

# Bermuda Parent Teacher Student Association

(BPTSA)

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Dear Member PTAs

## Changes to the Education Act and School Restructuring

The purpose of this letter is to solicit your support to end the Ministry of Education's plan to undermine parent autonomy by changing the Education Act and to reduce resources within the Public Education System by closing schools.

At a special meeting of the BPTSA Executive on March 20, 2015, members agreed that it is necessary to take the urgent actions proposed in this letter to regain momentum since the 2012 Ming Decision and to be firm in our determination to safeguard our children's educational future.

### Proposed Actions

The proposed actions are to demand the following:

- Immediate release of data requested by the BPTSA per its correspondence dated July 16, 2014 through to March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2015.
- After providing said data, permit the BPTSA adequate time to confer with its PTA membership and to respond to the Government school consolidation overture;
- Refrain from working to deter parents from meaningful participation in the educational system and partner with PTAs and the BPTSA as per the 2012 Ming Decision;
- Systemize parent consultation per BPTSA's consultation criteria proposal;
- Discontinue efforts to destroy parent independence via the Education Amendment Act 2015 by withdrawing it; and
- Explicitly accede to the demand of parents to make changes to the educational system and to pursue educational policy exclusively for purposes of *improving students' educational outcome in each affected school*.

### Our Rationale

The BPTSA executive chose not to mince words, as evidenced in the stated purpose of this letter and throughout this letter.

We have tried our best since the 2012 Ming Decision, as indeed beforehand, to partner with the Government of the day to 'improve the performance outcome of the educational system'. It is now with great disappointment that we are compelled to report to you that Government *then and now* have demonstrated its staunch aversion to our objective. Shockingly, 'performance outcome improvement' for students has proven to be an impediment to Government's agenda!

### Specific Examples of Government acting contrary to improving performance outcomes

1. On Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup> 2015, The Ministry of Education invited parents to the Ruth Seaton James Auditorium to canvass input about what we deem as its indecisiveness as to whether it should close schools to save \$1 million. It was explicitly stated by the Minister that he was merely mulling the idea. The presentation was deceptively



couched in the language of “school consolidation” to mask the intent of “school closure”. Parents were not fooled. The Ministry of Education panel was clearly stomped when the question was posed as to whether it was feasible to have ‘consolidation’ without corresponding ‘closure’.

2. The BPTSA made a written request for data verification of the figures presented by the Ministry to afford us the opportunity to ascertain the performance of the system; and to ultimately respond to the Ministry’s proposal. To date no data has been provided.
3. On the heels of the March 5<sup>th</sup> presentation, the Minister of Education tabled legislation entitled The Education Amendment Act 2015 (attached) on Thursday, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015. The Amendment was subsequently rushed through the House of Assembly on March 20<sup>th</sup>, as an add-on item in the midst of the budget debate. The Bill will have the effect of doing four things:
  - i. Remove provisions for Boards of Governors from the Education Act,
  - ii. Appoint School Councils with the same mandate as PTAs (but at the mercy of the Government as to who is appointed to them, what they do and whether they will continue to exist); and
  - iii. Appoint a Parent Involvement Committee, hand-picked by the Government that would have a mandate conspicuously similar to that of the BPTSA.
  - iv. Undermine the right of PTA consultation by the Ministry.

In the absence of proper consultation it is questionable whether the Bill is being pursued contrary to the judicial decision. The fundamental effect of the legislation will be to remove parents’ independence to advocate for improving the education of our children. This will be achieved by cleverly removing the “right to consultation” of independent parents that the Ming Decision has afforded. That right would instead go to the puppet bodies created through the new Act.

### **The BPTSA’s effectiveness**

Parents should take consolation that the BPTSA are being effective! Since the 2012 Ming Decision, the BPTSA and our PTA affiliates have succeeded in holding the Government to account for a number of decisions. In some instances they have had to retract their decisions because of a failure to consult. On one occasion we were forced to return to the Courts to dissuade them from their usual course of action. Their actions have included whimsical transfers of educational staff, failure to consult parents and key staff members on important decisions and tactics similar to those described in proposing the Amendment to the Education Act.



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### **The BPTSA Call to Action**

If we reverse our stance or waiver, we will return to a Government education administration that is unchecked, hence producing the results that Government is apparently ashamed of releasing to the BPTSA. Accordingly, we hereby forward this correspondence to PTAs for signature to show support for the proposed demands on Government noted above. Due to time constraints it was not feasible to obtain all PTA signatures. The entire PTA membership has supported the cause of this letter irrespective of whether they have had the opportunity to affix their signature.

Please also notify your membership that we anticipate mobilizing beyond this correspondence to achieve our aims.

Sincerely,

Harry Matthie  
Chair  
Bermuda Parents Teachers Students Association

Cc  
Honorable Wayne Scot, JP, MP (Minster of Education)  
Mr. Freddy Evans (Acting Commissioner of Education)  
Ms. Valerie Robinson James (Permanent Secretary)  
The Mass Media

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**School:**

**PTA Representative**

Dalton E Tucker

Elliot Primary

Harrington Sound Primary

Northlands Primary

St. David's Primary

East End Primary

St. George's Preparatory

Francis Patton

Paget Primary

Prospect Primary

Somerset Primary

Victor Scott Primary

Gilbert Institute

Heron Bay Primary

Port Royal Primary

Purvis Primary

West End Primary

West Pembroke Primary

Clear water Middle School

Whitney Institute

Dellwood Middle School

Sandys Secondary

T N Tatem

Cedarbridge Academy

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