



## CONTRIBUTION

**By Senator the Honourable Ruel Reid**  
**Minister of Education, Youth and Information**  
**State of the Nation Debate**  
**February 1, 2019**

Mr President,

It is indeed a privilege to contribute to this State of the Nation debate in the Honourable Senate. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve the nation in this capacity as Minister of Education, Youth and Information- a responsibility that was bestowed on me nearly three years ago by the Builder, and great leader, Prime Minister the Most Honourable Andrew Holness- the best Prime Minister Jamaica has seen.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve and transform this country through education. Mr President, there is one thing I live by as husband, father, Minister, lay preacher and educator: *put Jah God first, second and third and watch the blessings come forth, blessings come forth<sup>1</sup>*. I am indeed thankful for the support I have been receiving from various quarters, especially my wife Sharen and our two children; the Minister of State, Floyd Green, Permanent Secretary, Mr Dean-Roy Bernard, Chief Education Officer, Dr Grace McLean, OD., and the rest of the team at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information and its Agencies; my Jamaica

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<sup>1</sup> Banks of the Hope- Agent Sasco

College Family, my colleague Senators, Jamaica Labour Party family and the Constituents of North West St Ann. *I give toast to di fren dem weh tek off heavy load.*<sup>2</sup>

Mr President, I have dubbed this address, “Navigating Education 4.0”. As I begin my presentation, I take this opportunity to present a brief comparison of the progress that Jamaica has made over the past nearly six decades. Independence in Jamaica marked a new era for the education system. Indeed, it marked the point at which Jamaica was able to pursue its own vision for the country. The vision acknowledged that the people are our greatest asset, and that we must educate them well. This was the era of the New Deal for education in Independent Jamaica. At the time, there were 693 Primary, All-Age and Junior High Schools, 26 Infant schools and 55 Secondary schools with a little over 6,000 teachers serving over 300,000 students. Currently, there are 764 Primary, All-Age and Junior High schools, and 171 Secondary schools. There are 35 public institutions for students with special needs and in collaboration with Jamaican Association on Intellectual Disabilities (JAID) special needs students are placed in over 19 private institutions. The number of teachers has moved from 6000 to over 25,000 - significantly improving the pupil teacher ratio in most schools. Additionally, a new curriculum has been introduced with associated assessments fully aligned, the first of which is the Primary Exit Profile being fully implemented this year. The school population has grown Mr President, to over 600,000 but the vision remains the same that: no child is to be left behind.

The public education system is the closest and most sustained point of contact between children, youth and the Government, and is the point at which the Government exercises its latitude to mould the population with the values and

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<sup>2</sup> Toast- Koffee

attitudes representative of the Jamaican citizen. Education has, and continues to be one of the Government's key avenues and instruments in the pursuit of equity, the elimination of crime and poverty as well as the maintenance of discipline, public order, environmental responsibility, respect, productivity and other characteristics synonymous with the Jamaican identity.

Mr President, a study done by the HEART Trust/NTA recently placed the number of unattached youth at 158,400, which is significantly less than the estimates previously quoted, but still too many. The efforts by the Ministry to reduce these figures are concentrated around the need to introduce positive behaviours and to identify and curb violent behaviours in schools. The introduction of the Caribbean Maritime University (CMU) Cadet Marine Corps is one such collaborative effort, which has now been implemented in 23 schools, with more than 2,700 cadets and projected to expand to 50 schools this year. The Jamaica Combined Cadet Corps has also been expanded to include an additional 50 schools for this year. Furthermore, many schools have been provided with temporary Deans of Discipline, and Safety and Security Support Officers to assist in maintaining discipline and provide support to the students in schools.

To date a total of 250 hand-held metal detectors and 15 walk-through detectors have been delivered to over 150 schools through the support of the USAID programme. The Safety and Security in Schools Unit continues to work with the schools to ensure that the Safety and Security Committees are active. On average, up to 90% of the schools have their safety and security committees in place. Five schools were able to benefit from the CCTV in Schools Initiative through the USAID partnership and another 50 schools will benefit within the next school year. The MOEYI, in partnership with the Ministry of Justice has trained a

total of 407 school officials in 198 schools island-wide in Restorative Practices. Plans are in place to train a further 500 by the end of March 2019.

