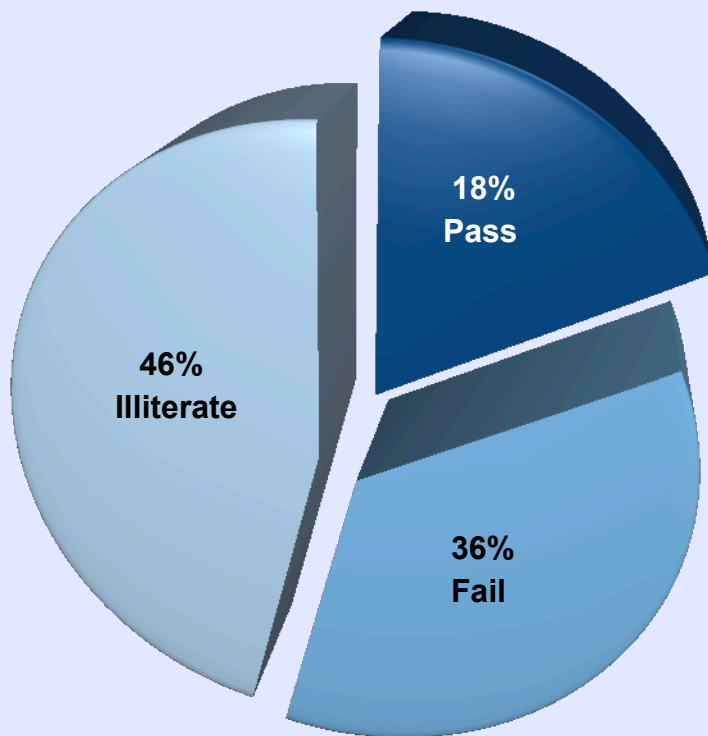


# The Learning Crisis



## A Bahamian Public Policy Essay by Ralph J Massey

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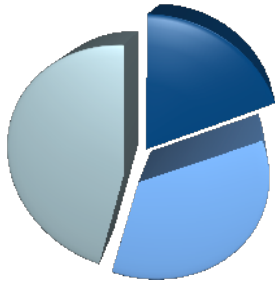
During his 36 year business career he worked for the Ford Motor, Kimberly-Clark, Johns Manville and Chemical Bank...that is now a part of JPMorgan Chase...where he was seconded to The Bank of New Providence, Nassau, Bahamas.

He is a founding member of the Nassau Institute and worked as an Economist for the Coalition for Education Reform.

# Outline

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## Introduction

This Essay addresses **The Learning Crisis** in the Bahamas that is evident to anyone who hires labour or who reads the Ministry of Education's reports on the annual Bahamas General Certificate of Secondary Education exam.

The overall average scores of the "BGCSE" have fluctuated between D+ and D- since this testing began. This dismal finding is confirmed in newspaper articles on the high failure rates at graduation time in specific public high schools.

To some this may come as a surprise since the Bahamas has met the United Nation's Millennium Development Goal of "Universal Education," namely "every child from age five is able to attend school."

If one uses "Universal Education" as the measure of education achievement, then the country was very successful after 1967. According to the 1970-2000 census data, there was a significant increase in the number of years of schooling attained by the adult population.

If one measures what children learn and can do at graduation time, then education in the Bahamas has been stalled in a long-standing and dangerous educational malaise. There is a national "learning impairment" that has significant economic and social consequences...hence, Learning Crisis

When considering this crisis, it is easy to get into a political "blame game." The

author contends that a number of factors that, when seen in hindsight, created the "perfect storm" in education.

1. The speedy attainment of Universal Education meant a sudden large need for new teachers
2. "Bahamianization", the foreign worker permit system, was often used simply to eliminate foreign teachers
3. "End Elitism" in teaching closed Government High, the premier public high school for learning
4. These three policies resulted in a precipitous drop in the quality of teachers and teaching instruction, a decline that could not be offset by teacher training courses.
5. Furthermore, a bad situation was institutionalized by Government employment-for-life policies, a teacher union and ultimately the acceptance of "social promotion", the end of academic standards.

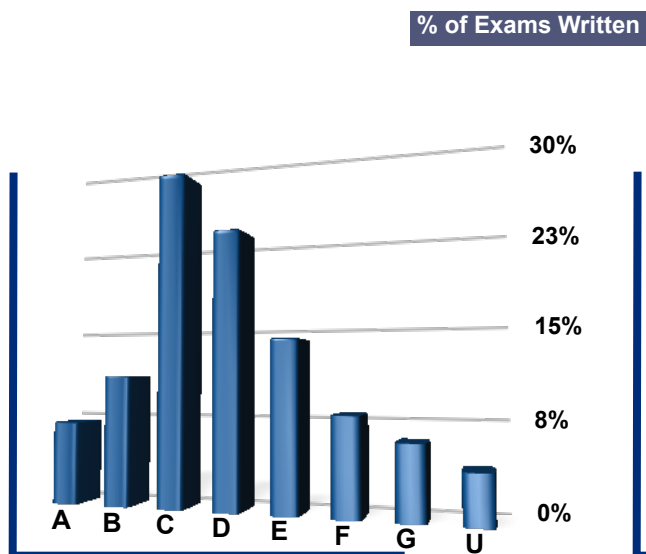
**This essay explores -**

- **The details of the BGCSE exam,**
- **Recent research on learning and**
- **Teaching success stories world-wide...**

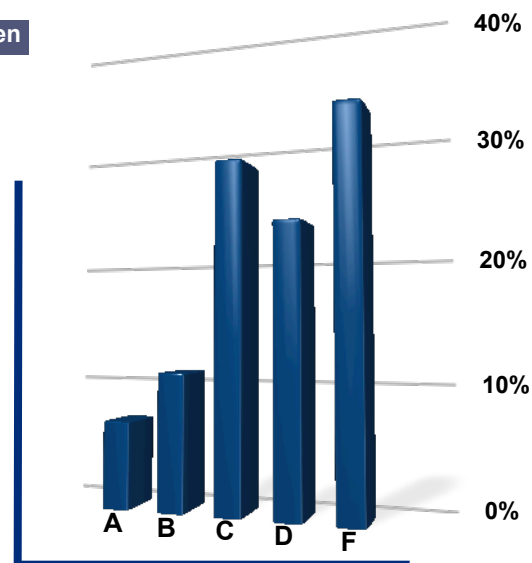
**to fashion a starting point for the monumental task of education reform in the Bahamas.**

# High School Diplomas

All Schools & Subjects - 8 Point Scale



All Schools & Subjects - 5 Point Scale



Once a year at graduation time there is always one newspaper report of a public high school where only a half of the school leavers receives a diploma. The government does not present such pass and fail graduation data in its annual "How did we do this year?" media releases.

