

Not Fit for Purpose: A Critique of the SCORE Report

Firstly, let me make clear that this critique of the SCORE report is not meant in anyway to criticize the effort and contributions of the members of the SCORE committee. Neither is it intended to be dismissive of the purpose of the report, the general structure of the work undertaken by the committee, nor the admirable accomplishment of delivering a well formatted 196 page document in a minimal time frame.

However, what follows is a constructive criticism of elements of the SCORE report which will logically lead to the conclusion that the report is not fit for its purported purpose of leading the Ministry of Education and ultimately the Minister of Education to a well informed final decision right now on how to reorganize or rationalise Bermuda's schools. Rather, the report should be seen as a helpful initial component which can be used in a much needed comprehensive and truly holistic review of the state and efficiency of the entire Bermuda public school system.

Objective of SCORE – What was it?

For any report such as SCORE to be useful, one must first understand its purpose. One would think that it should be fairly straight-forward to discern and understand the objective of the SCORE committee and their resultant report. Unfortunately, problems appear immediately when the representations made by the committee, the government, and the Minister are not wholly consistent with each other.

The first substantive page of the SCORE report is a letter from the committee chairman to the Minister which states:

“At your request, the SCORE Advisory Committee was formed to provide findings to address the following issues:

- i. Schools for consolidation or closure for 2016/17 academic year and beyond;
- ii. Plans for improving the quality and consistency of programming across primary schools; and
- iii. Opportunities for efficiencies and cost savings”

This statement clearly indicates a predominant focus on primary schools and objective of identifying cost reduction opportunities.

The Throne Speech delivered in November 2015 stated that “the SCORE Committee will engage parents, educators and other community members in a comprehensive review of the programmes, building use and stakeholder needs of preschool and primary school in the Public School System. The review will lead to a presentation of findings about the feasibility of school closures and the number of schools to be closed – if any at all – prior to the 2016/17 school year.”

The Throne Speech statement does not vary dramatically from the SCORE commission's view of their objective in that both seem focussed on assessing resource utilisation and exploring the closure of schools. However, the Throne Speech suggests an expanded

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scope of review of both primary and preschools. Credit should be given to the SCORE report for pointing out this inconsistency.

According to a statement made on 8 February 2016 by the Hon. R. Wayne Scott, the Minister of Education, his request of the SCORE committee was that they “review the state of our primary schools and identify ways to improve and expand our public education so that it better serves our students going forward”.

Following a reading of the above three versions of the purpose of SCORE, the following questions are raised:

- Was SCORE meant to review only primary schools with the objective of finding opportunities for school consolidation and closure (SCORE introduction and terms of reference)?; or
- Was SCORE intended to review both primary & preschools for the same consolidation purpose (Throne Speech); or
- Was the purpose of SCORE to find ways to improve and expand public education (Minister’s statement)?

There is a fairly wide divide between a study whose initial stated purpose was to explore consolidation and closure, perhaps for just primary schools or perhaps for primary and preschools, to the Minister’s suggestion that the remit of the SCORE committee was to expand the public education system. Which is it?...Consolidate and close (therefore, shrink), or expand? Did the Governor misspeak when he announced during the Throne Speech that SCORE would review primary *and* preschools? Did the Minister misspeak when he indicated that he asked the committee to find ways to expand public education (while leaving out that their primary purpose was to report on information to be used in decisions related to shrinking the system)? If the public starts off a little confused about what was meant to be achieved by SCORE, then surely they should be forgiven their confusion.

A “Holistic” Approach?

The Executive Summary of the SCORE report suggests that a “holistic approach” was taken in its work.

from www.merriam-webster.com:

holistic: relating to or concerned with wholes or with complete systems rather than with the analysis of, treatment of, or dissection into parts

I suggest that for a truly holistic approach to be taken by SCORE, it would have necessitated a review of the public school system as a whole, from preschool at least through secondary schools. It is arguable that a holistic approach may even require a review of the education delivery systems across Bermuda, both public and private (and possibly even consider home schools).