Through the Zero to 13 Strategy, the Ministry has provided funding for students at the secondary level to complete seven years of schooling and to exit with an associate degree. This is being made possible through the full implementation of the Career Advancement Programme (CAP) in 202 secondary schools, Community Colleges, Teachers Colleges, Universities and other private institutions. The Ministry continues to provide greater support to the traditional sixth form programmes that currently operate in over 101 schools.

Significant to note also is the National School Leaving Certificate, which is intended to give schools the means of documenting the growth and development of learners' personal qualities over the duration of their years in high school. The NSLC will be awarded after students have completed seven years at secondary school, that is, after grade 13.

Mr President, the PIOJ has also recently published a report which indicated that, with the inclusion of individuals who learnt from persons with more experience, approximately 56.9% of the labour force 18 years and over would be considered either trained or have some form of academic qualification. This is compared to the figures from a decade ago which stated that 70% of the population was untrained and uncertified. The truth is that many Jamaicans possess skills and other competencies, but may or may not have gone through a formal certification programme. Through recognition of prior learning, several Jamaicans who previously would have been recorded as untrained and uncertified have the possibility of receiving formal acknowledgement of their skills. This service is being rebranded with added capacity being provided through HEART in

collaboration with my Ministry. Within the next few weeks you will see the full roll out of this programme in communities and selected community colleges, other tertiary institutions and private institutions.

Mr President, the MoEYI also recently launched its “First Degree Upskilling Initiative”, which assists employees in attaining a first degree related to their field of work. Through this initiative, the Ministry has committed to bear 50% of the cost of tuition for each member of staff enlisted in the programme. This will be treated as a staff scholarship, and in our proposal, we ask that our partner institutions fund the other 50% of tuition costs. Already, 172 employees have begun studies through this collaborative initiative with two colleges.

The Minister of State, the Honourable Floyd Green, in his contribution to the Sectoral Debate last year delivered a brilliant presentation on the Youth Division. I take this opportunity to offer my heartiest congratulations to the Youth Division for its successful launch of the St Catherine Youth Innovation Centre, as well as the opening of a recording studio in that parish with funds provided by the USAID/MOEYI Partnership. The studio provides a space for youth to not only record songs, but also receive training in song writing, audio recording and studio engineering. The Youth Parliament was also held in November of last year, and the recommendations were tabled in the House of Representatives on November 20, 2018.

Mr President, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information has engaged in partnerships with the Ministry of Health in many ways, including the rolling out of the Jamaica Moves programme in schools, as well as the recent policy on interim guidelines for beverages in schools. This new policy stipulates the maximum sugar content for beverages sold and offered in schools, and

indicates the portions by which the sugar content of drinks should be gradually reduced over the next five years, to promote healthy living, and reduce the risk of non-communicable diseases.

Since the start of the 2018/2019 financial year, Nutrition Products Limited (NPL) has reformulated the bullas being provided to schools, creating a product with significantly lower sugar and salt content. It has also introduced healthier alternatives, including the provision of bottled water to students. The Government continues to embrace a spirit of partnership, and welcomes assistance being provided by several private sector entities that have partnered with schools to provide breakfast and lunch options for those who are not able to afford it.

I have had the pleasure of announcing a recently-signed partnership between the Ministry and a private sector entity that will provide bananas to be used in some schools for the preparation of healthier food alternatives. This is another signal achievement as we advance the notion of growing what we eat and eating what we grow through our School Feeding Programme. This is in alignment with declarations made recently by the Prime Minister and former Prime Minister the Right Honourable Edward Seaga, who have both encouraged Jamaicans to consider investing in the agricultural sector to stimulate sustainable growth in the economy. I am looking forward to seeing items such as pumpkin, sweet potato, boiled banana, cassava, and other local provision on the menu, especially breadfruit. *And in the words of Chi Ching Ching, Roast or Fry<sup>3</sup>?*

The MoEYI also works closely with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security on various programmes. Of special note is the PATH, which, year after year, continues to benefit from added focus and investment. In the last financial

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<sup>3</sup> Roast or Fry- Chi Ching Ching

year, parents benefited from an additional grant of \$3500 in the month of September to assist with back to school expenses. Book vouchers were provided for the neediest students up to \$2000 per student valuing an overall 50 million dollars. Furthermore, the Government has increased funding by 31% to the School Feeding Programme, which currently provides one cooked meal per day for students on PATH.