Rather, it releases the average overall test score of the annual BGCSE exams that are given to all high school leavers in 26 subjects. It is a single grade, usually a "D".

The graph to the left is a graph of the backup data for that average. It shows that 7% of the exam takers got As, 28% got Cs and only 8% got Fs

The eight-point system is useful in developing remedial instruction plans; but it gives a false picture of the nation's overall academic achievement in that it shows eight levels of performance, "A" to "U" rather than

the more widely used five levels, "A" to "F" as in the right-hand graph.

This graph has the same data; but now all those students shown as earning grades "E" thru "U" in the first graph are now shown as earning an "F".

This graph is reality; it is a good picture of academic achievement in so far as it approximates the actual pass and fail scores given in the high schools at graduation time.

Seven percent got "As", 28% got "Cs" and 32% got "Fs". An "F" means "Failure". This produces a D+ weighted average for all students taking the 2006 BGCSE exams in all schools.

**The national grade point average has fluctuated between D+ and D- since the BGCSE exams were first given in 1993. For too long there have been simply "Too Many "Fs" & Too Few "As".**

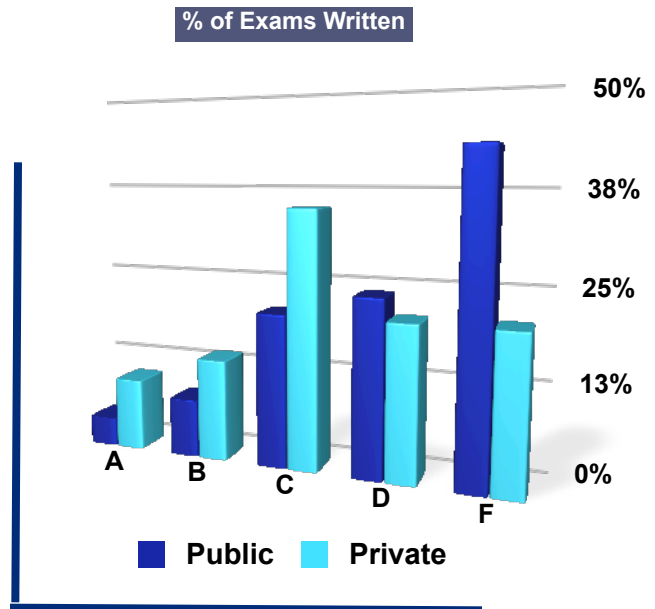
# Two Academic Worlds

But that graph does not tell the whole story since the performance of the private schools is distinctly better than the public schools as can be seen in the results from the 2006 BGCSE exams.

The graph to the right shows the BGCSE results for the public and private high schools on New Providence. The peak grade for the Public Schools is an “F”, 41 percent of the exams written. In contrast, the peak for the private schools is a “C” with 35 percent exams written.

**The bad news is, while the 41 percent of the public schools earn “Fs”, 21 percent of the private schools also earn “Fs”.**

All Public & Private High Schools



# Academic Excellence

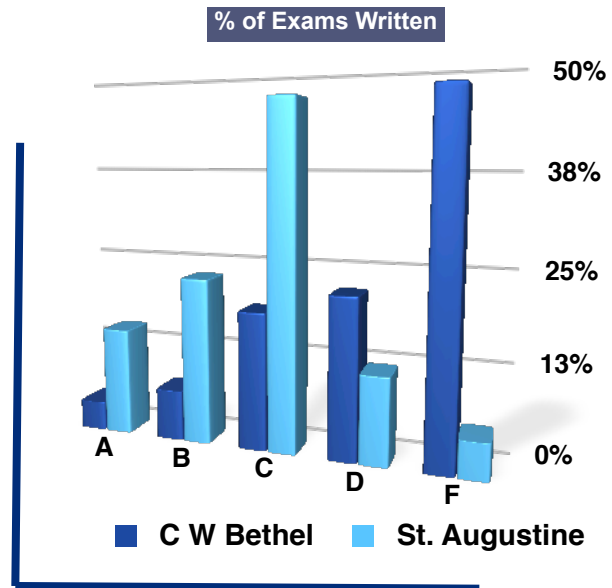
Nevertheless, the good news is that the Bahamas does have centers of academic excellence.

This can be seen in the comparative performance of the top public and private high schools on New Providence, C W Bethel and St. Augustine. In 2006 the latter edged out its nearest private high school rival by two one-hundredths of a point.

Look at the grade distribution carefully, the relative heights of the columns. The startling differences define the problem.

**St. Augustine is an example of academic excellence; while C W Bethel, the best of the public high schools on New Providence, is not.**

Two New Providence High



# Language, Math & the Cognitive Skills

In order to grasp the significance of the crisis as evidenced in the BGCSE test scores, one must delve even deeper into the data, particularly the test results in language and mathematics. These are the two great inventions of man and are the cornerstones for all learning. They facilitate -

- The acquisition, communication, organization and storage of knowledge, and
- All subsequent learning.

The English Language exam for the seven public high schools on New Providence shows that 44 percent passed, 39 percent simply failed, 17 percent got failing grades and were language illiterate.

The results on the Mathematics exam are far worse, 18 percent passed, 36 percent failed and 46 percent were numerically illiterate. This 46 percent do not know the difference between addition and multiplication.

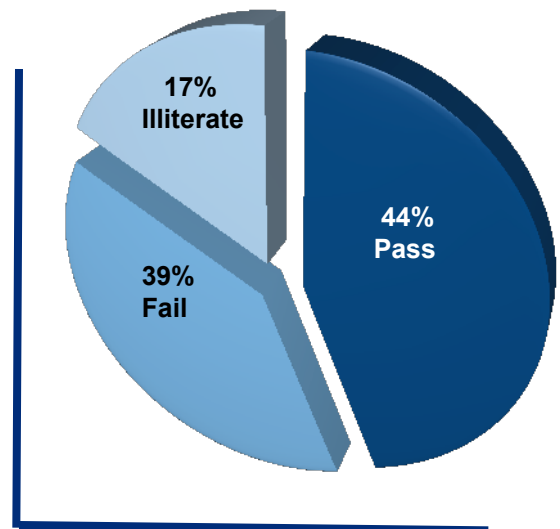
These two academic results are critical!