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SCORE does not consider the whole of the Bermuda education system (whether the whole of the public system or the whole of Bermuda's education delivery across both public and private channels). Neither does SCORE even attempt to consider how the narrow segment of only public primary schools with which it concerns itself may relate to the other segments of the educational system (e.g. feed-in from preschools or feed-out to middle schools; or metric comparisons between public and private schools within Bermuda).

In fairness to the SCORE committee, their Terms of Reference restricted them to examining primary schools only. However, the result is that SCORE is not a truly holistically developed report. Rather it is very narrowly focussed study on a single segment of the public school system – primary schools – for the stated major objective of determining consolidation and closure feasibility.

The Origins of SCORE

The financial challenges of the Bermuda treasury have been well publicised as has the government's pledge to work towards elimination of the Bermuda government annual budget deficit. One of the well known strategies announced by the government as a tool to help it achieve deficit elimination was the reduction of government department budgets by pre-defined target percentages in three successive years (2014/15, 2015/16, and 2016/17). As a result of predictable declining budget funding throughout most government departments, there has been a need for rationalisation of expenditures across government, including the education system. Shrinking funding and the mathematical imperative to utilise diminished financial resources more efficiently led the Ministry of Education to propose certain school closures and consolidations in early 2015. Those proposals were not well received by segments of the public and hastily held and generally ineffective information sessions did little to suppress the anxiety of stakeholders who would be affected by the proposed changes. The Minister of Education's response to the public unrest over the adequacy of the consultation process and the hurried timeframe of the suggested school closures resulted in the Minister picking only the lowest hanging fruit – two preschool relocations which were least controversial – and kicking the can down the road for all other reform while yet more studying was undertaken.

The Minister's lack of action in 2015 in favour of commissioning the SCORE report had the guaranteed effect of inefficient spending of the 2015/16 Ministry budget through continuing operation of high cost per pupil sites (East End Primary as an example). However, in fairness to the Minister, such a short term cost may have been justified if a robust SCORE process could produce substantially better information than was available in early 2015 and in turn lead to better decisions which resulted in even greater long-term efficiency savings than would have been achieved by taking quick action in 2015.

However, the theoretical potential of SCORE has not been realised as the Minister promptly fumbled the ball after calling for the SCORE commission to be formed. This is demonstrated firstly by the limited terms of reference given to the committee; and

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secondly by the fact that a period of more than six months was allowed to elapse before the SCORE committee actually met for the first time in October 2015. While certainly some lead time was necessary to form the committee and prepare for its work. The fact that the committee's report was delivered to the Minister in less than 2 ½ months following the first meeting of the committee, which was roughly 1/3 the amount of time that had been given to actually structure and name the committee, raises questions about whether sufficient time was given to the committee to produce and deliver a truly comprehensive, thoroughly researched and meaningful report.

40ft² per Student Standard

One of the greatest weaknesses of the SCORE report is its arbitrary adoption of the "40 square foot per student standard" as explained on pages 36 and 37 of the report. While the scope of SCORE was to gather data and report, and construct possible scenarios related to consolidations and closures, the Minister emphasised in his 8th February 2016 press statement "that the SCORE Advisory Committee was mandated to collect and present the data, **not to make decisions**" (emphasis mine).

That notwithstanding, it seems that the SCORE committee has in fact made an incredibly important decision in selecting a standard of 40 square feet of classroom space per student as the necessary criterion against which to evaluate the adequacy of every primary school facility in the system. The report makes reference to recommendations for classroom space to range from 22 to 64 square feet per student – a dramatic range! From that range, the committee selected a standard of 40ft² to apply to Bermuda schools, referencing two studies: one a single page academic study summary by Dr. Tanner of the University of Georgia focussed on the theory of social space requirements; and the other a multi-page report prepared for the government of Ontario focused on capital funding standards. While each paper may have some relevance and give some insight into possible considerations for formulating an appropriate classroom size standard in Bermuda, neither is entirely (or even mostly) on point with the realities and uniqueness of the Bermuda environment, nor does either actually state that 40ft² is an optimal standard. In fact the Ontario report does not explicitly discuss instructional square feet of space per child at all. However, as an aside, it is worth noting that the Ontario paper does imply that Ontario provides an allowance of 26 students per class for Kindergarten (P1) and 23 students per class for higher primary grades.

