



10 July 2020

*Delivered Via Email To:*

Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports, Agriculture, and Lands  
5th Floor, Government Administration Building  
133 Elgin Avenue  
George Town  
Grand Cayman  
Cayman Islands

Attention: Hon. Juliana O'Connor-Connolly, JP, MLA

Dear Hon. Minister,

### **Challenges in public education**

We are a private group of invested and concerned Caymanians.

We would like to initiate dialogue with the Ministry to improve our understanding of ongoing issues in the Cayman Islands public education system. There have been specific recommendations in reports commissioned by the Ministry. We would like to help pave the road toward implementation and help the Ministry achieve the approved recommendations.

### **Strategic Policy Statement**

According to the 2020-2021 strategic policy statement delivered in April 2019 by the Premier, Hon. Alden McLaughlin, MBE, JP, MLA, "the total operating expenditure targets for the Core Government for each of the next three financial years have been set at \$734.2 million for 2020; \$741.7 million for 2021 and \$746.8 million for 2022. This expenditure will be used to fund key priorities including the following for the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports, Agriculture and Lands:

- continuing enhancement of teaching and learning in schools with a focus on increasing the use of online and computerised testing
- strengthening core curriculum across primary and secondary schools



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- funding for scholarships for advanced, specialised tertiary education – such as Medical and Special Education Needs
- supporting and promoting growth in the agriculture sector

It is important that the measures applied in the public education system actually achieve these priorities, the ultimate success being higher rates of performance and higher levels of attainment across all subject areas.

### Auditor General’s Report

The objective of the Auditor General’s report dated October 2019 was to determine how efficiently and effectively the Ministry is using its resources to maximize student achievement. It includes recommendations and timelines for implementation.

The following recommendations noted from the Auditor General’s report require urgent attention:

Recommendation	Planned Implementation	Amplify Cayman Response
The Ministry of Education should develop a new medium- to long-term education strategy. The Ministry should regularly assess and publicly report progress against the strategy.	Resume planning an education strategy in October, 2019	Education priorities outlined in the Premier’s strategic policy statement appear to be drivers for action plans in the Ministry and schools. However, the strategic policy statement only addresses three years. We suggest that strategic policy statements and education plans reflect 15-20 year strategies to cover a student’s entire (initial) education cycle.
Recommendation	Planned Implementation	Amplify Cayman Response
The Ministry of Education should develop a long-term financial plan that is	Resume planning an education strategy in October, 2019	Estimated government revenues were impacted by covid-19. The financial plan for education





<p>underpinned by the Capital Projects Master Plan, student population projects and workforce plans, and that supports the delivery of the education strategy.</p>		<p>should be revised (not must be longer-term years) with emphasis on robust hiring practices and training. This may improve the quality of teachers, teaching, training and the number of Caymanian teachers. This is especially important since 67% of the \$86M in education spending is for personnel costs.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation</b></p>	<p><b>Planned Implementation</b></p>	<p><b>Amplify Cayman Response</b></p>
<p>The Ministry of Education and Department of Education Services should ensure that there is effective engagement with all stakeholders in the development of strategies, and that policies and changes are communicated well in advance of implementation dates.</p>	<p>Immediately</p>	<p>The Ministry must increase engagement with parents. In particular, low income households who may not have the tools or equipment at home to aid success of students. The education of students is at risk when parents are not engaged more frequently. Policies should include the provision of laptops for all children, not just laptop loans.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation</b></p>	<p><b>Planned Implementation</b></p>	<p><b>Amplify Cayman Response</b></p>
<p>The Scholarships Secretariat should start to collect, analyse and report information on all scholarships annually to better demonstrate how scholarship funding is achieving its intended purpose and contributing to economic priorities. The data collected should include the subjects and courses funded and the destinations of scholarship recipients.</p>	<p>Process to begin in January, 2020</p>	<p>Covid-19 is an excellent opportunity to immediately reallocate 30-40% of scholarship funding to technical and vocational studies and immediately develop a long-term, national TVET strategy. This will increase the number of skilled Caymanians who may replace a number of work permit holders in plumbing, electrical and construction. These are the people the country needs to rebuild the economy and who will not be sending</p>





		200M overseas to support foreign economy.
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Planned Implementation</b>	<b>Amplify Cayman Response</b>
The Ministry of Education should ensure that it takes corrective action, where monitoring identifies a lack of compliance by private schools against the terms and conditions specified in the Purchase Agreements.	Process began in September, 2019	The Ministry should ensure that the funding to private schools is accompanied by a guarantee of a certain number of Caymanians who will benefit from attending generally or who will need to attend to complete Year 12. This also assists with the desegregation of schools.
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Planned Implementation</b>	<b>Amplify Cayman Response</b>
The Government should specify clear outcomes and success measures for education as part of the budgeting process, and should ensure that performance against these is monitored and publicly reported.	Process to begin in February, 2020	It is critical for government to place less focus on “outputs” ie number of projected students in schools etc and more focus on outcomes ie higher performance of students etc. The focus on outputs leads to policy making that has no relevance to the enhancement of the public education system. For example, a larger number of students may indicate expansion to a school facility but the expansion may cost 100M dollars, money which could be better allocated to hiring the best teachers from around the world, providing students with the best equipment and hiring and training more Caymanians.

