

“Improving the Quality of Education in Jamaica: Accountability and Performance”.

Council Room, University of the West Indies, Mona Campus
October 29, 2008

Purpose of this Conference

In light of the recent call to implement accountability mechanisms in order to raise the quality of Jamaica’s education system, CaPRI (the Caribbean Policy Research Institute) held a one-day conference to look at practical measures that can be taken. The conference was a collaboration among CaPRI, Expanding Educational Horizons (EEH, a USAID/Jamaica-sponsored project), and the Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas (PREAL), an Inter-American Dialogue project. Its purpose was to address the need for education reform in Jamaica, particularly with regard to educational standards. The goal of the conference was to help Jamaican opinion- and sector-leaders understand the concept of accountability in education and to build support for relevant policy measures. This conference facilitated a transfer of knowledge between PREAL, which has years of experience measuring and implementing educational standards in the Americas, and the Jamaican education sector. It brought together an august group of politicians, policy-makers, educators, academics and key stakeholders, who dedicated themselves to the task of forging a consensus on the development of accountability standards and mechanisms.

This conference built upon the legacy of two reports - the Government of Jamaica’s own *Education Transformation Plan* (2004) and CaPRI’s own report - *Educational Reform in Jamaica: Lessons from Ireland, Singapore & Finland* (2007).



Agenda of the Conference

Sessions:

Overview – Education in Jamaica: Challenges and Accountability

Ruel Reid, Advisor to the Minister of Education

Jeffrey Puryear, Vice President, Social Policy, Inter-American Dialogue/ PREAL

Setting Clear and Ambitious Goals, and Measuring Performance

Dr. Gilbert Valverde, Department of Educational Policy & Leadership, University of Albany

Dr. Jean Beaumont, Project Director, Expanding Educational Horizons (EEH)

Rewarding Success, Tackling Failure

Dr. Lucrecia Santibañez, IDEA Foundation, Mexico

Hopeton Henry, Past President, Jamaica Teachers' Association

Keynote Address

Honourable Andrew Holness, MP, Minister of Education

Panel – Accountability in Jamaican Education - the Current State

Dr. Elaine Foster-Allen, National Educational Inspectorate

Dr. Dennis Minott, Head, A-QUEST (Association of Quietly Excellent Scholars & Thinkers)

Basil Waite, Opposition Spokesperson on Education

Technical and Political Challenges Ahead

Maxine Henry-Wilson, MP, Former Minister of Education

Conference Summary

Definitions

The need to define standards, vision(s) and goal was also a theme of discussions at the conference. What are the standards for students, for the curriculum, and for teachers?

- There are two main components of accountability within the education system:
 - The policy of accountability needs to be enforced. Thus the Ministry of Education (MOE) needs to develop accountability matrices.
 - Compliance in accountability is achieved by persons believing in the standards set- “culture of accountability”. Our teachers need to internalize the goals and the Ministry of Education needs to create an educational campaign in order to provide a framework that will inform the public within this developmental phase. This will involve providing a proper channel of communication and training of agents (principals, teachers, parents, advisors). Also critical is the creation of mass support for accountability within the education system.
 - Critical within performance accountability is the need for specific measurements and the need to make information available to those being held accountable.
 - Suggestions were made that the job of measuring performance should not be left solely to the Ministry [of Education], but to an independent body.
- There is a worldwide change in education priorities - the quality of what transpires in the classroom matters. Evidence conclusively demonstrates that the traditional repertoire of policy instruments is insufficient to address the poverty of educational outcomes in the region. Educational reform should be based on visions and goals. It is important above all to preclude:
 - a) Ambiguity of standards
 - b) Lack of focus and priorities
 - c) Absence of academic rigour
- “Performance Management” may be defined as a process of creating an environment in which people and their job are defined. There is need for the realignment of the Jamaican education system. The Education Task Force Report 2004 underscored the fact that there is gross under-funding and a lack of accountability in the Jamaican education system. Interestingly, performance was not the basis of evaluation in the Jamaican education system.