Incidentally, the SCORE Advisory Committee process seems to be somewhat modeled upon the Nova Scotia School Review Policy. Interestingly, documentation relating to Nova Scotia school reviews suggests that they use an average allotment of 25ft² per student for classroom space and maximum primary grade class sizes of 24-25 students (<http://www.ednet.ns.ca/sites/default/files/pubdocs-pdf/schoolreviewpolicy.pdf> p28).

While it is understandable that SCORE requires some criteria against which to evaluate student capacity at each school, at present I believe the only criteria actually adopted by the Ministry of Education are maximum class size guidelines. There is no adopted area

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per student standard and as such I question the appropriateness of basing a significant amount of the SCORE report's conclusions on a heretofore non-existent standard. It may be entirely reasonable for SCORE to suggest that an area per student criteria may be worthy of consideration, and to even provide information and data supporting that suggestion. Even further, it may be appropriate for SCORE to deliver a sensitivity analysis to show the potential outcomes of utilising various per child area requirements within the range it has identified as being potentially reasonable (i.e. between 22 and 64 sq ft). However, SCORE has not done these things.

Instead of taking a thoroughly researched and informative approach which provides the basis on which a decision on per child area requirements might be made, the SCORE report leaves the impression that a hasty, insufficiently supported conclusion about optimal classroom area space requirements was reached. If that was the case, then the error was compounded by basing much of its subsequent analysis and conclusions on a potentially flawed non-existent standard.

This issue alone is sufficient to make the SCORE report not fit-for-purpose.

Data collection and evaluation

SCORE relies heavily upon questionnaires completed by 18 primary school principals and staff which are full of qualitative descriptions and assessments of their own schools. While SCORE committee members also independently collected data via interviews and site visits, there appears to be heavy reliance on qualitative judgments from a very narrow conduit (the subject school's faculty and a small SCORE team). While it may be that tight timeframes for producing and delivering a final report necessitated limited consultation on qualitative factors, it raises the question as to whether or not the same qualitative assessments would have been confirmed or altered if a survey of a broader scope of stakeholders (e.g. including parents at each school) was undertaken.

While the data surveys requested point-in time snapshots of school conditions, they did not take the opportunity to gather information on potential easily identified cures for deficiencies reported. A follow-up question such as "What do you believe is the most efficient or practical way to remediate this situation?" for every problem reported may have provided extremely insightful information to the committee as it was analysing the data and formulating possible scenarios in response to the analysis. E.g. Would it be reasonable to assign a higher score to a school which is deficient in factor criteria but which deficiency can be easily and affordably cured vs. a similar deficiency in another school for which there is no immediately obvious and affordable cure?

A significant reliance is placed on qualitative data in the report (e.g. Financial Resources was assessed purely qualitatively even though it should be one of the elements best suited to quantitative analysis). By its very nature qualitative data is very subjective and less reliable than quantitative data, especially when it originates from a small sample size.

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I believe that SCORE makes a mistake by taking qualitative data, converting it into a quantitative data point by assigning a numeric score, and then using that score in an equation that delivers an overall evaluation score for the school which is purported to be reliably comparable from school to school. This approach creates the illusion that overall school scores are based on unbiased and strictly factual data – a misleading oversimplification when there is a significant component of subjective assessment underlying the scores. This does not mean that qualitative data is not valuable—just that greater care must be taken when relying upon it.

Material omission of financial data

For a report whose objective was, *inter alia*, to identify “opportunities for efficiencies and cost savings”, the lack of adequate financial data in the report is both a disturbing and critical omission. The heavy reliance upon anecdotal evidence and subjective assessment of the adequacy of financial resources at each school is both inappropriate and inadequate to deliver a reliable assessment of financial circumstances.

The complete omission of any financial viability assessments (whether rudimentary or detailed) from the potential outcome scenarios SCORE has delivered is dangerous if a decision maker is to give any serious weight to any of the offered scenarios.

Just on its own, the absence of financial data and analysis in the report makes it not fit-for-purpose.