**One learns the basic skills of language and numbers in one's infancy. In the process one acquires the "Cognitive Skills" -**

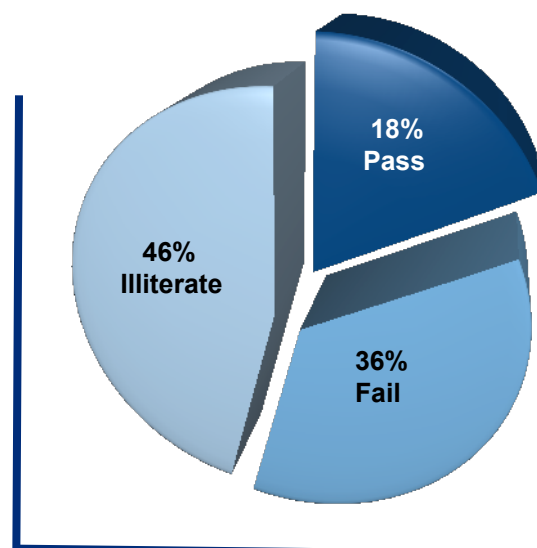
- **Attention,**
- **Concentration,**
- **Memory,**
- **Self-discipline and**
- **Symbolic and logical thinking.**

**They are essential to the subsequent acquisition of all knowledge. Their importance is seen in the first four paragraphs in Teachers Count on page 13 and the discussion of the Baby College on page 16. If the basic cognitive skills are not learned by the fifth grade, they are not likely to be acquired thereafter.**

## NP Public High Schools - English



## NP Public High Schools - Math





# Economics & Globalization

“Large increases in education and training have accompanied major advances in technological knowledge in all countries that have achieved significant economic growth.” There is a link between education, knowledge and significant economic growth.

Gary S. Becker, the 1992 Nobel Laureate in Economics

## Economics

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This low and unacceptable level of academic achievement deprives individuals and the nation of the skills necessary to produce both personal and collective growth.

Economists consider these skills to be the “Human Capital” of the country. Bahamians should also embrace this view especially since Human Capital is more important to the public welfare than is physical capital...the tangible investment in buildings, equipment, roads, etc.

Eric Hanushek and Ludger Woessmann explored the role of school improvement in economic development in studies published in 2007 by the National Bureau of Economic Research and the World Bank. It covered 70 countries and examined the economic impact of education reform, specifically, the improvement in the average level of

academic achievement (a.k.a. “education quality”).

It answered the question “How important is academic achievement or ‘education quality’ to economic growth?” -

- It is more important than increases in school attendance alone, the number of schooling years completed. In fact, the most important public policy implication is that school attendance that does not increase both cognitive and specific skills is a waste of scarce national resources.
- It is more important than other factors commonly cited as critical to economic growth such as freedom to trade and the rule of law.
- It alone can raise real Gross Domestic Product by 36 percent over a 15-year period.

## Globalization

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However, this analysis does not adequately describe what is going on in the world.

In the scientific press Ray Kurzweil, a leading inventor and futurist, has traced the rate of technological change from the beginning of time to the present. He produces substantial evidence that the rate of technological change is accelerating. Certainly developments in the computer sciences over the past 70-years illustrate this point.

A more widely known commentator has been Thomas Friedman, the author of two books on “Globalization”. He describes in

great detail how in the last two decades technological innovation and a massive investment in fiber optic transmission systems have produced a global market for manufactured goods and services.

- India and China, the two largest countries in the world, emerged as key players in this “technologically flattened” and more economically unified world, and
- All other countries large and small are faced with the need to adjust rapidly or fall increasingly behind.

Globalization is so important that the leading countries of the world have developed two parallel academic testing systems to measure the academic achievement of its students in science and language. One of these is the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2007.

The Mathematics exam, for instance, is organized around two dimensions, a content dimension and a cognitive dimension.

The TIMSS 2007 math results is shown in the table to the right. The scores are the results for both the content domains - numbers, algebra, geometry, data and chance - and the three cognitive domains -

- “Knowing refers to the student’s knowledge base of mathematics facts, concepts, tools and procedures.
- “Applying focuses on the student’s ability to apply knowledge and conceptual understanding in a problem situation.
- “Reasoning goes beyond the solution of routine problems to encompass unfamiliar situations, complex contexts, and multi-step problems.

Singapore had the highest average achievement in the content domains and Taiwan was the top-performer in the cognitive domains.

It is also evident that many countries made strategic policy errors in the past that produced a subsequent “educational malaise.” This is true of most countries in the Caribbean including the Bahamas. Only Barbados avoided a post-colonial slump in educational standards as it reformed its educational system.

The Bahamas does not participate in the TIMSS system; but a cursory examination suggests it would be included in the lowest group shown.

**In a world where knowledge is growing at a geometric rate, will the ‘learning gap’ between the Bahamas and the world’s leading countries grow, remain unchanged or decrease? The worst case scenario is that the education problem will be ignored because reality is painful and frightening. In such a situation the government reforms will be inadequate and the learning gap will increase.**

| TIMSS 2007 - Mathematics Score |                   |            |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Average Age 14                 |                   |            |
| Rank                           | Country           | Avg. Score |
| 1                              | Singapore         | 605        |
| 2                              | South Korea       | 589        |
| 3                              | Hong Kong         | 586        |
| 4                              | Taiwan            | 585        |
| 5                              | Japan             | 570        |
| 6                              | Belgium (Flemish) | 537        |
| 7                              | Netherlands       | 536        |
| 8                              | Estonia           | 531        |
| 9                              | Hungary           | 529        |
| 10                             | Malaysia          | 508        |
| 11                             | Latvia            | 508        |
| 12                             | Russian Fed.      | 508        |
| 13                             | Slovakia          | 508        |
| 14                             | Australia         | 505        |
| 15                             | United States     | 504        |
| 16                             | Lithuania         | 502        |
| 17                             | Sweden            | 499        |
| 18                             | Scotland          | 498        |
| 19                             | Israel            | 496        |
| 20                             | New Zealand       | 494        |
| 21                             | Slovenia          | 493        |
| 22                             | Italy             | 484        |
| 23                             | Armenia           | 478        |
| 24                             | Serbia            | 477        |
| 25                             | Bulgaria          | 476        |
| 26                             | Romania           | 475        |
| 27                             | Norway            | 461        |
| 28                             | Moldavia          | 460        |
| 29                             | Cyprus            | 459        |
| 30                             | Macedonia         | 435        |
| 31                             | Lebanon           | 433        |
| 32                             | Jordan            | 424        |
| 33                             | Iran              | 411        |
| 34                             | Indonesia         | 411        |
| 35                             | Tunisia           | 410        |
| 36                             | Egypt             | 406        |
| 37                             | Bahrain           | 401        |
| 38                             | Palestine.        | 390        |
| 39                             | Chile             | 387        |
| 40                             | Morocco           | 387        |
| 41                             | Philippines       | 387        |
| 42                             | Botswana          | 366        |
| 43                             | Saudi Arabia      | 332        |
| 44                             | Ghana             | 276        |
| 45                             | South Africa      | 264        |



