

# NEW EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE BAHAMAS

PREPARED FOR  
THE ORGANIZATION FOR RESPONSIBLE GOVERNANCE  
BY

SCOTT W. HAMILTON

MARCH 2017



# New Educational Opportunities for The Bahamas

## Executive Summary

The Organization for Responsible Governance, as a nonprofit, nonpartisan, civic foundation committed to improving the core socio-economic drivers of The Bahamas, recognizes that an effective Education System is an essential tool toward successful national development. In the face of a decades-long systemic failure of the Bahamian Public Education System and the imminent risk that this poses to the long term viability of the economic development and governance of the country, ORG has commissioned a report to research and identify key policies and strategies that can be employed to bring about positive reform.

The report, assembled by Scott W. Hamilton, of Circumventure, LLC, an internationally recognized expert in innovative approaches to education, seeks to achieve the following formula for success:

- Environments that can facilitate innovation and learning
- Collaboration with businesses to offer pathways that lead to long term employment
- Developing effective and engaged educators

Mr. Hamilton, through extensive review of local and international data, has assembled a series of recommendations drawn from relevant international successes and reimagined local initiatives that can provide short and long term successes to the Education System in The Bahamas. They include:

- Partnership Schools as alternative learning environments that foster successful pilot programs which can be applied in the broader educational system.
- Teach for Bahamas as a dynamic, inclusive teacher recruitment and retention programs to build a new corps of higher caliber teachers and school leaders.
- Integrate models and technology to expand the quality of very low-cost private schools.
- Secondary School Apprenticeship programs in collaboration with local businesses to provide students jobs in successful and emerging fields.

Mr. Hamilton's report is offered as a starting point for a national dialogue and further study toward the adoption and implementation of these concepts.

To accomplish the presented solutions will require significant resources and commitment from both private and public sectors. The Organization for Responsible Governance will secure input and engagement from all relevant stakeholders including educators, civil society, private industry, media, clergy and government to shape these ideas toward further development and actualization. To this end, the following steps must be taken:

- Launch Public Education efforts surrounding the report and presented solutions.
- Establish US, Canadian and Bahamian Foundations to secure private funding for the projects.
- Develop Legislation to drive the creation of Partnership Schools.
- Build a Partnership School Board.
- Found Teach for Bahamas as a not-for-profit and hire a team.
- Work with existing low-cost private schools to identify and implement appropriate technology and models that will provide for increased quality and expansion.
- Create a public private partnership to launch secondary school apprenticeships.

The Organization for Responsible Governance is committed to leading this effort and welcomes the collaboration and cooperation of all stakeholders who seek a Bahamas that fosters productivity for all.

## New Educational Opportunities for The Bahamas

For decades, education in The Commonwealth of The Bahamas has produced disappointing results. From consistently poor performance on The Bahamas General Certificate of Secondary Education exams since its origin in 1993<sup>i</sup>, to students not being prepared to enter the workforce<sup>[C1]</sup><sup>ii</sup>, the public schools of The Bahamas are not preparing most students for success. Successive governments have made efforts to fix the education system with<sup>[MA2]</sup> minimal results<sup>iii</sup>. As a result, the future of the nation is at risk.

The continued poor results generated in the 2015 BGCSE exam, particularly in the core subjects of math and English, provide little hope that the education system is able to independently improve itself.

- Sixty-five percent of the 5,400 candidates who sat for the English language exam received a D grade or below.
- 75 percent of the 5,200 who sat for the math exam earned a D grade or below.

As Education Director, Lionel Sands, explained, Math and English “have perennially been problem subjects for us and we have been working very hard.”<sup>iv</sup>. Unfortunately, this hard work has yet to produce discernable results.

“The overwhelming and critical national problem is functional illiteracy on a large scale,” said Coalition for Education Reform chief Barrie Farrington, four years ago. “What we are looking at is a societal failure of immense consequences. It is a real nightmare; a horror movie.”<sup>v</sup> Things seem no better four years later.