It should be noted that the SCORE Finance Subcommittee suggested that more time be allowed so that they could obtain and properly analyse meaningful financial data. Its suggestion was not heeded and instead it seems that the rushed delivery of the report to presumably meet Ministry/Ministerial demands was prioritized over producing a robust and meaningful report upon which reliable data could reasonably be used to form meaningful decisions.

Errors in connecting the dots

I believe that the SCORE study contains one or more errors in translating gathered data into scores and conclusions. One example of this is resource funding for the Deaf/Hearing Impaired programme at Gilbert Institute.

Gilbert Institute was scored 1 of 5 on the Financial Resources metric with a rationale of “Many references to need for resources...School is designated as the official campus for Deaf and Hearing Impaired students, however staff and school are not provided with additional funding to support the program.” Setting aside the question of whether or not the D/HI programme is actually underfunded (which is not possible to reliably assess without actual data on validated funding requirements and actual funding provided), it is inappropriate to take the funding status of one unique specialist programme and use it to grade the financial resources of the whole school in which that programme is housed.

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If a required specialist programme exists at only one campus within the system, and that programme is inadequately resourced, then that resource deficiency must be isolated and excluded from an overall analysis of school resource adequacy in order to develop a realistic picture of the school's viability.

If a school is scored as under resourced as a consequence of an underfunded specialist programme, and that scoring materially contributes to a conclusion that the school is not viable and should be closed, then that conclusion will have been falsely reached. If for example Gilbert Institute was closed and its population relocated to another facility with no changes being made to D/HI funding, then the disruption and relocation would have yielded absolutely no solution to the underlying problem of inadequate D/HI programme funding. Rather, the identical problem will merely be transferred to another facility and as a result degrade its viability rating (using the current method), leading to a vicious circle that can only be broken when the actual root cause of correcting funding to the unique specialist programme is addressed.

Omissions of relevant factor criteria and failure to assess all factor criteria selected
SCORE utilises 14 seemingly relevant factor criteria for data gathering and analysis. However, perplexingly it omits what most rational people might consider to be one of the most relevant potential criteria: The measurable effectiveness of the individual schools in achieving positive student outcomes.

Related closely to positive outcomes is a review of the demand for each school – not just in absolute terms, but in relative terms of enrolment demand vs. available seats. For example, if a school is regularly over-subscribed (particularly as a 1st choice) relative to its available seats, then is that not an indication that the market (i.e. parents and students) deems the school to be successful, desirable, and valuable? Should a purported comprehensive study such as SCORE not explore the reasons why any regularly oversubscribed schools are in fact in demand? One would think that such an approach would be fundamental to any research designed to improve “the quality of our student’s [sic] educational experience” – an expressed desire of the Minister in the penultimate paragraph of his statement of February 8th 2016.

In addition to missing some relevant factor criteria is the fact that some of the criteria selected for the study were not effectively evaluated, or not evaluated at all. The evaluations of Criteria 1, 2, and 14 (School Utilisation, Classroom Capacity, and Flexibility) all derive from the inadequately supported (and possibly unrealistic for Bermuda) 40ft² area requirement. The resultant scores derived from a flawed analysis are then given a weighting of 4 in case of criteria 1 and 2, and a weighting of 2 in case of criterion 14, thereby giving massive overall weight to the committee’s assumption that 40ft² per child is the appropriate classroom space requirement to deliver a good education.

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The next inadequately evaluated criteria were numbers 3 and 4 (Financial Resources and Financial Viability) both given a weighting of 4. Financial related data should be amongst the most objective of all data collected. Finances are always expressed as numbers which can be mathematically manipulated and analysed. Financial measurements should not be subject to the vagaries of subjective opinion. However, SCORE seems to indicate that no actual objective financial data was made available to them for analysis during their research. This is not a failing of the SCORE committee, but rather a failing of the Ministry of Education who should be in possession of the required data and should have been able to make it available for meaningful financial analysis.

Instead of being based on hard numbers criterion 3 was evaluated entirely subjectively, and criterion 4 not evaluated at all due to lack of data. For a study with a stated objective of recommending opportunities for cost savings, and whose genesis was from a budget funding crisis in the Ministry of Education, the lack of actual financial data analysis in a report which then proceeds to develop specific scenarios for possible adoption based on incomplete analysis is a glaring omission.