‘Ownership’ by Stakeholders

- One point commonly mentioned was the need to have public buy-in and ownership of the ‘new’ direction of the transformed education system. There has to be a culture of performance accountability.

- In order to effectively develop an accurate and measurable system of performance and accountability system within Jamaican schools, we need to strengthen and consolidate resource and priorities, particularly funding and project sustainability. Collaborations between stakeholders are critical within institutions for development and the way forward.
- Envisioning a system of accountability should be a multifaceted one involving parents, teachers, students, principals, ministry advisors along with personnel from the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance and the Public Service.
- Education is a decisive factor in national progress. Within Jamaica, several factors have contributed to a level of poor performance and low educational quality. These include: lack of resources; inadequate educational financing; under financing of pre-education and primary education; dilapidated school infrastructure and staff at the primary level; overcrowding of classrooms; unsanitary facilities and improper ventilation; and disparity between boys and girls. In light of this, the important thing to measure in an accountability instrument is not output, but value added, to reward those schools and individuals who are doing well within the context of scarce resources.

Funding

- The need for funding the transformation was referred to throughout the day. The funding issue encompasses
 - teacher salaries
 - teacher training
 - upgrading of schools
 - abolition of the shift system
 - the implementation of the Transformation Plan itself
- The 2007 McKinsey & Associates study, *How the World's Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top* (http://www.mckinsey.com/client-service/social-sector/resources/pdf/Worlds_School_Systems_Final.pdf), done across OECD countries concluded that reforms in education do not necessarily lead to better outcomes in education. Therefore, Jamaica needs to look at what provides value for the money spent on reform efforts.

Teachers

- Teachers and their particular aspect of accountability attracted significant attention due to the developments of the week regarding the conclusion of teacher salary negotiations (<http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20081028/lead/lead6.html>); and the presence of two past presidents of the Jamaica Teachers' Association. In Jamaica, it is being debated whether teachers should be rewarded for student performance, whether teacher pay

should be scaled to student performance or whether all members of the school should benefit from rewards if the students perform well. Nonetheless, there was agreement that teachers are central to the education process, and will occupy a central role in performance evaluation.

New Government Initiatives

- A number of new accountability initiatives were announced – the Parenting Commission, the Leadership Council; the National Education Inspectorate; and the Teachers’ Council.

The Way Forward

CaPRI, based on the calls to action by both the current and the former Ministers of Education, would be willing to lend its support to the creation of an independent monitoring body, which could produce a scorecard on education that would be “owned” by all stakeholders.



The Inter-American Dialogue is the leading U.S. center for policy analysis, exchange, and communication on issues in Western Hemisphere affairs. The Dialogue brings together public and private leaders from across the Americas to address hemispheric problems and opportunities. Together they seek to build cooperation among Western Hemisphere nations and advance a regional agenda of democratic governance, social equity, and economic growth.



The Expanding Educational Horizons (EEH), a five-year Project (2005-2010), is a joint initiative of the Governments of Jamaica and the United States of America, monitored by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The Project provides assistance to the MOE to increase the levels of literacy and numeracy of students in 71 primary schools and 6 NGOs, administered by People’s Action for Community Transformation (PACT).



Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas

The Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas (PREAL) encourages business and civil society to work with governments in common efforts to improve education, and strengthens their capacity to do so. Its mission is to improve the quality and equity of education by helping public and private sector organizations throughout the hemisphere to promote informed debate on education policy, identify and disseminate best practices, and monitor progress toward improvement.



The Caribbean Research Policy Institute is a Caribbean think tank that promotes evidence-based policymaking in the region. It evolved from a three-year evidence-based study on the socio-economic history of Jamaica since Independence known as “Taking Responsibility: The Jamaican Economy Project” which began in 2005. Capri seeks to counter one of the main missteps of our past, by addressing the widening deficit between researchers and policymakers - across the region. We seek to bridge this gap whilst consistently introducing fresh thinking into the policymaking process, we apply a unique methodology - one that is built on the values of multi-disciplinary work, team work, and the utilisation of the Diaspora in our search for evidence.