As recently as August 2016, Education Minister Jerome Fitzgerald explained that the government is working to rectify the situation. “The teachers are doing all they can and the Ministry is doing everything they can. The government is providing resources like no other government has ever provided before to ensure that the students are given every opportunity.”<sup>vi</sup> <sup>[C3]</sup> From the 2015 results, however it appears that there continues to be much that is needed to properly serve our students.

The Bahamas is not alone in the crisis it faces with the poor performance of its public schools. Other Caribbean nations suffer the same problems.

“When we have students that come out of the colleges, and we hire them to perform certain tasks, we realize that we will have to give them some form of support in terms of skills and job readiness,” said Ruth Stevens, a hotel manager in St. Vincent. Caribbean nations have invested in increasing both primary and secondary enrollment. Yet, despite spending nearly eleven or more years in

education, most Caribbean students finish school and struggle to find formal employment and businesses struggle to find suitable employees.

The school system in The Bahamas and those in other Caribbean nations face similar challenges as school systems serving disadvantaged students in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the United States, and in most other Commonwealth nations.<sup>vii</sup>

The past few decades in these countries would also suggest that substantial improvement of the system of public schools is very, very difficult to achieve. Corporate bureaucracies move slowly, and governmental ones move even slower.<sup>viii</sup> Issues from teacher union rules, outdated curriculums, lack of technology, longstanding bureaucrat habits and the costs associated with full system reform prohibit movement forward. A successful and systematic overhaul of the Bahamian public schools is not likely in the near term.

But there are some innovative ways The Bahamas can create better education opportunities for its youth. Based on successes observed in the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Switzerland, Singapore, Haiti, and a number of African nations, a series of strategies arise that can comprise a more dexterous and achievable strategy for creating new and improved educational options in The Bahamas:

1. **Partnership Schools.** Create a small cadre of new innovative public schools (called charter schools in the US, free schools in the UK, and partnership schools in NZ) to show what successes can exist outside of standard educational environments.
2. **Teach for Bahamas.** Attract a higher caliber of teachers and school leaders to Bahamian education by creating a new teaching corps, patterned after Teach for America and Teach for Haiti.
3. **Low-cost Private Schools.** Seats<sup>[MA4][MA5]</sup> in private school classrooms that disadvantaged families can afford should be increased. High quality low-cost schools in The Bahamas can be expanded. The Bahamas can explore technology that has enabled the creation of new very low-cost private schools in Africa and other developing nations.
4. **Workplace Learning Standards & Opportunities.** Turn Bahamian companies into centers of learning that help students explore career possibilities and preparing themselves for the jobs they want, borrowing from national systems like Switzerland and Singapore, as well as school models like the UK's School 21, or the US's Big Picture or Cristo Rey schools.<sup>[RM6]</sup>

In assessing the failure of the public schools and developing options for substantially improving the educational opportunities for children in The Bahamas, it is important to confront three big challenges:

1. **Labor supply may be a challenge.** Schooling faces the same challenge as business and industry in terms of needing to hire talent and buy supplies. While the number of students in The Bahamas is about the same as a smaller big city school district in the US (e.g. Seattle, Atlanta, Tucson), or like one of the smaller rural districts in the US, schools here can be more remote and cannot easily draw from a larger market for labor and supplies.
2. **Public education funding purse strings are tight.** The Bahamas spends more per pupil than most third-world countries<sup>[MA7]</sup> but significantly less than many developed countries. The Ministry of Education does not (yet) have a per pupil expenditure number available, but for 2016 \$216M was reported in its budget for all preschool, primary, and secondary education costs (excluding capital). When divided by the number of enrolled students in Bahamian public schools (45,000), spending is \$4,800 per pupil. In US dollars equivalent, that amount is \$4,824.