The total weightings of criteria 1,2,3,4, and 14 discussed above sum to 18. When that sum is compared to the total of all weightings (41), these criteria which I suggest are not adequately analysed and evaluated represent 44% of all weighted scores in the study. This is a massively material component of the SCORE report.

Some elements of data collected are not well explained or importance is not obvious

The appendices to the SCORE Report include the School Profile Summary questionnaire which seems to be the primary data collection tool used by SCORE. No definitional or explanatory supplement to the questionnaire was provided in the appendices and it is unclear to the report reader if that is because such information was omitted from the report, or rather if it does not exist. Certain questions could benefit from better explanation to ensure that all persons completing the questionnaire interpret it consistently and so that public users of the report can properly understand the scope and purpose of certain questions.

For example, the questionnaire inquires as to the existence of “Social Space” at a school. What is “Social Space”? The meaning of that term is not intuitive. Similarly, the questionnaire asks if a school site has a “Hard surfaced playground”. What constitutes a hard surface playground? Is it merely any asphalt/concrete/paved surface which could be potentially used for play? Does it require a specific erected play structure? Does a gymnasium constitute a hard surfaced playground (it will have a hard floor and one can play there)? Ambiguity on these and other questions within the questionnaire can lead to inconsistent responses amongst various respondents and therefore degrade the reliability of data comparisons. It is unclear how much the score on any single potentially ambiguous question may have impacted a school’s overall assessed score. For example, the Summary Findings for Gilbert Institute presented in the report scored Recreational Space as 2.8/5 with the following comment in the Rationale narrative “No hard surface

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playground area”. However, I am aware that there are hard surface play spaces or potential play spaces at that site around (particularly to the rear of) the assembly hall so a statement of “No hard surface playground area” is perplexing.

Scenarios seem contrived

One of the responsibilities of the SCORE committee was to recommend “schools for consolidation or closure for the 2016/2017 academic year and beyond; using the initial input of decreasing the number of primary schools by one primary school per zone; i.e. East, West, and Central” (p 13 SCORE Report). The default preference of closing one school per zone leads to bias in the report from the outset.

The ten scenarios presented in the report seem contrived to meet the committee’s obligation to deliver to the Minister recommendations for closing schools in each zone rather than organically developing from the data and any aspects of sound analysis in the study.

Five of the ten scenarios propose to “resolve overutilisation” at one or more schools through the shuffling of students to other facilities. I am presuming that resolving overutilisation requires eliminating the purported overutilisation. These scenarios are problematic in a number of ways, including:

- a) “overutilisation” is an artificial problem created only by the committee’s use of 40ft² per child as the minimum classroom area requirement;
- b) These scenarios are inconsistent with the stated mandate of the committee to report on school closure and consolidation opportunities. No closure or site consolidation is achieved in any of these scenarios (and hence no cost reduction); and
- c) Although the scenarios represent a resolution to “overutilisation”, their own commentaries state that not in all cases (e.g. Central #1-West Pembroke); Eastern #2 – Francis Patton & Harrington Sound) would the “overutilisation” actually be resolved.

Four of the ten scenarios suggest closing schools and shifting students to locations which are geographically illogical and most likely impractical based on the locations of the families the potentially closing school serves, and related traffic patterns, etc. These problematic suggestions include:

- d) Gilbert to Prospect;
- e) Prospect to Paget Primary;
- f) St. David’s to East End Primary; and
- g) Heron Bay to West End Primary

One of the ten scenarios (Western Zone Scenario 4) described as no schools closing is surprising for two reasons: firstly because no closures or consolidations must be a theoretical option for all zones yet it is not offered as a scenario for the Central or Eastern zones; and secondly because it does little to achieve the objected stated in the committee’s terms of reference to identify schools for possible closure or consolidation.

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This leaves all 10 of 10 presented scenarios as flawed in some way, not leaving much for a decision maker to use as the basis for reaching a well researched and positively impactful decision.