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Planned Implementation</b>	<b>Amplify Cayman Response</b>
The Ministry of Education and Department of Education Services should develop strategies to improve education attainment at all	Immediately	Additional programmes should not be developed without engaging students to find out what things they like. Students should be surveyed to determine





<p>levels. These should include closing gaps in attainment and between genders by improving the attainment of lower-performing students while continuing to motivate higher-performing students to do even better.</p>		<p>what fun activities they enjoy. Various lessons incorporated into these activities. After-school programs should focus on a combination of social skills, etiquette, math, English and sciences. A behavioural assessment should be done on male and female students to understand any behavioural issues that may be impacting attainment levels of boys and girls.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation</b></p>	<p><b>Planned Implementation</b></p>	<p><b>Amplify Cayman Response</b></p>
<p>The Department of Education Services should develop and implement a policy on reducing truancy rates. The policy should specify strategies for targeting the efforts of truancy officers to schools with the highest truancy rates; and ensure that sufficient resources are available to effectively manage and reduce truancy levels.</p>	<p>Policy development process to begin in October, 2019</p>	<p>Truancy rates are high at John Gray High School and CIFEC. Studies should be done immediately to determine behavioural and other issues that are prevalent at CIFEC and John Gray that are not at other schools. Truancy may also be linked to poor quality of teachers or teaching which should also be assessed. Assessments can be done during the month of July 2020 and August 2020. Parents must also be engaged to determine any issues at home.</p>

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Planned Implementation</b>	<b>Amplify Cayman Response</b>
<p>The Ministry of Education should develop a national strategy for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) that clearly sets out what it trying to achieve. The strategy should include a framework for measuring, assessing and reporting how the investment in SEN is</p>	<p>Enhanced data collection process began in August, 2019 to include data from private schools.</p> <p>Process for the development of an SEND strategy to begin in January, 2020</p>	<p>There is an increasing number of students with special education needs. The Ministry should investigate why this number is increasing and whether some children are being misdiagnosed as having special needs. Perhaps, some students are gifted and will benefit from a different</p>





<p>contributing to improved outcomes such as the attainment performance of SEN students; and determining how SEN funding is targeted at primary and secondary levels.</p>		<p>approach to their ed The aim should alwa produce productive ...members of society and individuals who can function well and make contributions to society. This should be a part of short, medium and long-term plans.</p>
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Although not necessarily set out as recommendations in the Auditor General’s report, our additional observations are as follows:

- Teachers and administrative personal must be provided with continued training and development to meet the needs of our children. The Ministry must mandate that all teachers must do at least 20 hours of Continued Professional Development “CPD” annually, for best practice and to keep current in teaching methods and newest information. The Ministry shall keep a register of all Teachers and their evidence of CPD.

The Ministry should be liaising with the Private Schools Association to share best practice and collaborative CPD sessions.

- It is noted that the Department of Education Services is planning to implement a new secondary school curriculum from September 2021 and has implemented a new primary school curriculum in September 2019. We respectfully suggest the Ministry take a closer look at the quality of teachers and teaching. If teacher quality is low, then a new school curriculum will not alter the outcome for a poorly taught student.
- CIFEC is viewed as a school where students go if they fail Math and English. This may have created a stigma for students who attend CIFEC. This stigma may have contributed to the high truancy rates at CIFEC. CIFEC should be designed as a school which provides education from the primary school level to give students an alternate educational route from a young age. They can transfer from CIFEC to another school at the end of Key Stage 2 if they do not want to continue to pursue core vocational studies at CIFEC. Alternatively, all primary schools should increase their focus on vocational education and, at the end of Key Stage 2, those students could transfer to CIFEC to continue their vocational studies. The idea is to have alternate routes to success. Not one which is deemed a failure and the other which is deemed a traditionally successful route.