The rough, but best available comparison numbers from UNESCO (not all from the same year), for per pupil education expenditure in US dollars begin to portray the challenge:

2016	
<b>Bahamas: \$4,824</b>	
2015	
• Jamaica:	<b>\$2,151</b>
• Bermuda:	<b>\$5,972</b>
• Dominican Republic:	<b>\$2,194</b>
2013	
• U.S.A.:	<b>\$11,750</b>
• United Kingdom:	<b>\$10,500</b>
• New Zealand:	<b>\$8,750</b>

3. **Teacher salaries are low relative to the Bahamian cost of living.** While a few anecdotal reports suggest that leading on-line data sets may not be entirely accurate, the cost of living on New Providence or Grand Bahama seems to be equal to and maybe even 2-3% higher than New York City or Miami. Since about 70% of education expenditures are usually consumed by teacher salaries, the relatively low per pupil funding explains why the average teacher salary in The Bahamas for 2016 is \$26K.

4. The average teacher salary in New York City for the same time period is \$75K, with an average starting salary of \$44K. In Miami, the median teacher salary is \$57K. To be sure, rent costs are cheaper on New Providence when compared to New York City, but many other costs are as high if not higher. This is not a about opinions of what teachers may deserve for their work. This is about the free market for human talent. Across the globe, it has proved hard to attract or to retain effective teachers at home or from abroad when salaries are very low and living costs are high.<sup>ix</sup>

While it is important that these challenges are recognized, they should be used to inform rather than deflate efforts to provide Bahamian children a quality education. The following three-part strategy would steer clear of the existing bureaucracy and system while finding ways to get good teachers and school leaders with school models that operate at low per pupil costs.

Based on the experience of other countries on different parts of the globe facing similar challenges, schooling options for Bahamian children could be substantially improved by:

1. **Partnership Schools.** The creation of fifteen “Partnership” schools, new independent public schools inspired by America’s “Charter” schools, Great Britain’s “Free” schools, and New Zealand’s “Partnership/Kura Hourua” schools.
2. **Teach for Bahamas.** The creation of a special new corps of 10-20 teacher-leaders annually for The Bahamas, based on the Teach for America model for recruitment, training, and a minimum two-year commitment.
3. **Low-cost Private Schools.** The creation of one or more very low-cost private schools<sup>[MAS]</sup> based on the example of school operators like Africa’s Spark and Omega schools or the Apec schools in the Philippines.
4. **Workplace Learning Standards & Opportunities.** Because businesses in The Bahamas face an ongoing shortage of skilled workers, and school graduates face a challenge in getting jobs, a new organization should be created like BASIC in Colorado to foster collaboration between business and schools that includes paid, part-time apprenticeships as well as competency standards and standards for the apprenticeships themselves.

## 1. Partnership Schools

New independent public schools with a particular focus on serving disadvantaged students could be powerful, both in terms of the students they would serve and the example they would set of what is possible.

To determine how such schools could be best established in The Bahamas, we can draw from the experiences of New Zealand's "Kura Hourua" Partnership Schools, England's Free Schools, and America's Charter Schools.

**U.S. Charter Schools.** The charter school idea in the U.S. was conceived in 1974 by a professor in Massachusetts. Al Shanker, President of one of the two national teacher unions in the U.S., the American Federation of Teachers, embraced the concept in 1988, when he called for the reform of the public schools by establishing "charter schools."

For Shanker and others, the main appeal of the charter school model was the belief that public schools should be held accountable for student learning. In exchange for this accountability, school leaders should be given freedom to do whatever it takes to help students achieve and should share innovations and what works with the broader public school system so that all students benefit.

Minnesota was the first state to pass a charter school law in 1991. California was second, in 1992. Massachusetts was third. The first charter school opened in 1992. Today, 43 states and the District of Columbia have charter school laws, with more than 6,800 charter schools serving nearly 3 million children across the country. Charter schools are unique public schools that are allowed the freedom to be more innovative while being held accountable for advancing student achievement. Because they are public schools, they are:

- Open to all children;
- Do not charge tuition; and
- Do not have special entrance requirements<sup>[RM9]</sup>.