What happened to review of the preschools?

Conspicuously absent from the 196 pages of the SCORE report is much reference to preschools. In some cases preschools are co-located with primary schools. How does one effectively evaluate primary school capacity and properly consider best student environments without discussing current and potential arrangements for preschool classes?

Only a year ago the Ministry of Education listed St. Paul's Preschool as a potential closure/relocation opportunity due, in part, to the fact that it is a rented rather than government owned facility. I am aware that the Gilbert Institute PTA, with the support of the St. Paul's Preschool faculty, made a written submission in response to last year's call for public input and proposed that St. Paul's be amalgamated into Gilbert. This was a home grown solution from the stakeholders in the affected community which would have resulted in some (though not massive) financial operating savings, improved site utilisation at Gilbert Institute, and brought practical benefit to the families and students who are clients of those schools. However, beyond an acknowledgment that a submission was received, neither the Gilbert PTA or administration (nor to my knowledge the St. Paul's administration) received any follow-up communication from the Ministry to explore a solution offered which would meet some of the Ministry's stated objectives (i.e. site consolidation and cost savings) and offer additional opportunities (keeping families together at one facility; smoother transition of preschoolers into primary grades; developmental opportunities of preschoolers learning from the "big kids" and for "big kids" learning to mentor the "little ones", etc.) to clients and the community. This notwithstanding that a similar proposal was adopted by the Ministry in St. David's last year. Similar opportunities may also exist at other currently stand-alone preschools.

In addition to the physical consolidation of preschool classes onto primary school sites, one glaring potential opportunity which at least bears a discussion is the elimination of the need for dedicated preschool administrators if preschool classes are truly amalgamated into primary schools. Once all students are on the same site, it does not seem obvious that it is necessary to have a "Principal" (i.e. Administrator) for the preschool separate from the Principal of the primary school. Any honest discussion of potential rationalizations and cost savings in the system must at least explore this option.

Where is the Board of Education in all of this?

As alluded to in the SCORE Terms of Reference document which is appended to the SCORE report, the Board of Education ("BoE") has a statutory role to advise the Minister in areas which are the subject of the SCORE project and upon which the Minister has represented that he intends to make decisions based on the SCORE report.

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However, it seems that the involvement of the BoE in the SCORE process has been at best peripheral, consisting of receiving periodic updates, having few BoE members participating in the committee, and presumably getting some advance preview of the final SCORE report before it was publicly released.

I am aware that the BoE suggested early last year that the Ministry should examine the entire school system (including Middle & Senior schools) in any reform review it conducted rather than restricting any review to primary and preschools only. I am also aware that the Minister did not consult the BoE in early 2015 in advance of his public announcement that certain proposed school closings would be deferred in favour of forming the SCORE committee to undertake further study. Many of the members of the BoE would have only learned of this development subsequent to the Minister's public press conference and news release on the topic (and less than 24 hours before an already scheduled meeting of the BoE wherein the Board was expecting to receive an update on the consolidation consultation process and discuss the topic). The Minister seems to have had little regard for actually soliciting or listening to advice from his statutory advisory board (i.e. the BoE), and by his actions has shown contempt for what should be the BoE's very major role in this decision process.

The seemingly purposeful minimisation of the BoE's practical influence on the structuring and operation of the public education system by the Minister/Ministry should be of great concern to the public. This may in turn lead one to question the integrity of the review process that has been undertaken and the integrity of the decisions purportedly based on this review which the Minister may make subsequently.

If SCORE is insufficient, then what now?

As discussed above, the SCORE report is not fit for its intended purpose of providing unbiased research and recommendations upon which decisions regarding school closures and consolidations can be made. However, that does not mean that it is without any value.

SCORE has gathered much useful data regarding actual and perceived conditions at public primary schools. That data does not provide answers to the legitimate challenges faced by the school system, but it does identify areas that need to be investigated and raises more questions which need to be asked as part of a process which solves the system's problems.

SCORE has undertaken some research which is a useful starting point for a robust discussion on the suitability of possible changes to standards (e.g. sq ft per student classroom area requirement) or structure of the public school system.