# Myths and Potholes

## Spending

At this point it is helpful to look at some of the surprising lessons learned from the past.

“On average, [and contrary to what one might expect] the countries with high educational expenditures perform at the same level as countries with low educational expenditures.” More spending alone does not produce improved student performance.

The best example of this is the United States. It spent \$125 Billion Dollars from 1965 to 2001 under Title I of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act “to improve the quality of education in high-poverty schools and/or to give extra help to struggling students.” Legally mandated school segregation ended; and the separate-but-not-equal “educational facilities gap” had virtually disappeared.

However, in 2001 Roderick R. Page, the Secretary of Education, said -

“After spending \$125 billion of Title I money...we have virtually nothing to show for it.” In constant dollars, the funding doubled between 1985 and 2001. Yet...the test scores on academic achievement available in 2001 showed no significant improvement, no measurable increase in academic achievement.”

In economic terms the productivity of American schools declined...that is...as spending increased, academic

achievement, as measured in actual test scores, did not.

Some have argued that Black and Hispanic students in predominantly minority schools did not get their fair share of total spending. The U.S. Department of Education showed that school district expenditures per student were higher in overwhelmingly minority districts by 8.5 percent; but when the expenditures were adjusted for the overall higher operating costs in those minority districts, the expenditures were 6.5% less than those in suburban schools. This spending differential does not explain the differences in academic achievement.

In the case of the Bahamas, as in most other post-colonial Caribbean countries, the Government made strategic policy errors after 1967. The author contends that these had some short-term political benefits, namely it created jobs for Bahamians, but produced debilitating long-term consequences. (See Chapter IV Teachers Count.)

**The evidence suggests that the Bahamas has wasted some part of its scarce resources for 40-years by warehousing school age children. Yes! It kept them off the streets; but, the low level of skills actually learned has robbed the country of workers with sufficient critical skills.**

# Unions

The decline in educational productivity in the United States is particularly instructive for the Bahamas since the sequence of events and their consequences are so clear.

The biggest change during a period of rapid spending growth after 1965 was the simultaneous nationwide unionization of teachers in the nation's 13,000 separate school districts.

Before 1961 trade union collective bargaining by teachers was illegal everywhere. The New York City union representation election of 1961 established a legal framework for mandatory collective bargaining; and the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) changed from professional associations to industrial trade unions. Starting in 1964 they unionized teachers from coast to coast.

The labour contracts negotiated were highly bureaucratic and inflexible. For instance, they imposed single salary pay schedules based strictly on seniority and "teacher education" courses taken. The subjects taught, grade level, and teaching effectiveness played no role in the salary earned by the teacher.

The NEA became the largest, most powerful labour union in the U.S. Its purpose is to increase and retain the largest number of dues paying members possible. Thus they have effectively opposed all innovations that will reduce its membership or the power that it

wields. These policy actions include effective and persistent opposition to incentive pay systems, charter schools, government vouchers to defray the costs for students attending private schools, tuition tax credits, contracting out and home schooling. All of these have the potential for negative effects on the number of people employed by the regular school system, the prospects for collective bargaining, etc.

A good example is the comment of the NEA President prior to a national meeting on standards, testing and accountability. In September 1999, two years before the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act.

"With all due respect, the prevailing attitude among politicians and policy-makers is something right out of the movie 'Field of Dreams': 'If we set the standards high, the students will achieve.' It is folly--no, it is fraudulent..."

**In the case of the Bahamas, as in the U.S. and most post-colonial countries, the collective bargaining agreement affects productivity; but more importantly, the teacher is a public servant "protected" under of the Constitution by the Public Service Commission, its Regulations and the Public Service Board of Appeal. This more comprehensive structure limits a principal's decisions and reduces the system's ability to reform.**

## Classroom Size

Teachers and teacher unions promote the reduction in classroom size with the stated objective to lower the student to teacher ratio and improve student learning. This seems logical; it's the Conventional Wisdom.

Eric Hanushek looked at 300 studies on classroom size and academic achievement. He found that in a full 85 percent of all the studies reducing class did not improve student performance.

A rapid reduction in classroom size generally requires a significant increase in newly hired teachers and this is most often done by reducing the quality of teachers employed.

In fact, the nationwide average class size fell for decades (from 30 students per class in 1961 to 23 students per class in 1998); yet there was no overall improvement in

student classroom performance as measured by standardized tests.

This result is also evident in a comparative study of 25 OECD countries including the top ten performers. "South Korea and Singapore (two of the top ten) employ fewer teachers than other systems; in effect, this ensures that they can spend more money on each teacher at an equivalent funding level." South Korea's student-to-teacher ratio is 30.1. In contrast, the OECD average is 17.1 student per teacher; yet the OECD countries on standardized tests do not show higher test scores.

**There is no convincing proof that reducing classroom size has been a successful reform strategy except for the teaching of math and English in primary grades one to five.**



# Culture Counts

“Culture is a repertoire of socially transmitted and inter-generationally generated ideas about how to live and make judgments, both in general terms and in regard to specific domains of life.”

Orlando Patterson, *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, 2003.

“Cultures involve attitudes as well as skills, languages, and customs. Attempts to measure cultural differences between groups by attitude surveys, however, miss the crucial point that culture is expressed in behavior, not lip service.”

Thomas Sowell, *Race and Culture: A World View*, 1994.

“Cultural legacies matter – they are powerful and pervasive and they persist, long after their original usefulness has passed.” However, “these legacies need not be an indelible part of who we are. If we are honest about where they came from and are willing to confront them, we can change.”

