployment problem ... Innovation and entrepreneurship provide a way forward for solving the global challenges of the 21st century, building sustainable development, creating jobs, generating renewed economic growth and advancing human welfare:

*(World Economic Forum, 2009, p. 7)*

Your work is certainly on par with, and often exceed, similar work that I have seen in progressive countries in which I have worked cross the globe. The challenge is now to engage in **deeper implementation, careful monitoring** and **consistent feedback** in order to get the results you deserve.

I also encourage you not to adopt strategies that do not work that are still being used in some countries. They will simply demoralize your staff. Producing league tables or comparing schools publicly is one case in point. In some jurisdictions, approaches have been disbanded by the “mother country” and yet some countries persist in using them. As McKinsey and Company, OECD, and others who have studied education internationally have said - countries like Canada are using high impact strategies and are achieving the commendable results, especially with their increasingly diverse school populations. Equally important is the fact that these countries work at keeping the optimism and motivation of their staff alive.

OECD (2010) states:

The Ontario strategy is perhaps the world’s leading example of professionally-driven system change. Through consistent application of centrally-driven pressure for higher results, combined with extensive capacity building, in a climate of relative trust and mutual respect, the Ontario system was able to achieve progress on key indicators, while maintaining labour peace and morale throughout the system. (p. 75)

It is also important to build into your plan the notion of developing the “Entrepreneurial mindset, which Zong Zhao (2012) discussed, in his book *World Class Learners*. He believes that the most desirable is one that enhances human curiosity and creativity, encourages risk taking, and cultivates the entrepreneurial spirit in the context of globalization. (p. 17).

Zhao further explains:

“Entrepreneurs are no longer only those who start a business and try to maximize profits. There are social entrepreneurs who recognize a social problem and apply entrepreneurial principles to achieve social change (Martin & Osberg, 2007). There are intrapreneurs who bring significant innovative changes from within an organization (Swearingen, 2008). There are also policy entrepreneurs, whose enterprise is to bring innovative improvement in policy from within public and government institutions.” (Harris & Kinney, 2004)

One of the truths that I will always maintain is that systems need highly motivated people to get the job done. Demoralized or disenchanted people find ways to circumvent system goals. Hence my frequent reminder to school systems that want real reform is to pay attention to the needs of staff and they, in turn, will take care of the children and work towards the achievement of the system goals. There is a common saying “If you don’t feed the teachers they will eat the children.”



“It has been proven time and time again by hundreds of reputable researchers internationally that capacity building is what is required for school and system improvement. This requires a laser-like focus on instructional effectiveness and leadership development.”

(Glaze 2016)

Your current staff who have been my main contact over the last couple of years deserve special encomiums. Their knowledge of educational theory, research and practice is second to none. Based on what I have seen of their work, I have great trust in their insights, judgments and recommendations. They have kept abreast of their field and certainly know what the promising practices are, what good work looks like, and, more importantly, what works.

Our quest for educational excellence with equity must be relentless. Building and developing a robust publicly funded education system is a challenge we must all embrace. This is our best guarantee for realizing the future we envision. Working towards the goal of providing children and their parents with a graduation guarantee is a vision and a mandate that must become reality.

Congratulations once again, on your excellent Education Plan of Action and the process you have used to forge consensus while developing your priorities.

Respectfully submitted by:

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