There is a wide array of charter school types in the US. Charter schools may be specialized, either as to their programmatic focus (such as a STEM academy) or students served (prior drop-outs), though many simply serve mainstream populations with a distinct academic approach.

The charter authorizers, entities that may legally issue contracts for a new school's operation, differ from state to state. In some states, like Massachusetts, the State Board of Education authorizes charters. In other states, like Maryland, only the local school district may issue charters. States including Arizona and Washington, D.C. have created independent charter-authorizing bodies to which applicants may apply for a charter. Forty percent of charters were authorized by local districts, 30% by state boards of education, 12% by State Commissions, and the rest by cities, universities, and others.

On average, charter schools in the US get about 80% of their host district's PPE [RM10] (again, this excludes capital), or about \$9,400 per pupil. KIPP charter schools, which run a longer school day, longer school week, and longer school year, typically need to raise </> \$1,000 per pupil each year more than they receive from government. This does not take into account the costs of starting a school (site, equipment, books, etc., staff recruiting/training), which is often about \$1M per school.

How have charter schools in America performed? Some have been closed, usually due to poor academic performance or financial management. Overall, about 1/3 of charter schools have produced better results than their district public school peers, with half doing no better, and the rest somehow managing to do even worse.<sup>x</sup> A closer look at the results reveals that, when the usual suspects, e.g. school district bureaucrats, authorize the charters or there is no selectivity when handing out charters, the results are bad. When a separate board [RM11] does the authorizing, the results are fantastic.<sup>xi</sup> In Massachusetts, for example, where a state board and a dedicated charter school office do the authorizing, charter school students were 36 days ahead in reading and 65 days ahead in math on the annual tests. In Washington, D.C., which has a separate charter school board and office, charter students tested 72 days ahead in reading and 101 days in math!<sup>xii</sup>

The national data also reveal that poor minority kids fared much better in charters. Black students in poverty were 29 instructional days ahead of district school peers in reading, and 36 days ahead in math. Some of the very top performing charter schools began to replicate. KIPP ([www.kipp.org](http://www.kipp.org)), Rocketship ([www.rsed.org/index.cfm](http://www.rsed.org/index.cfm)) and Success Academies ([www.successacademies.org](http://www.successacademies.org)) are examples of how one effective school can grow into many more.

### *Britain's Free Schools*

The United Kingdom's Free Schools were a centerpiece of the Conservatives' election manifesto, drawing on the experience of the charter school program in the US and something similar in Sweden. The first 24 of these new independent state schools opened in 2011. They have been set up by groups, including charities and religious bodies, teachers, parents and some private school operators.

Six years later, there are now 500 free schools open or approved to open across the country. Once full, these schools will provide over 330,000 new school seats. About

half are primary schools and the other half secondaries. Nearly 70% of Free Schools have been set up in the most deprived areas in England.

Similar to Britain's Academy Schools (existing government-run schools that have been allowed to operate independent of traditional school councils), the Free Schools are new entities, funded directly by Westminster, semi-independent and outside of local authority control, with the freedom to vary the school day, terms, the curriculum and teachers' pay and conditions.

While proponents believe the schools provide choice for parents and will drive up standards, critics (mostly teacher union leaders) have warned that they will damage other schools by taking pupils and resources from them and break up the state school system.<sup>xiii</sup>

Once established, free schools are funded by national government with a per pupil amount this school year equal to \$5,000. Free schools have a range of freedoms:

1. They do not have to teach the National Curriculum: some schools use this freedom to teach different curricula - whether that is a challenging international math curriculum or taking a different approach to learning with a theme each term linking all subjects.
2. They can extend the school day or year: most use this freedom to add more time for learning or extra-curricular activity.
3. They have more flexibility in the way they employ their staff: some choose to offer teachers performance related pay to keep and reward their best staff while others choose to bring in outside expertise by employing people without traditional teaching qualifications.
4. They decide how they spend their full budget: they receive all funding directly from central government, which means they have complete independence over how it is spent.
5. They have independent governance: free schools are run by an Academy Trust, and are independent of Local Authority oversight.