- Government should consider subsidizing all after-school programs for students. This may remove a significant financial burden from parents and encourage more participation of students in after-school programs.
- It is understood that the Ministry and the Department of Education Services collaborate to produce a template plan of action which is given to the principal of each school. The template plan of action is intended to achieve the objectives in the strategic policy statement and each principal is accountable for the plan of action. Since the Minister is responsible for promotion of effective implementation of education policy, we suggest that the Minister develop a plan of action for each school after considering feedback from each principal, parent, and student. The Minister must remain accountable rather than attempting to transfer accountability to the principals.
- Nearly 40% of employees within the Ministry and the Department of Education Services are over the age of 50 years. We suggest that some of these qualified persons train as school inspectors so that the public education system can have the benefit of a larger number of inspectors who can review school performance all year round, rather than 3 weeks at a time. Alternatively, they may assist in after-school or other programs.
- It is understood that funding is allocated to schools based on historical spending levels and enrolment figures. The funding model should be adjusted to create a link between spending and quality of education. Under the existing model, staff may be primarily motivated by salaries (salaries are the highest portion of educational expenditure other than buildings) and may take a relaxed approach, simply herding children through the education system regardless of their education levels.
- The existing Cognitive Abilities Test appear to be flawed or are not effective as they predict that students should be at a higher level while their actual attainment is approximately 30% less than the prediction. In addition, 55% of students at the primary school level are performing at less than expected levels. In particular, a large percentage of students are performing poorly in Math and English. Alternative measures for student attainment and achievement should therefore be introduced. Better teacher quality may also improve attainment.
- The Ministry should modify appraisal and performance management of staff to ensure that underperformance is readily identified and managed appropriately





- The Ministry should eliminate the level 1 diploma from the education system and replace this with internationally accredited vocational and apprenticeship training. make it mandatory for all students including those who are performing well to take and pass two vocational training courses in their six years of high school.
- All students in the public education receive standardized test in years 4, 6, & 8. These tests are indicators of student's performance levels and should guide schools of the type of programs that students should be placed in to gain the most success. Despite the education system performing these tests each year and paying for Educational Assessments for students they suspect are struggling with a learning and/or mental health disability which cost an average of CI\$3500 per student, the testing and the reports are seldom followed. It must be mandatory for students to be placed in a programme that challenges them and provides them the skills to be successful throughout school.
- The Ministry of Education must employ its own Psychiatrists. According to the WHO-AIMS Report on Mental Health System In The Cayman Islands, 2014; 4,000 patients were treated in the government and some outpatient private facilities; 9 percent were children and adults 17 years of age or younger and the majority of the patients were diagnosed with schizophrenia, mood (affective) disorders, and neurotic, stress related disorders. The average family in our country does not have health insurance which means most of our children do not have health care. With the continued rise in mental health among our children, learning becomes a challenge without treatment.
- The Ministry currently employs approximately 8-10 very qualified Educational Psychologists. All Education Psychologist have clinical qualifications and experience; however, they are only expected to complete very expensive reports that the schools do not have the resources to provide. Education Psychologists must also be active in classes to guide teachers and administrative personnel to meet the needs of the students.
- Teachers should also be trained by CPD to support Special Educational needs in order to deal with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder, Oppositional Defiance Disorder, dyslexia, dyspraxia and anything Autistic Spectrum and work along side the educational psychologist by using their recommendations to create individualized education program (IEPs) for each child.





- Mental illness is a very significant issue in our schools. When students are not diagnosed and consistently provided with treatment, their behaviours and disability prevents them and their peers from learning. Its therefore recommended that any student diagnosed with a mental health disability receive indigent insurance through the government. This will assist parents and schools to provide the correct treatment.
- Our public schools are known for large classrooms and overcrowded campuses. Most classrooms have approximately 22-29 students. With many of our children struggling with learning and mental health disabilities, trying to function in a classroom with 22-29 peers is chaotic. For decades, many school reports have recommended smaller class sizes and more focus support. While its understandable that many schools simply don't have the space to reduce class size, the Ministry of Education must add a qualified teacher's assistant to all classrooms. This will provide teachers the opportunity to work with students who are more advanced while a teacher's assistant will work with students who need additional support.
- International borders may be closed for several months or may open and close periodically. Bearing this in mind, the Ministry's strategy should clarify and communicate its recruitment policies for the 2021 school year to ensure that sufficient, qualified teachers are available for the public education system for the entire school year and they are properly quarantined and tested prior to being exposed to our children. The Ministry must start recruiting for the following school year by the January, for the following September academic year.

## Summary

We must now align our \$86M education spending with outcomes for students and the economic priorities of the Cayman Islands. Long-term, this will create a better framework of sustainability, including "recession proof" jobs for Caymanians. This may also result in less work permits being granted as more Caymanians become employed in various trades. However, for a long-term strategic policy direction to have an opportunity for success, the Ministry must be accountable at all times and practice a high level of parental, teacher and student engagement. The government must also ensure that it hires top quality teachers and completes an ongoing assessment of their performance. A part of this assessment should consider whether students continue to underperform or are performing at higher than expected levels.





We look forward to hearing from you and engaging in-depth practical discussions at the earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,  
amplify Cayman

Cc:

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