In addition, students on PATH have been provided with literature books, their insurance coverage has been paid for, and the Rural Transportation Programme has been expanded. The spirit of partnership has transcended Government Ministries and the private sector, to also include discussions and collaboration with the Opposition in an attempt to advance the transformation of the education sector. Mr President, the Ministry is advancing the implementation of the National Standards Curriculum and the Primary Exit Profile (PEP). A Review Committee was formed in 2018 comprising representatives from the Jamaica Teachers Association (JTA), the National Parent Teachers Association (NPTAJ), the Church the parliamentary Opposition and other stakeholders, as a symbol of the commitment of all partners to put differences and political biases aside and focus on an optimal implementation in the interest of our children. In addition to this, an MoU was signed with the Jamaica Teachers' Association with the goal of ensuring that the PEP is strategically implemented.

I take the opportunity to express thanks to Senator Kamina Johnson-Smith who as opposition spokesperson on Education- now leader of Government business in this House for the supportive and constructive and manner in which she contributed to the discourse on education. I also express gratitude to Reverend Thwaites for his maturity and for extending his hand to us in partnership. We extend the hand of partnership to Senator Skeffrey also.

A website and mobile app were created to meet the needs of parents, teachers and students. Both platforms have been launched with information such as relevant exam dates, curricula, lesson plans and sample items for each exam. To date, the website has had over three hundred and seventeen thousand views.

Mr President, in an effort to benchmark our performance to international standards, the Ministry has started the process of ensuring Jamaica's participation in the 2021 cycle of the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA). This involves the participation of a representative sample of 15 year olds in assessments in the areas of Reading, Mathematics and Science.

Mr President, the Prime Minister has been dubbed as "The Builder", having embarked on a massive remodelling of Jamaica, transforming its appearance one infrastructural work at a time. Indeed, this is a government of transformation, and the responsibility I have been given is that of the Brain Builder - tasked with stimulating young minds, and ensuring that all children have the opportunity to receive a good quality education.

The Government of Jamaica (GOJ) recognises that socialisation starts at the home, and any form of intervention is best directed from the very start. As such, the early childhood sector is being reformed into one that is focused on achieving optimal development for all children from birth to eight years. A record number of early childhood institutions have been registered and certified, and the Early Childhood Commission (ECC) has been carrying out inspections of these institutions. The ECC has also engaged in numerous partnerships with stakeholders from the public and private sectors to meet other initiatives, such as ECC Pon Di Cawna, Read Across the Region, a Curfew Initiative and the establishment of libraries in schools.



The Ministry also developed a strategy and partnership to focus on 126 day-care centres in all Constituencies across Jamaica. This is known as the Brain Builders Programme, which has so far yielded brilliant results, having established 32 Brain Builders Centres since the start of 2018. The Ministry will provide: Trained Early Childhood Teachers, upgrade of facilities as needed, furniture and equipment, resource materials, and any other support required. Furthermore, children will attend these centres at no cost to the parents. We care!

Furthermore the Ministry has also granted approval for those institutions that have started the Brain Builders Programme to also enrol children at age 3 months. Mr President we are encouraging our Members of Parliament to review and submit to us the schools they would like to see become Brain Builders Centres in their constituencies as soon as possible. We have therefore given permission for Infant schools to be able to enrol children from age 3 years, instead of the customary 3 years and 8 months.

Mr President, let's switch our attention to speak a little about the overall education budget, which has increased significantly with a 16 per cent increase over the period 2016-2018. *Seh we a come in wid a force, blessings we a reap pon we course- inna handful.*<sup>4</sup> This includes a nearly 100% increase in operational grants for high schools, and an 169% increase for primary schools. This includes over \$38.6 Billion being spent on primary and secondary education. The overall education budget is roughly \$104billion. Around \$500million is received from parents of children in sixth form, while around \$1.2 billion is received by schools from parents of lower school children. These contributions are used predominantly for extra-curricular programmes; as the government has continued to raise allocations to schools to cover the core areas. Nevertheless, it is clear that several

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<sup>4</sup> Song: Koffee- Toast

parents are unable to find funds to make the non-mandatory contributions to schools- in addition to ensuring that children are fed, clothed and are transported to and from school. Consequently, the Government stands firm behind its Non-Mandatory Fees Policy, and will continue to deliver free, quality public education to all students up to age 18.