So far, the results are encouraging. On average, Free schools recorded the best A-level results last year of all types of state school in the post-16 sector, with 27.8% of students getting AAB or better. This compares to a national average in the state sector of 19.9%."

## *New Zealand's Partnership Schools*

New Zealand's National Party joined with the ACT Party to pass a law to set up charter schools to lift educational achievement of disadvantaged learners by allowing the establishment of schools with greater flexibility and freedom in how they are organized and managed in return for much stronger accountability for learning outcomes. The bill to allow charter schools, now called Partnership Schools/Kura Hourua, was introduced in October, 2012 and narrowly passed in June, 2013, with 62 votes in favor and 57 opposed.

These new schools are operated by private businesses or organizations and are accountable for performance. The schools receive state funding but have the same freedoms as private schools in matters such as in setting the curriculum, length of the school year and teachers' pay. Teachers don't need to be registered or even formally trained (although they must pass police/background checks). Charter schools are subject to triennial external reviews by Education Review Office, and the government has the power to intervene if there are serious problems.

The first five schools opened in February 2014, and another four schools opened in February 2015. Eight schools currently in operation. One of the first charter schools, *Te Pumanawa o te Wairua*, was in serious trouble at its start and was closed in 2016.<sup>[RM12]</sup> A review found the school had poor teaching, low achievement and an inadequate curriculum. It had struggled with a range of issues including drug use, poor achievement, a falling enrollment and poor governance. (A closure rate of 11% is so far a bit better than the 15% closure rate of charters in the US, which is still better than the 25% failure rate of business start ups in their first year of operation!)

Applications from would-be sponsors of Partnership Schools were selected by the Partnership Schools/Kura Houra Authorisation Board if they met the following criteria:

- Focus on disadvantaged learners who struggle to succeed in the current system. In particular, the schools must lift the educational achievement of Māori, Pasifika and special needs students and those from low socio-economic backgrounds, and they must demonstrate in their applications how they will achieve this.
- Use the freedoms available in this model to lift the educational performance of these students through high-quality educational programs and innovative approaches.

- Meet specified performance standards agreed with the government, including student academic performance.
- Engage effectively with parents, family and communities to support and contribute to the achievement of high educational outcomes for their children.
- Partner with community and other organizations to strengthen and support their educational offering.
- Have strong governance and organizational competence and capability, with the skills and experience to ensure high-quality management of the school.

Once selected, the sponsor of a Partnership School enters into a contract with the Authorization board. The sponsor/operator then receives a set-up grant made up of:

- A fixed contribution to set-up costs of (NZ) \$250,000 for primary schools and \$400,000 for secondary schools;
- Six months of property and insurance funding, calculated using a property per-student rate for the number of students expected to be enrolled in the school's first year of operation; and
- Six months of a principal's salary.

This is followed once the school opens with annual operating funding based on the number of grade level of students, at an average of US \$6,075 per student.

New Zealand's Ministry of Education has lauded the performance of the first Partnership schools on the test that secondary school seniors in the nation must take, noting that high pass rates are especially laudable on account of the at-risk nature of the enrolled student population. Opponents have challenged the validity of the results. The Ministry is expected to release a report on the achievement results of the Partnership schools in a few months.

It was recently announced that New Zealand partnership schools will be expanded to serve students who are keen on science, technology, engineering and math.