Malcolm Gladwell, “The Ethnic Theory of Plane Crashes” from *Outliers: The Story of Success*, 2008.

This analysis contends that culture is the biggest pothole faced by the Bahamas in securing effective educational reform. To many this may seem like an inappropriate comment on an incredibly sensitive subject.

Nevertheless, one must deal with it; and a good place to begin is with the above definitions of culture by three Afro-American scholars: a sociologist, an economist and a social commentator and journalist. These statements suggest that culture really counts. In effect, Culture is to society what “Location-Location-Location” is to real estate.

This essay will not discuss Bahamian culture in detail since to do it well is beyond the limits of this author. This can be done more authoritatively by Bahamian educators and commentators.

This essay will briefly describe research done in the U. S. on its racial and ethnic “gaps” because this work is extensive and is a useful background in identifying effective solutions.

**Orlando Patterson**, a Black sociologist at Harvard, observed the following in “Taking Culture Seriously: A Framework and an Afro-American Illustration”:

First, “the test score gap between Afro-Americans and Euro-Americans is indeed important in explaining later occupational status and income, although what it is measuring is not so much as intelligence as it is learnable cognitive and educational skills. [Please note that the learning gap between Asian-Americans and Euro-Americans is roughly the same size as the gap between Afro-Americans and Euro-Americans]

“Second, this test-score gap is only partly explained by the class or social background of students. The still substantial income difference between Afro-Americans and Euro-Americans explains, at best, almost one point of the large ethnic gap in students’ test scores. And when all socioeconomic background factors are considered, such as wealth and occupation, no more than a third of the ethnic gap is explained...

“The answer in a nutshell is culture... Cultural beliefs and practices affect the child at least from the moment of birth and perhaps sooner. Even the parents’ expectations of the unborn child and their teachers, and other sources of influence in the culture signal what is important to the growing child, and these messages have both short- and long-term impact.”

**John U Ogbu**, a black anthropologist at the University of California Berkeley, is best known for his work on the academic disengagement of Black American

students in Shaker Heights, the upper-middle class suburb of Cleveland, Ohio.

Shaker Heights had successfully prevented Black and Jewish residency until the 1960s when it became the “model of a voluntarily self-integrated community that discouraged ‘White Flight,’ and promoted diversity...about one third of the community was African American...

“The school system was one of the best in the nation. The community’s pride in its excellence in education was reflected in its motto: A community is known by the schools it keeps.”

However, the disparity in academic achievement was glaring. For instance, in one high school graduation class of 400 students evenly divided between Blacks and Whites, 156 of the Whites graduated with honors while 5 Blacks did so.

In 1997 the Black community of Shaker Heights was angry about the persistent Black/White school performance gap; and a newspaper article reporting a 1996 internal study of the gap by school was leaked to the press. The community approached and got John Ogbu to do an eight-month ethnographical study.

Professor Ogbu observed and documented what he had seen elsewhere with Black students, namely, “disengagement from academic work, inability to focus on the task at hand, blaming teachers for their failure, and having low academic expectations of themselves.”

He concentrated on “the beliefs and behaviors within the minority community regarding education that minority students bring to school” that caused the disengagement and the resulting poor record of academic achievement. These

beliefs and behaviors included the “Norm of Minimum Effort” and excuses like -

- “It’s not cool to show you’re smart”,
- “I’m bored with uninteresting courses”,
- “Motivate me if you want me to learn,” etc.

**John H McWhorter**, a young Black linguist at Berkeley, wrote *Losing the Race* while John Ogbu was doing the Shaker Heights study. McWhorter contends -

“Black America is currently caught in certain ideological holding patterns that are today much, much more serious barriers to black well-being than is white racism, and constitute nothing less than a continuous, self-sustaining act of self-sabotage.”

He then identifies the three major manifestations that create an “ideological sea of troubles”.

1. The **Cult of Victimology** treats “victimhood not as a problem to be solved but as an identity to be nurtured...[It] encourages the black American from birth to fixate upon remnants of racism and resolutely downplay all signs of its demise. Black Americans too often teach one another to conceive of racism not as a scourge on the wane but as an eternal pathology changing only in form and visibility, and always on the verge of getting not better but worse.”
2. **Separatism** “encourages Black Americans to conceive of black people as an unofficial sovereign entity, within which the rules other Americans are expected to follow are suspended out of a belief that our victimhood renders us morally exempt from them.”
3. **Anti-intellectualism** is a tendency founded “in the roots of the culture of poverty and disenfranchisement” that “has now become a culture-internal infection nurtured by a

distrust of the former oppressor.” He demonstrates that it is the root cause of the notorious lag in black students’ grades and test scores regardless of class or income level and not the unequal distribution of educational resources.

Many may find these comments disturbing. But... the learning gap in the U.S. today is beyond acknowledging its existence or agreeing on its anthropological, ethnographical, or sociological origins.

**Failure “to go beyond” living with the status quo and undertake educational reform means forgoing the opportunity to add to the human capital of the country and this invites social instability or worse.**

**Jared Diamond** in *Collapse: How Society’s Choose to Fail or Succeed* provides an interesting perspective on culture with his five factors that account for the failure of the societies that he examined. The most relevant to the Bahamas is his number five that states that -

Political, economic, and social institutions and their related cultural values determine a society’s capacity to solve or to even try to solve its problems.

## **The Bahamas.**

**With respect to the Learning Crisis the question is “What shall be done and will the action be effective and affordable?” In the Bahamas, the more specific question is “Who will step up , recognize both the problem and the solutions and provide the political will to implement change?”**

**Leaders with courage to create specific new institutions that become the pivotal agents of change.**





# Teachers Count

**“Students benefiting from regular yearly assignment to more effective teachers have an extreme advantage in terms of attaining higher levels of achievement”...students having a series of years with poor teachers experience a “near-permanent retardation of academic achievement.”**

**University of Tennessee Study, 1996.**

**“The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers...The more effective systems get more talented people to become teachers, develop them into better instructors, and ensure that they deliver consistently for every child in the system.”**

**McKinsey & Company/OECD Study, 2007**

There are many reasons given by social scientists, teachers and unionists for the poor academic record of public education in the Bahamas, the U.S. and elsewhere. However, based on recent authoritative research, the most significant common one is the quality of teachers and teaching instruction.