We recognise that even with the additional funding for feeding, books and maintenance, several children, especially in rural areas, still encounter barriers to enjoying the full complement of benefits offered through the public education system, particularly due to challenges with transportation.

For this reason, two years ago, the MoEYI, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MLSS), transformed the transportation component of the PATH programme. The Rural Transportation Programme was launched in the 2017/2018 academic year in eight parishes at a cost of \$200 Million. I am pleased to say that we have since expanded this programme to 12 parishes for this year, at a value of \$380 Million, and up to 7500 students. Again, we care! *Seh we a come een wid a force, blessings we a reap pon wi course- inna handful.*<sup>5</sup>

Mr President, support was also given to canteens in schools through the payment of a total of 1077 cooks in primary and secondary schools and a contribution of \$105 Million for the upgrading of school canteens and equipment in 269 schools. Allocations have been made to cover subsidies for secondary level students sitting exit examinations in 2019 for up to eight (8) subjects. Students on PATH and some wards of the State are eligible to receive the support. There has also been an expansion of the scholarship programme, including 1,140

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<sup>5</sup> Song: Koffee- Toast

scholarships being offered between 2018 and 2020. Over \$300 million is also being utilized to support students at the tertiary level for this financial year.

As we follow the lead, Prime Minister, the builder as the country undergoing significant infrastructural upgrades, many schools have also been remodelled or have benefitted from one or more projects and critical repairs. Funds for critical repairs have been allocated to 192 schools in the 2018/2019 Financial Year. Another one hundred and eleven (111) Primary schools were identified for the construction of ramps for access to students with physical challenges. Work is in progress with sixty-nine (69) classrooms along with amenities constructed at the Primary and Secondary School levels. These projects have all helped to facilitate the removal of nine schools from the shift system since the 2016/2017 school year, leaving a total of 38 schools on shift. The National Education Trust (NET) has also provided significant assistance in updating infrastructure, doing critical repairs and other maintenance works in schools.

Mr President, I recently met with the Commonwealth Education Ministers Action Group and gained significant insight on achieving the fourth Sustainable Development Goal, which focuses on education. We must leverage the resources afforded to us, including new and existing technologies, which will assist in dismantling many of the barriers that students, educators and administrators alike face on a daily basis. A paradigm shift is required throughout the sector, which calls for flexibility and innovation in teaching methodologies, and the use of ICT to fill gaps and find solutions to issues such as high costs of transportation, teacher-pupil ratio, addressing the need for individualised learning and costs of textbooks and other classroom items.

This, Mr President, is merely part of the concept of Education 4.0, which emphasises a shift in responsibility of learning from the instructor to the learner, as well as more interactive and “hands on” work, innovation, and involving the community through a personal and targeted approach to teaching and learning. Concepts of e-learning, integrating current technologies, personalised learning and project learning are also pertinent in navigating this new era, can will assist gradually in making education more accessible for all. Importantly is the open school concept which will see us taking the learning to all whenever it is needed. The notion of the borderless classroom is taking shape Mr President and there will be more to come in the next financial year.

Mr President, the Jamaica Teaching Council (JTC) Bill has also been approved by Cabinet to move on to deliberations by the Legislative Committee. This legislation will introduce new procedures, including the registration and licensing of teachers, as well as professional disciplinary action for teachers and principals. The amendments to the Education Regulations (1980) will treat with the long awaited call for an increase in the number of members of primary school boards. They will also introduce standards for which schools should conform, to include guidelines on attire, conduct and discipline of students. Lastly, the Education Regulations will finally and formally abolish corporal punishment in public education institutions.

