



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA
Ministry of Education

Public School Reorganization: A Consultation

March 2015



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PUBLIC SCHOOL REORGANIZATION – A CONSULTATION

Background

The Government of Bermuda continues to face significant economic challenges. In simple terms, the Government continues to spend more money than it collects. As a result, the Government must borrow money in order to provide services, fund the public service, and service its debt to lenders.

The Government is therefore interested in identifying strategic solutions to reduce fiscal challenges and its overall debt burden. In January 2015, all Ministries and Departments across the public service were charged with reviewing their operations. The aim of this exercise was to increase efficiency in the delivery of services and programmes to the general public and key stakeholders.

Why is this important?

The Ministry of Education also faces significant economic imperatives and financial limitations as a result of Government mandated budget reductions. These budgetary challenges are in part a result of the need to manage Bermuda's debt and the current and ongoing costs of running the Government.

The Ministry of Education is both committed and required to meet its budget allocation. In January 2015, the Government directed the Ministry of Education to reduce its budget without compromising the quality of instructional services provided to students. In order to help achieve budget reductions, the Ministry of Education has been asked to examine public school restructuring and consider school closure in order to meet a target of \$1 million in savings through school closure.

What is the issue at hand?

The Legislature is currently considering a 5% reduction in the Ministry of Education's budget which equates to \$5.9 million during the 2015/2016 fiscal year. The total proposed budget of the Ministry of Education (not including Bermuda College) is \$111 million.

In addition, as a result of demographic factors, including emigration from Bermuda and a declining birth rate, total enrolment in Government preschools and primary schools is at an all-time low.

After careful consideration of these two factors: the economic imperatives facing the Ministry of Education and the Bermuda Government, coupled with demographic trends such as a declining birthrate and a pattern of decline in enrolment, the Minister of Education, the Hon. R. Wayne Scott, J.P., M.P. has made the difficult decision to consider public school reorganization and the closure of schools at the preschool and primary levels.

However, no decision has yet been made on whether schools will be closed, which by extension means that no decision has been made on the closure of particular schools.

What is being proposed?

The Minister of Education proposes that consideration be given to closing preschools and primary schools in order to reduce the overall expenditure by the Ministry of Education, whilst still maintaining the quality of instructional services provided to students.

What is being consulted upon?

The question being consulted upon is:

Do the economic imperatives facing the Ministry of Education and the Bermuda Government, coupled with demographic trends such as a declining birthrate and a pattern of decline in enrolment, etc., warrant school closure?

Why has this specific proposal been made?

The Ministry has made significant budget reductions in the past few years, but is unable to continue to reduce the budget without giving serious consideration to a broad range of options. As stated above, the Ministry of Education's budget has been reduced by \$5.9 million, which is a 5% reduction.

As significant reductions have already been made in previous years, it is becoming more and more difficult to decrease spending without compromising the quality of instruction. The Ministry of Education has been asked to consider school closure in order to meet a target of \$1 million in savings. However, that amount represents less than 20% of the total reduction in the Ministry of Education's budget from the previous fiscal year.

How will a decision be made?

The Minister of Education is soliciting consultation views from PTAs and members of the community. The Minister will consider and weigh all views to determine if the economic imperatives facing the Ministry of Education and the Bermuda Government, coupled with demographic trends such as a declining birthrate and a pattern of decline in enrolment, etc., warrant school closures.

In making a decision, the Minister will also consider the ability of the Ministry of Education to maintain the quality of instructional services provided to students with a significantly reduced budget.

What information will assist in the decision?

The information that will assist in the decision include:

- i. The budget allocation for the Ministry of Education;
- ii. The budget allocation for schools;
- iii. School enrolment and trends of enrolment;
- iv. Cost per student by school; and
- v. Trends in the birthrate.

This information is provided in the appendices section at the end of this consultation document.

When will a decision be made?

The Minister of Education will obtain views from consultation meetings, first with PTAs and the relevant board of governors, and then from the larger community. PTA members, board members, and others may represent their views in these meetings and are also encouraged to provide their views in writing via email or by hand. The consultation will close on Friday, 20 March 2015.

The Minister will make a decision after the end of the consultation period.

What happens after a decision is made?

What happens after a decision is made depends on whether or not the decision is to:

- i. Consider the closure of specific schools; or
- ii. Find budget reductions through other means.

If the Minister of Education determines that closure of specific schools should be considered, the Minister will then determine which schools should be considered for closure following the application of criteria. Following advice from the Ministry of Education and any views provided by possibly affected and interested parties, the Minister will inform the PTAs of any affected schools that the school is being considered for closure and consult with that PTA *before* making a final decision on whether that school will close.

The Minister or a representative will also inform the staff of the school. PTA members, and staff will be consulted directly, but members of the larger school community and the public are also welcome to make representations to the Minister on the possibility of the closure of a particular school.

If the Minister determines that no specific schools should be considered for closure, he will determine how budget reductions will be achieved through other means.

Additional considerations

If the Minister of Education determines that the closure of particular schools should be considered, as referenced above, criteria will have to be applied to determine which schools may be closed. The Ministry has developed a list of factors that should or may be considered if a decision is taken that specific schools should be considered for closure. The Minister would like PTAs and members of the community to consider and provide feedback on the following factors under consideration:

- i. Impact on provision of quality education and programmes;
- ii. Parental preference;
- iii. School enrolment and trends of enrolment;
- iv. Total budget of the school;
- v. Cost per student for the school;
- vi. Physical accessibility of the school;
- vii. Carrying capacity of the school (i.e. the number of students the school can accommodate);
- viii. Possibility of other optimal uses of the school;
- ix. Safety and health;
- x. State of repair and maintenance;
- xi. Quality of information technology infrastructure;

- xii. Transportation needs of students and transportation alternatives; and
- xiii. Location and access.

Additionally the Ministry of Education will consider how to measure the likely effects of possible closure on students and the wider community.

Consultation questions

- i. Do the economic imperatives facing the Ministry of Education and the Bermuda Government, coupled with demographic trends such as a declining birthrate and a pattern of decline in enrolment, etc., warrant school closure?
- ii. If the Minister determines that specific schools should be closed, what suggested criteria do you think should be used?

PTA members and others are encouraged to answer the consultation questions, but are also invited to provide additional feedback. Please provide reasons for your responses.