The first quotation above comes from the November 1996 report “The Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement” by William Sanders and June Rivers of the University of Tennessee. It was a “longitudinal” study in that it followed individual students and their teachers over a five year period.

The results were astounding.

For instance, this study described the increase in math achievement resulting

from the “regular yearly assignment to more effective teachers as extreme, in fact, AWESOME!!!”

In January 2007 Hanushek and Woessmann, the two economists cited earlier, used an entirely different methodology and came to the same conclusion.

The second quote is from a September 2007 study by McKinsey & Company that analyzed the primary and secondary education systems of 25 countries including the ten best in the OECD’s “Programme for International Assessment”.

As a result of this research the focus shifted from explaining what went wrong in the poor performing countries to what was being done right in the successful countries.

## **Teacher Selection & Training.**

Recruit teachers from the top-third of each group of graduates from their school system.

For example, South Korea recruits from the top 5 percent, Finland the top 10 percent and Singapore and Hong Kong the top 30 percent. “A South Korean policy maker is explicit about the importance of getting good people into teaching. ‘The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers.’”

In contrast, the United States recruits from the bottom third. There are school districts, those that are the most rapidly improving ones, that target top college graduates as teaching candidates. The most prominent organizations for recruiting high-potential candidates in the U.S. are the Boston Teacher Residency, the New York Teaching Fellows and the Chicago Teaching Fellows.

- Almost every top-school system requires the student to receive a degree in a subject other than education before teacher training begins.
- And teacher training is practical with most of the training taking place within the teachers’ classroom.

The educator interested in a more comprehensive understanding of these recommendations should refer to the McKinsey Report.

**Teacher Compensation.** Pay starting salaries that are in-line with the starting salaries in other graduate school programs so that strong candidates will view the teaching alternative favorably.

According to the McKinsey report “surveys...show that, unless school systems offer salaries which are in-line with other

graduate starting salaries, these same people do not enter teaching.”

**Cultural Setting.** Operate within a society that values teaching and teachers highly.

“In Singapore and South Korea opinion polls show that the general public believes that teachers make a greater contribution to society than any other profession...New teachers in all of the systems studied consistently reported that the status of the profession is one of the most important factors in their decision to become a teacher.”

**Background.** The persistent low scores in Bahamian public schools strongly suggests that the average teacher is ineffective. There is no available evidence to suggest otherwise. Neither the annual media releases on the BGCSE test results nor the other Department of Education’s public statements make reference to teacher quality.

In this regard, however, a top union officer responded to a query “Is anyone teaching math?” with “Teachers are qualified but are uncomfortable teaching math.”

Some clues can be gained from the work of Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom on teacher quality in the U. S. They ask the question, “How can we identify good teachers?”

Most states require candidates to pass a basic skills test and most of these are not rigorous. The problem in low performing school districts is not the number of candidates that fail these minimum competency tests and are subsequently hired but also “the inadequate skills of the large number who pass them.”

The Chicago public school system is particularly instructive. “In the state as a

whole, 8 percent of all currently employed teachers had failed at least one test of teacher competency; in five high-minority, high poverty districts the average was 20 percent. In a dozen Chicago schools, 40 percent of the teaching staff had flunked one or more tests...

“The prize for incompetence went to a Chicago teacher who failed on twenty-four out of twenty-five tries, including all twelve of the tests in the subject she taught. Nevertheless, she was still teaching.”

One California study concludes that a master’s degrees in education “is arguably one of the least efficient expenditures in education”; and therefore, the \$3 billion a year spent by school districts and teachers to obtain such a degree is a waste.

The weight of evidence in the U.S. suggests that teaching experience and teaching degrees do not raise teaching effectiveness except for first and second year teachers who are learning “classroom management skills.”

The evidence does suggest that the test scores of teachers on the more rigorous standardized tests of teachers’ skills do matter. Studies in North Carolina, Texas, Alabama and Tennessee suggest that a teacher with higher scores on such tests “would do much more to help at-risk students than reducing class size or any other reform under discussion.”

Furthermore, the teaching environment in public schools relative to that existing in private schools works against the recruitment and retention of high quality teaching candidates. It is in the traditional

public school where the teacher faces student pregnancy, verbal abuse, disrespect, apathy and unpreparedness to learn. Here the culture of the classroom is hostile to learning and teacher effectiveness.

**The Bahamas.** In Chapter One reference was made to the strategic policy decisions that set the pattern for almost four decades of public education. These “strategic errors” alone would account for the enduring educational malaise.

**An education reform program must start with a greater candor and disclosure not only on Bahamian Culture (the last Chapter) but also on the quality of teachers, teaching instruction and proposed reform programs.**

**Of necessity such a reform program is a monumental task that can take up to 15 years to implement. It will require -**

- **The hiring of higher quality teachers and displacing lower quality ones,**
- **A completely new approach to teacher training, and**
- **Leadership and a public will to reform.**

**BUT...it can start with critical new agents of change that produce tangible benefits to the ordinary citizen. This will take courageous leadership.**



# Solutions

## Institutional Setting

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This essay contends that Government authority is so centralized that political calculations dominate all decision making and the decisions are made on the basis of “How does it help me win the next election?”

Unfortunately, the full benefits of successful education reform take fifteen to twenty years both to implement and to produce the full benefits, benefits that are widely visible to the electorate.

Yes, some tangible progress should be evident in as little as 3-years; but

grievances arise in the short-term for students, parents, unions and/or bureaucrats affected by the reform program itself.

**The necessary first step has to be institutional, the taking of education out of the immediate day-to-day control of politicians...hopefully freeing them from short-term political pressures. The importance and specifics of this will be seen in the specific proposals that follow.**

## The Baby College

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The first steps should be the creation of “agents of change”. The most basic is an institution patterned after the Baby College of the Harlem Children’s Zone (“HCZ”) of New York City.

Its goal should be to provide everyone “who is expecting a child or raising children between the ages of 0 to 3 with the information and support necessary to bring up happy and healthy children who enter school ready to learn.”

To ensure an effective start and a basis for growth the program should be confined to a specific geographic area. In

the case of the HCZ, the specific geographic area covered 24 blocks. This year (2009) the area will expand to 100 blocks. This is “a largely low income neighborhood plagued by a host of ills attendant upon poverty”...61 percent of its children live below the federal poverty line, unemployment is 3 to 4 times the national average, 75 percent of its students do not graduate from high school and 40% drop out before high school.