SCORE should be viewed as a starting point to a meaningful dialogue about how to reform education in order to deliver adequate educational outcomes for our students and

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our country. It should inform the process of making difficult trade-offs between what we would like to have and what we can afford to have. SCORE should not be viewed as the endpoint from which generational restructuring decisions will be derived.

Education has long been a highly emotive topic drowned in platitudes about doing that which is best “for the children”. Such a position is as overly simplistic as it is trite. Obviously the education system must serve the children who are enrolled in it. However, while a rationale of “it’s for the children” may work in an isolated theoretical context, or political stump speech, real life is seldom that simple.

Maybe having a 1,000 ft² classroom is ideal, but “we must have it because it’s for the children” is not a sufficient argument. There are financial realities to consider and practical questions to ask (not what do we want, but rather what can we afford?). There are opportunity costs and intangibles to consider (if I’m spending an extra ½ hour or more each day fighting through traffic to deliver and collect my children from an inconveniently located school, what is being given up ... homework time? Extra-curricular time? Family time? Lost wage earning time? Etc.). If say 100 families lose only one half hour each day to transportation inefficiencies from a poorly implemented school reorganisation, that’s 50 hours per day of lost potential productivity to the Bermuda economy or 250 hours per week and probably close to 10,000 lost hours over the course of a school year. If 200 families are disrupted, then that’s at least 20,000 hours of productivity loss, etc.

A truly holistic review (as SCORE aspired but failed to be) would consider all of these factors. SCORE has put the focus on several potentially flawed aspects of the education system that should now be reviewed in greater detail to truly determine if, on a holistic basis, they are truly problems that need to be solved, and if so, if they are problems that need to be solved right now. Let’s take advantage of this opportunity that SCORE has provided to systematically explore each problem identified by SCORE one at a time through a truly holistic analysis of how critical each perceived problem is when viewed in a larger context.

Let’s hear from the Ministry immediately what the one greatest issue is that must be addressed now without further delay and let the client community (i.e. the families and students who use the public school system, and the business and community consumers of the school system’s output) form a consensus as to what solution is best for them. If this one greatest issue is that there is only \$x to spend and the current structure is too costly, then disclose the actual resources that are available and ask the clients to advise how they would like to see that money spent according to *their* priorities. This may spawn community grown solutions for reorganizing or combining schools in a way that their user base finds digestible. This may result in a requirement that administrative burden within the system be reduced so that a greater percentage of resources can be focussed on educating rather than administering. Similarly, this may result in an unequivocal demand from clients that staffing at Ministry headquarters be reduced in

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order to redistribute those resources to other areas that the system's clients (rather than the system's bureaucrats) perceive to be more valuable.

Whatever the critical, real, and unambiguous problems are, tell the public and let them contribute to the solution with which they must live. The public doesn't want to be treated like fragile mushrooms in the dark fed whatever fertilizer the Ministry/Minister deems appropriate.

Let SCORE be the spring board to full and honest disclosure about the true driving force behind education reform (i.e. the lack of money) and what we as a community can do, not to get the unaffordable, impractical, "ideal" school system concocted from theory and academic papers; but rather the most practical, functional school system we can afford which balances the real needs of our students, families, communities, and country. At the end of the day, the majority in the community will likely view the most important part of education to be the practical knowledge and wisdom that students gain which enables them to function effectively and productively in the community in which they live after their school days are complete. Whether that education occurs in a one-room school house or a modern educational palace is likely to be deemed secondary to the knowledge (and ability to apply it) that each student takes home with him.

A rushed Ministerial decision at this time will not solve our problems but rather ensure that the endless circular debate about fixing the education system will be continued for years to come. However, what will be a step in the right direction is recognition by the Minister that SCORE is not good enough as presently presented to make generational reform decisions.

A true comprehensive engagement of the community in finding acceptable solutions to critical problems might provide an opportunity to put education on a sustainable path for the foreseeable future. Holding three 1.5 hour large group community consultation meetings in the space of a few days does not constitute sufficient or comprehensive community engagement before a great decision is made and announced. Hopefully the Minister will recognize that, but it would not hurt for the public to point it out to him.