In taking the recommendations and lessons learned from these examples of the creation of independent public schools, and in applying these to the politics, government, and geography/population distribution of The Bahamas, these are the 11 key ingredients for a successful independent public school law:

1. Allowance for the creation of 15 independent public schools, called Partnership Schools. (This would be just less than 10% of the public schools across The Bahamas, and it would likely result in 8-10 Free Schools in Nassau and 5-7 schools total across Grand Bahama, Abaco, Andros, Eleuthera, and Exuma.)
2. Provision of a per-pupil funding amount equal to the average annual operating and capital expenditure per pupil determined simply by a clear formula (e.g. the annual Ministry of Education budget for pre-school, primary, and secondary education divided by the number of public school pupils enrolled). This year that amount is approximately \$4,800.
3. Creation of an Independent Partnership School Board to grant and oversee contracts to founding groups seeking to sponsor a new independent public school. This seven-person board would have a modest budget, a staff of 1-2 people, and would be comprised of 3 members appointed by the University of The Bahamas and 2 members appointed by The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers Confederation and 2 members appointed by Civil Society.
4. Requirement that students in Partnership Schools take the same tests annually required of all Bahamian public school students.
5. Clear Student Recruitment, Enrollment and Expulsion Procedures, which must be followed by all Partnership Schools.
6. The contract term of Partnership Schools will be 7 years, with conditions stipulated for the non-renewal of a contract at the end of each term.
7. Provision that the Government (not strictly the Ministry of Education) make excess publically owned and controlled space available for use by Partnership Schools for their facilities.
8. Exemptions from most Bahamian Education laws, except for those covering health, safety, civil rights, student accountability, employee criminal history

checks, open meetings, freedom of information requirements, and generally accepted accounting principles.

9. Exemption from collective bargaining, whereby Partnership Schools are exempt from any outside collective bargaining agreements, while not interfering with laws and other applicable rules protecting the rights of employees to organize and be free from discrimination.
10. Allowance for the private school and religious entities to operate Partnership Schools as state schools but be allowed to retain their special characteristics and programming.
11. Allowance for educational service providers (non-profit and for-profit school operating entities), provided there is a clear performance contract between the Partnership School board of trustees and the service provider, and there are no conflicts of interest between the two entities.

The political advice from New Zealand, the U.K., and the U.S. is that charter/partnership schools will gain more support if they are aimed at (or even limited to) disadvantaged students.<sup>xiv</sup> Support has also been won when the prospective new schools are billed as sites for innovative models that can share best practices with existing schools. In the U.S., a charter law received key support when it seemed its passage would defuse support for private school vouchers.

## 2. Teacher & Leader Talent

In 1989, Wendy Kopp was aware of the failure of America's public schools to provide a good education to a majority disadvantaged students. As a senior at Princeton, she also became aware of how aggressively she and other seniors were being recruited by consulting firms like McKinsey and other companies. That's when she proposed creating a new entity to recruit seniors at the best universities in the country to go teach in America's poorest neighborhoods for two years. Teach for America was born and the next year she recruited 100 teachers to join this special corps.

More than two decades later, Teach for America selects about 4,000 seniors each spring, most from the country's best colleges and universities, who make that two-year teaching commitment. More than 46,000 people have fulfilled that commitment, and 65% of them are still in education. Many of the leaders of education reform initiatives are Teach for America alumni, as are 75% of KIPP school leaders (and the school leaders of many other top-performing charter schools)

Wendy Kopp proved that you can recruit smart, capable leaders into the classrooms and schools serving our most disadvantaged kids. While studies have shown that they are more effective as teachers than the average teacher<sup>xv</sup>, they have also gone on to lead schools, networks, and even districts. Most corps members sign up expecting that they will only teach for two years and then get on with some other profession. More than half stay on.

Getting some teachers and leaders who are different in disposition and talent from today's typical Bahamian public school teacher is essential to the success of the proposed charter school initiative as well as reform efforts yet to come.<sup>xvi</sup>

That is why it is good news that Wendy no longer runs Teach for America and instead runs Teach for All, an organization focused on helping other nations create a Teach-for-America-like teaching corps. Teach for All has recently helped people in Haiti form a Teach for Haiti (or Anseye Pou Ayiti).

Started and run by a young woman, Nedgine Paul, a Haitian who earned her Bachelor's at Yale and a graduate degree at Harvard. She started Anseye Pou Ayiti (AYP) in 2014. Its first corps of 30 new teachers began teaching in 2015, and now joined by this year's cohort of 35 they are teaching 2,500 students. AYP received 440

applications for the 2016 corps, and the combined corps members are now teaching in 30 schools.