On another positive note, the consultations are on-going for the transition of the Jamaica Tertiary Education Commission (J-TEC) to become the Higher Education Commission, which will have responsibility for direct oversight of the entire higher education landscape. Furthermore, the Ministry intends to introduce significant changes to the higher education sector, to include an extension of the amortisation period for students, capping student loan repayments at a maximum

of 15 per cent of monthly income, and providing scholarships for the neediest students to pursue higher education.

Mr President, it is for this reason that the Government has allocated a total of \$311 Million in the budget to help pave the way for this Industrial Revolution and Education 4.0, and has been implementing a new policy on Information and Communication Technology.

E-learning Jamaica within the next few months will be providing over 20,000 computers to close to 200 primary schools as a part of an 11 year roll out project. In addition, the Overseas Examinations Commission (OEC), is delivering on its commitment to enhance the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) capabilities of selected Secondary Schools across the island, through an investment of \$250 million. Over 6,000 computers and aided devices will be provided to schools at all levels and there is more to come through diaspora support. These innovations are in line with the ICT Policy, and our targets for navigating Education 4.0.

Mr President, the MoEYI is committed not only to brain building but to constructing critical legs of the Information Super Highway across the Public Service and throughout Jamaica. As such, the Cabinet approved in July of 2018 a Government of Jamaica Records and Information Management (RIM) Policy. We are now in the midst of implementing this Policy and rolling out an entire RIM Programme, which will establish accessible, efficient and effective service delivery that facilitates the citizenry; data sharing across MDAs; ease of doing business (local and international); research and attraction of investment. A companion policy, the Data Collection and Information Sharing (DCIS) Policy, will also be taken to Cabinet for consideration.

The formulation of an Electronic Content and Media (ECM) Policy is another initiative we have advanced throughout this year. Its recommendations include treatment on transitioning Jamaica to digital transmission of broadcast signals and switching off analogue transmissions. This Digital Switchover Mr President, will be the biggest transformation Jamaica has seen in the media landscape since our switch from Black and White to Colour Television in the 1980s, enhancing the media experience and increasing interactivity and inclusivity exponentially. Optimal management of the Spectrum resource is another critical outcome of the upcoming digital switchover Mr President.

Our policy focus brings the added dimension of confronting the impact of artificial intelligence, virtual reality, augmented reality and new challenges such as 'deep fake' which is the use of AI in a manner that is hard to separate from reality and how these will impact on children, learning, memories, immersive experienced and culture. The Broadcasting Commission is collaborating with the Centre for Digital Innovation & Advanced Manufacturing at the Caribbean Maritime University and has begun engagement with our other Universities to use algorithms, automated processes, and research for the development of regulatory solutions that are effective & appropriate for the digital era. These include the establishment of a Virtual Digital Literacy Academy, with the support of UNESCO, and the development of an Automated Content Monitoring System with capabilities across platforms customised for Jamaican realities and language. Additionally, this will be a Jamaican solution with opportunities for commercial deployment in the wider Caribbean and globally.

We commend the work of the Broadcasting Commission which yielded global recognition, having copped two International Muse Creative Awards in 2018 for the “Pinchy Dead” Video which warns against fake news and “Ordinary

People” which urges parents to be more aware of what their children are viewing online. ***We winning right now!***<sup>6</sup> In the same light, I wish to highlight, within the context of recent incidents, the need to exercise responsibility and maturity when engaging in dialogue via social media.

So, Mr President, I have attempted, through this presentation, to give an overview of some specific initiatives taking place in the MoEYI. Of course, there is a lot more that I would share, but time does not allow. The Government has a responsibility, according to the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms to guarantee “publicly funded tuition in a public educational institution at the pre-primary and primary levels;” and we continue to strive to fulfil that commitment. Once again, I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the on-going transformation of the Education sector, and serve this great nation in this capacity. I thank you for your patience and for your partnership. As I take my seat, I’ll leave you with some of my favourite song lyrics:

***Though the billows of trouble and sorrow may sweep***

***Christ the Saviour will care for his own***

***Till the end of the journey my soul he will keep***

***And I won’t have to cross Jordan alone***<sup>7</sup>

Yes, we won’t have to cross Jordan alone. Thank you. God bless us all and Jamaica land we love.

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<sup>6</sup> Winning Right Now- Agent Sasco

<sup>7</sup> “I Won’t Have to Cross Jordan Alone”