

Press Statement

Ministry of Education, Science & Technology
Sunday 15th July, 2012

For Immediate Release

Today the Minister of Education, Science and Technology the Honourable Jerome K. Fitzgerald updated members of the media on school repairs occurring across the country ahead of the start of the new school year.

Minister Fitzgerald commenced school visits throughout the country four weeks ago to see firsthand the progress of repair works at various schools ahead of the 2012 new school year.

In New Providence he announced, "We are well underway and in fact a number of the contractors have already completed their scope of works". The Education Minister noted that although this year the individual contracts and scope of works were relatively small as is traditional in the case for school repairs, he was ecstatic that the Ministry was able in New Providence alone, to add approximately 20 new contractors to the list of approved contractors at the Ministry. "In doing so we have empowered these contractors and given them an opportunity to be re engaged in the construction field where in some cases they have indicated that they have not worked in many years. Of the 74 contractors engaged for the school repairs 47 have not done any work for the ministry in the previous 5 years." said Fitzgerald.

He added "My Ministry will continue to ensure that the widest possible participation of small and medium sized contractors engaged in the Ministry's maintenance, minor repairs and capital works".

This year with the assistance of some Members of Parliament the Ministry were able to ensure for the most part that the repair works done in the various constituencies were done by contractors who actually reside in those constituencies. This according to the Minister resulted in many young men being hired who would have otherwise been idle.

Approximately 4.5 million dollars, the Education Minister announced will be spent on school repairs this summer adding that the Ministry estimates that this will provide employment for about 800 persons over the summer; 400 in New Providence, 200 in Grand Bahama and 200 hundred throughout the Family Islands. The 4.5 million dollars is represents 1 million more than the 3.5 million that was allocated in the 2012/2013 budget. This figure was achieved after Minister Fitzgerald prior to the closing out of the old Budget on June 30th 2012, invited the senior management at the Ministry of Education to go line by line through the Budget to find any funds that the Ministry had not used. This process he confirmed yielded about 1.3 million dollars which they allocated and was able to be drawn down before June 30th 2012. "The extra 1.3 million dollars will go a long

way in addressing some much needed repairs particularly in those Family Islands which are still suffering the effects of Hurricane Irene last September" said the Minister.

Providing a breakdown of the allocation of the funds, the Minister released the following:

New Providence	\$3,200,000
Grand Bahama	\$600,000
Family Islands	\$650,000

He added, "The allocation to Grand Bahama is about 25% greater than last year due mostly in part to the poor physical condition of certain schools I witnessed during my visit there". Allocations to the Family Islands were also increased to facilitate necessary repairs due to damages which resulted from Hurricane Irene. The participation of the Minister for Grand Bahama, the Honourable Dr. Michael Darville and the Minister of Tourism, the Honourable Obie Wilchombe in coordinating the selection and general oversight of contractors and school repairs in Grand Bahama the Minister said was a welcomed component of the process. "It is anticipated that this will ensure the efficient and timely execution of the scope of works in Grand Bahama. This will be a first for Grand Bahama and I am grateful to my colleagues".

Over the past 4 weeks the Education Minister has visited and inspected various schools in New Providence, all the schools in Grand Bahama, Eleuthera and Abaco. Before the summer is complete he announced it is his intention to have visited 95% of the 164 schools which make up the public school system. The visits he said have afforded him not only a firsthand view of the state of the physical plant but also an opportunity to meet with administrators and hear their concerns and hope for education in our country. "I have made it clear to all administrators and reiterate here today that I will be a Minister who manages by walking around, so they can expect to see me throughout the school year ensuring that the physical plant is maintained and the government's policy initiatives are implemented". He noted that he was pleased that the President of the Bahamas Union of Teachers Ms. Belinda Wilson acknowledged the hard work and long hours the senior administrators and the accounts department at the Ministry put in to ensure that as the president said; "was the earliest she could recall summer repair works commencing at our schools".

The B.U.T. President's remarks were welcomed by the Minister who said, "Her vote of confidence and the general public solidifies our resolve to commence works as early as the week after school closes to ensure that schools open on schedule".

He continued, "Based on the progress we have made in this short space of time I have every confidence that the necessary repairs will be complete for the start of the school term in September".

The Education Minister thanked the Minister of Works and Deputy Prime Minister the Honourable Philip Davis and his technical team at the Ministry for the assistance provided in pricing the scope of works and managing its timely completion schedule. He also thanked the senior administrators and accounts department at the Ministry and the Minister Of State for Finance the Honourable Michael Halkitis and his team at the

Ministry of Finance and the Treasury Department for accommodating and facilitating the mobilization of contractors and going the extra mile. "To date this has been an incredible team effort which gives me a tremendous amount of hope and confidence that the necessary changes envisaged for the Ministry of Education Science and Technology in the Government's Charter for Governance will be achieved" said Mr. Fitzgerald .

The Minister of Education, Science and Technology closed by encouraging parents to not only register their children for school but to apply early for any social assistance that is needed for uniforms. He also reminded those who qualify for the school lunch programme to register their children for the programme.