The staff of the College goes into the community, literally door to door, and

actively solicits candidates for its nine week course in child rearing and development. That course now has three full cycles a year, each with more than 50 in each class. The curriculum is comprehensive and includes “brain development, discipline, safety, asthma, lead poisoning, parental stress, and parent-child bonding.” Not the least bit important is the promotion of systematic reading.

Berry Brazelton, a retired pediatrician, a Professor Emeritus at the Harvard Medical School and co-author of the Baby College curriculum, contends that there are critical periods just before spurts in emotional, physical and cognitive growth.

**In fact, education literally begins in the womb. Children that do not get good early childhood care end up permanently handicapped.**

**“Without significant interventions, disparities in cognitive advantages at the very early stages in development often lead to ever-widening differences in educational achievements as children grow older.”**

**A Baby College is an institution for expectant and young mothers, an agent for change, a significant cultural intervention.**

## Program SURE

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The second proposed agent of change already exists in the Department of Education. Its target is the male teenager who is about to drop out of the educational system.

The Alternative Education Program or Program SURE (a.k.a. Success Ultimately Reassures Everyone) started in Nassau in February 1992 and in Grand Bahama in March 1993 for male students with chronic disciplinary problems. These students are emotionally detached from school and unable to function in the traditional school setting. They tend to disruptive and/or violent behavior and/or commit “expellable” but not criminal offenses warranting arrest.

The Nassau Program occupies a school complex on Gladstone Road and has a capacity for 40 students. It is a four and one-half month program designed to promote a positive self-image and discipline and to develop problem solving and conflict resolution skills. Students are referred to the Program by the

Department of Education teachers; and the program focuses on functional literacy, vocational training, athletics and counseling.

Individual and group counseling are very important yet the program has not been able to recruit and retain two full-time male counselors, and for periods of time it has operated without any counselors or with only a part-time counselor.

Teachers who transfer to the school receive a \$300.00 per year salary premium that is an insufficient inducement to attract and retain the “optimal” all male teaching staff.

The program requires parental and guardian presence in student/parent/counselor reviews at three points in the program. These sessions are important for success; yet to date it has been unable to reach and involve male parents or guardians.

Overall the Program appears successful insofar as the limited data available shows

a relatively high “return to school” record. But this raises the serious issue, “Is the program undernourished?”

**As an Agent of Change the effectiveness of Program SURE of the Department of Education should be more thoroughly documented. If the**

**program is successful, the capacity should be increased. If higher pay will attract the male teachers and counselors necessary for success, the financial incentives should be increased. One should expect that a new institutional setting would find a way.**

## A Laboratory School

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The third proposed agent of change is a primary/secondary laboratory school as proposed by the Coalition for Education Reform in its July 2005 Report to the Minister of Education.

It is a school patterned after the Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP). KIPP has succeeded in targeting disadvantaged children in low income areas. It is a group of over fifty schools that started with one grade level, the 5th grade in Houston, Texas, expanded up to include an 8th grade, and then branched to the South Bronx of New York City.

Over 95% of KIPP students are African American or Latino/Hispanic; and over 80% of KIPP students are eligible for the federally subsidized meals program. Students are accepted regardless of prior academic record, conduct, or socioeconomic background. However, 76% of KIPP alumni attend college versus 48% in regular public high schools New York and Houston.

The schools are “free open enrollment college-preparatory public schools where educationally under-served students develop the knowledge, skills, and character needed to succeed in top quality high schools, colleges, and the competitive world beyond.” KIPP schools operate on the basis of the “Five Pillars” that, in effect, change the culture of the classroom.

1. **High Expectations.** The program is based on clearly defined and high expectations for academic achievement and conduct. They are measurable and do not make allowance for excuses based on the students’ backgrounds.
2. **Choice & Commitment.** Students, parents and teachers participate strictly on a voluntary basis and each sign an agreement to the basic principles of the school. Breaches of the agreements have consequences.
3. **More Time.** The parties commit to longer school hours...7:30 AM to 5:00 PM Monday thru Thursday. 7:30 AM to 4:00 PM on Friday, 9:15 AM to 1:05 PM on Saturdays, and one month of schooling during the summer. KIPP students spend 62% more time in school each year.
4. **Power to Lead.** School principals “are effective academic and organizational leaders who understand that great schools require great School Leaders. They have control over their school budget and personnel. They are free to swiftly move dollars or make staffing changes, allowing them maximum effectiveness in helping students learn. There is no blaming “downtown” or “blaming the system”... all decisions rest with the principal.

5. **Focus on Results.** The focus is on high student performance on standardized tests and other objective measures. There are no shortcuts, no excuses. The expectation is “a level of academic performance that will enable them to succeed at the nation’s best high schools and colleges.”

## Observations \_\_\_\_\_

Malcolm Gladwell in *Outliers: The Story of Success*, Little-Brown, 2008, describes a visit to a KIPP school as follows:

The KIPP Academy in the South Bronx of New York City is a middle school. “Classes are large: the fifth grade has two sections of thirty-five students each. There are no entrance exams or admissions requirements. Students are chosen by lottery, with any fourth grader living in the Bronx eligible to apply. Roughly half of the students are African American; the rest are Hispanic. Three-quarters of the children come from single-parent homes. Ninety percent qualify for ‘free or reduced lunch’, which is to say that their families earn so little that the federal government chips in so the children can eat properly at lunchtime.

“KIPP Academy seems like the kind of school in the kind of neighborhood with the kind of student that would make educators despair—except that the minute you enter, it’s clear that something is different...In the classroom, they are taught to turn and address anyone talking to them in a protocol known as “SLANT”; smile, sit up, listen, ask questions, nod when being spoken to, and track with your eyes...

