

STATEMENT

Senator Ruel Reid

Minister of Education, Youth and Information

On Early Childhood Programmes

May 5, 2017

Mr President

I am pleased to provide an update to members of the Senate on developments and programmes in the early childhood sector.

The Government of Jamaica, recognising that an emphasis on early childhood development (ECD) is strategic to national development has committed to a multi-pronged transformation programme aimed at achieving the best possible outcomes for all Jamaican children from birth to 8 years.

ECD Policy

Mr. President while government policy must meet the needs of all children, it is imperative that particular emphasis be placed on the most vulnerable, particularly children with special needs and those living in poverty. Our ECD policy therefore sets out the provision for comprehensive, universally available and equitable early childhood development programmes and services for children.

Historically, Jamaica has evolved a cooperative community based culture of child care provision through churches and civic societies such as the Jamaica Welfare Society which built the first crèche in Jamaica in 1948.

- Community-based ownership

The ECIs are owned by churches, trusts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or community based organizations (CBOs). Some schools are owned by private individuals utilizing community/government owned infrastructure.

In other cases, although the school and infrastructure are privately owned, the community plays an integral role in the governance and administration of the school.

- Government Support

ECIs that have satisfied certain criteria set by the Early Childhood Act 2005, including application for registration, are afforded government subsidy in the form of grants for teacher salaries, nutrition and teaching resource materials. While there is no explicit agreement between basic schools and the government on moderating fee levels in exchange for subsidies, it is safe to assume that without subsidies, fees would be significantly higher than current levels. On average J\$1.2 billion is allocated from the Budget as direct subsidy to basic schools.

Policy Direction

The Government of Jamaica's policy direction is to:

- i) Create Infant Schools/Departments where there is a need.

There are significant benefits to be derived from the implementation of the proposed policy direction. These benefits will be both short and long term.

- In the short term, children in all parishes will be provided with access to quality early childhood infant school services that will positively impact their development. The prime hallmarks of quality are trained teachers, adequate teaching learning resources, appropriate practitioner/child ratios and safe and secured learning environment.
- Importantly, the strategies will impact the most marginalized children, where the provision of quality early childhood services have been found to have the greatest gains.
- The immediate return on the GOJ's investment will therefore be at its highest.
- In the long run, high quality early childhood provision will result in improved student performance at primary and secondary levels and a reduction in the remedial education and social dependence, including welfare and criminal justice systems.

Current Regional Efforts for Rationalization

The Early Childhood Commission's regional team is collaboratively working with the MoEYI Regional Team to establish 14 infant departments across the island for the Early Childhood Rationalization Programme. The work entails provision of data on basic schools in proximity to the primary schools that will be impacted as well as participating in meetings with boards of management of the primary schools to provide information on the processes and requirements for registration with the Early Childhood Commission.

It must be noted that some regions because of financial constraints have indicated that while they have earmarked some primary schools to establish infant departments they will be concentrating their efforts on upgrading the newly established infant departments to ensure they meet the building requirements for certification with the ECC.

In addition, Mr. President, to help in the physical improvement of schools fifty million dollars (\$50,000,000.00) was allocated in last year's budget for renovation or modification works in primary schools to create Infant Departments in thirty (30) schools.

Contracts were awarded for thirty (30) schools at a cost of forty-nine million and fourteen thousand, one hundred and fifty dollars (\$49,014,150.00) with twenty-eight (28) completed and work in progress on two which are almost completed.

Another fifty million dollars (\$50,000,000.00) has been programmed in this year's budget for renovation or modification works in primary schools to create Infant Departments.

Mr President, we also believe that a review of existing legislation for young children, including the Early Childhood Commission Act (2003) and the Early Childhood Act and Regulations (2005) and other relevant legislation is necessary at this time to ensure a comprehensive legislative framework is provided to meet the needs of young children.

Mr. President, against the background of gaps identified in the existing framework, a review of the implementation of commitments to international conventions for young children, with emphasis on those relating to child protection, support, health and development is also needed.

Given the wide-ranging needs of the sector, an Oversight Committee headed by Professor Maureen Samms-Vaughn has been established to oversee the development of a comprehensive strategy to revitalize the vision for Jamaican children eight years and younger. We expect that the work of this committee will advance the ECD sector further towards internationally-accepted levels of quality.

Among the areas recognised as imperative are improvements in the mobilization of resources, development of a comprehensive ECD policy, review of Early Childhood Commission (ECC) specific legislation and other relevant legislation for young children and the delivery of co-ordinated programmes and services for young children.

The Committee will not be limited to the activities of the ECC In addition given that the needs of young children are multi-sectoral. This will ensure that the role of early childhood development in nation building is central to the work of all Ministries, Agencies and Department, Private Sector and Civil Society.