“What KIPP is most famous for is mathematics. In the South Bronx, only about 16 percent of all middle school students are performing at or above their grade level in math. But at KIPP, by the end of fifth grade, many of the students call math their favorite subject. In seventh grade, KIPP students start *high school* algebra. By the end of eighth grade, 84 percent of the students are performing at or above their grade level, which is to say that this motley group of

## Student Contract

I fully commit to KIPP in the following ways:

1. I will arrive at KIPP every day by 7:25 A.M. (Monday-Friday) or board a KIPP bus at the correct time
2. I will remain at KIPP until 5:00 P.M. (Monday - Thursday) and 4:00 P.M. on Friday
3. I will come to KIPP on appropriate Saturdays at 9:15 A.M. and remain until 1:05 P.M.
4. I will attend KIPP during summer school
5. I will always work, think, and behave in the best way I know how, and I will do whatever it takes for me and my fellow students to learn
6. This also means that I will complete all my homework every night, I will call my teachers if I have a problem with the homework or a problem with coming to school, and I will raise my hand and ask questions in class if I do not understand something
7. I will always make myself available to parents and teachers, and address any concerns they might have.
8. If I make a mistake, this I will tell the truth to my teachers and accept responsibility for my actions
9. I will always behave so as to protect the safety, interests, and rights of all individuals in the classroom. This also means that I will always listen to all my KIPP teammates and give everyone my respect
10. I will follow the KIPP dress code
11. I am responsible for my own behavior, and I will follow the teachers' directions
12. Failure to adhere to these commitments can cause me to lose various KIPP privileges and can lead to returning to my home school.
13. X \_\_\_\_\_  
Please print name here.

## Observations (cont.)

randomly chosen lower-income kids from dingy apartments in one of the country's worst neighborhoods--whose parents, in an overwhelming number of cases, never set foot in college--do as well in mathematics as the privileged eighth graders of America's wealthy suburbs.

'Our kids' reading is on point,' said David Levin, who founded KIPP with a fellow teacher, Michael Feinberg, in 1994. 'They struggle a little bit with writing skills. But when they leave here, they rock in math.'

"There are now more than fifty KIPP schools across the United States, with more on the way.

"The KIPP program represents one of the most promising new educational philosophies in the United States. But its success is best understood not in terms of its curriculum, its teachers, its resources, or some kind of institutional innovation. KIPP is, rather, an organization that has succeeded by taking the idea of cultural legacies seriously."

### Abigail and Stephan

Thernstrom in *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning*, Simon & Shuster, 2003, observed -

"Terrific schools that serve highly disadvantaged minority kids do exist...These schools are not waiting until the day social and economic disparities disappear. 'No Excuses' is their relentless message. Every student is expected to work hard to acquire the skills and knowledge that tests measure. These are schools with great leaders and great teachers who have high academic and behavioral standards, and the schools

provide nonstop learning through longer school days, weeks, and years.

- "These schools aim to transform the culture of their students--as that culture affects academic achievement...We are fighting a battle involving skills and values," David Levin...explained. "This is a fight that all good schools must engage in.
- Those we came to admire set social norms that create effective learning environments.
- Students learn to speak politely to the principal, teachers and strangers; they learn to dress neatly, to arrive at school on time, to pay attention in class, finish homework, and never waste time. Teachers work hard to instill the desire, discipline, and dedication--the will to succeed--that will enable disadvantaged youth to climb the American ladder of opportunity.

These are essential ingredients in the definition of effective education for high-need kids...

## The Bahamas

**The proposed primary/secondary Laboratory School offers the concerned Bahamian with the opportunity to provide their children with a superior education. These are parents who cannot afford "private school" tuition and children who would otherwise viewed as "disadvantaged" or "at-risk". These are parents and children who are willing to make a binding commitment in their lives.**



# Charter Schools & Vouchers

The U.S. began a period of systematic education reform with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. It established tough, standards-based, annual-testing requirements for schools receiving funding under the program and potential consequences for those schools that fail to meet those standards.

Two institutional innovations are increasingly used to provide parents and students with alternatives to the regular public school.

## Charter Schools.

The most dramatic institutional device used by public school districts to improve academic achievement has been the “Charter School.” This school is publicly owned but is freed from most of the restraints and crippling rules of regular public schools.

All the successful public schools that match the academic achievement of the best inner-city private and parochial schools are Charter Schools.

But most Charter Schools, however, have academic achievement records that are not materially different from regular public schools.

The evidence suggests that this has been due to the following:

- The real power of the charter school principal, in fact, has been limited with respect to funding, budgeting, discipline and/or staffing. These limitations reflect the political power of the unions and the public school bureaucracies that are able to determine how such schools will operate.

- The sheer difficulty of starting a school enterprise from scratch...the recruiting of outstanding teachers, etc.
- Many charter schools have been more successful in providing a safer school environment than higher academic achievement; and that safety accounts for the broad parental support that such schools acquire.

**It should be noted that the proposed “Lab” School can be successful only if it has the institutional setting that produces both high academic achievement and order and civility in the classroom.**

## Educational Vouchers.

The Voucher is a redeemable coupon given to a public school student that can be used to defray some portion of the cost of attending a private school. Such education is not free but the voucher increases the number of families able to attend private schools.

In the U.S. vouchers have been fiercely resisted not only by the teachers unions for reasons already enumerated but also by the American Civil Liberties Union (the ACLU). Parochial schools have been far more effective in teaching at-risk children in disadvantaged neighborhoods than the regular public schools. Yet the ACLU has been able to stop the use of educational vouchers on the grounds that they violate the doctrine of separation of church and state.

**In the Bahamas it appears that the law and customs do not create such a barrier to the adoption of an**



## Bahamian Reality & Reform

**The Learning Crisis** presents the Bahamas with an overwhelming and seemingly un-resolvable problem, a long and unacceptably poor record at educating its citizens.

The country must decide what to do. If it sits with the status quo, the country's achievement gap with the more advanced countries of the world will simply widen. That should be unacceptable.

The present education paradigm must change significantly if the country wants higher academic achievement levels.

Successful overall reform requires -

- Educational standards
- Flexibility in hiring, promoting and separating personnel that does not now exist in the public education system
- A major change in how teachers and principals are recruited and trained
- A compensation component that relates teacher and principal compensation to the skills acquired by students...to teaching effectiveness. Pay and promotion must not be tied to the number teacher training courses taken and years-in-service as is the case today.

- A Department of Education with an independence and a management system that that will facilitate change.

A critical reservation in these reform proposals is that the scarce resource is the supply of outstanding teaching candidates and entrepreneurial principals. Any program that expands too rapidly will outrun the supply and thus inadvertently compromise reform.

The country needs specific places to start such as -

- The creation of strategic agents of change: a Baby College, an expanded Program SURE and a Laboratory School, and
- Two innovative institutional mechanisms: Charter Schools and Educational Vouchers.

Furthermore, limited resources may even mean that, in order to fund change, it must drop the policy of retaining students in school who do not have the capability or willingness to learn.

**Finally the Bahamas needs leaders who have the courage, wisdom and desire to put their names on the Agents of Change proposed in this essay. .**

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