The composition of the Committee is therefore cross-sectoral in nature. The term of the Committee will be three years in the first instance and it will be assessed based on its impact and value for continuity.

In addition, we recognised the need for better co-ordination of early childhood programmes and services for young children. Traditionally, Ministries, Departments and Agencies work by themselves without reaping the benefits and efficiencies to be gained by cross-sectoral collaboration. Additionally, different services are often being provided to the same group of children and families, particularly the most vulnerable, by multiple ministries.

The Oversight Committee, Mr. President, will have responsibility for reviewing the progress made in the ECD sector against established GOJ targets and against

internationally accepted ECD targets. The Committee shall also have the following specific responsibilities, identified as critical to the advancement of the ECD sector:

- Oversee and monitor the review and amendment of existing Legislation (Early Childhood Commission Act, 2003, Early Childhood Act and Regulations, 2005) and other relevant legislation for young children.
- Oversee and monitor the development of a comprehensive policy on Early Childhood Development (ECD).
- Oversee and monitor the implementation of a coordinated provision of quality programmes and services for young children
- Oversee and monitor the development and implementation of a resource mobilization strategy to respond to the changing needs of the early childhood sector.

Reporting Responsibility and Authority

The Committee will report directly to the Minister of Education, Youth and Information which has primary responsibility for children but will collaborate with other Ministries as the Committee may need to review the work of Ministries, Agencies and Departments that are relevant to young children. The Committee will also report regularly to the public through the Minister of Education, Youth and Information.

As a subsidiary body created by the Minister, the Committee shall function in accordance with the terms of reference conferred by the Minister and shall have no authority other than those powers conferred. The Minister may adopt wholly, modify or reject the recommendations of this Committee as he sees fit.

Composition/Membership

The Committee shall consist of no more than 10 and no fewer than six members, large enough to represent a balance of views and experience, yet small enough to operate efficiently. The composition of the Committee shall represent the diversity required to undertake its mandate. Each member shall be appointed by the Minister and is required to make a unique and valuable contribution. The Minister shall elect the Chairman and the other members shall be distributed as follows:

- ECC Board Chair
- At least one ECD Specialist versed in Local and International ECD matters.
- At least one member from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information. This allows for programme and policy integration between the MoEYI and the ECC.
- At least one member from the government organisation responsible for National Planning (PIOJ). This recognises the central role of ECD to national planning and development.
- At least one member responsible for Technical Services within the Ministry of Health. This appointment recognises the critical role played by the Ministry of Health in service provision in the first three years of life.
- At least one person appointed from the legal fraternity. This appointment recognises the critical role that legislation plays in advancing children's development.

- At least one person appointed from Civil Society. This appointment recognises the importance of the contribution of civil society in advancing children's development.
- At least one person appointed from Private Sector. This appointment recognises the important role played by the private sector in advancing ECD in Jamaica throughout the years.
- At least one person appointed from academia. This appointment recognises the role of academia in producing a workforce that advances and supports ECD and provides the research that guides ECD programmes and services.

In addition, the Committee shall have access to the resources necessary for the fulfilment of its mandate. The resources most likely utilized will include administrative support and occasionally outside specialists or consultants.

- The Committee may interface with other Ministries/Department/Agencies from time to time to receive information that will allow it to fulfil its mandate.
- Where there is a conflict of interest, the member of the Committee member so affected shall declare his/her interest through the Chairman and the details of the conflict are to be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
- The member of the Committee who has a conflict of interest shall not participate in the deliberations of the particular matter and will excuse himself/herself from discussions in respect of these interests during the period of discussion of the matter.
- The Recording Secretary shall submit to the Chair of the Committee the details of the conflict to be recorded in the Register of Interests.

- The Committee has the power, in consultation with the Minister, to require individuals to attend meetings, pursuant to its mandate.
- The Committee shall have the authority, after approval by the Minister, to engage outside advisors as it deems appropriate and necessary.

Mr President, I would also like to use this opportunity to urge all Jamaicans to work with us in helping to raise the standards of the early childhood sector.

At present, some 2,700 early childhood institutions need certification. Many lack the resources to attain an acceptable level of operation, but collectively we can do more. I commend the representatives of corporate Jamaica who have committed to and are helping to improve the physical standards of many of our institutions.

The ECC has been conducting public education fairs across the island, increasing public awareness on operational standards necessary for certification, including the imperative of teachers obtaining a police record and medical certificates.

Mr. President, these measures are indicative of our commitment to lifting standards at the entry point to the formal education system. It also demonstrates that we are a caring government looking out for the needs of our most vulnerable.

In so doing, we are not only helping them as individuals, but laying the foundation for a brighter and more prosperous Jamaica.