Nedgine and her four-person team do an annual recruitment and selection process for each new corps of teacher/leaders. They then work to place those new teachers in existing primary schools in Haiti with underserved populations. The AYP team does a mandatory four-week pre-service training for each corps before they show at their schools for the first time. This is followed by further monitoring assistance, coaching, and continued training/leadership development over the course of their two-year fellowship.

Teach for Haiti took a planning year (with a cost of \$55K), and its first year of operations cost \$246,000. This year its costs are \$367,000, both years broken down into the following categories:

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>COST '16</b>	<b>COST '17</b>
Recruitment, Matriculation & Selection:	\$25,000	\$27,400
Pre-Service Training/Summer Immersion:	\$55,000	\$62,745
Ongoing Training & Alumni Leadership:	\$70,000	\$121,000
Governance & Onsite Operations:	\$7, 245	\$30,278
Staff Operations:	\$75,000	\$105,875
Teacher Support (Stipends)	\$9,500	\$20,500

Individuals were the source of most of the planning year costs, with foundation funding now covering about half of the costs. Living costs are higher in The Bahamas, so the program cost may be higher, but something similar could be created by somebody like Nedgine with less than \$100k for a planning year and \$400K-\$500K thereafter.

### 3. Blended Learning & Affordable Private Schooling

James Tooley, a professor in England, launched a research program funded by the Templeton Foundation to explore the private schools serving the poor in India, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, and China. A book, *The Beautiful Tree*, emerged from this research. He found that a majority of schoolchildren in urban areas in India and in those three African countries were enrolled in low-cost private schools. After testing 24,000 children, it was found that children in the low cost private schools significantly outperformed children in public schools, after controlling for background variables and the school choice process.

This market has also recently attracted social entrepreneurs and venture capital, leading to the creation of several very promising chains of low-cost private schools in Africa and the Philippines. These schools take advantage of the huge advances in learning technology to keep costs low while delivering effective instruction.

While it is very worthwhile to pursue a charter school law to put public money to work more effectively for the education of Bahamian students, even 15 Partnership schools won't meet the need (or the demand) for better schools. To that end, in the pursuit of increasing the supply of quality school options, it is also very worthwhile to simultaneously explore if existing low-cost private schools in The Bahamas can be expanded to more sites. Additionally, The Bahamas should explore the suitability of new models of very low-cost private schools that have proven to be effective in less developed parts of the world. The development of 1 or 2 of these could provide a model opportunity which could help to determine the need for possible further development.

There are three promising models of these very low-cost private schools:

**Spark Schools.** There are 11 Spark Schools currently operating in South Africa. The first Spark schools opened in 2013. They are primary schools (K-60<sub>[RM13]</sub>) that combine teacher-led instruction with computer-based adaptive education technology. The combination translates into an individualized learning experience for each student, tailored to his or her particular learning needs. The Spark model also uses daily motivational assemblies, sports, and family engagement for the critical non-cognitive aspects that must be developed. Spark schools charge a tuition equal to \$141 US per month, or \$4.70 a day. ([www.sparkschools.co.za](http://www.sparkschools.co.za))

**Apec Schools.** There are 24 Apec secondary schools (serving grades 7-12) in the Philippines. The schools offer full English immersion, a technology-based learning system, and promise employment readiness through its Employer Partner Network program. Apec offers the use of Google Chrome Books in school, and also integrates all subjects in its real-world project-based learning. Apec charges \$465 (US) per year, or about \$1.30 per day. ([www.apecschools.edu.ph/home-1.html](http://www.apecschools.edu.ph/home-1.html))

**Omega Schools.** Thirty-eight Omega schools (of about 500 students each) have opened in Ghana since 2008, serving a total of 20,000 students. The schools are primary and lower secondary schools. Omega has developed its own curriculum and lesson plans that are used in conjunction with digital content. Tuition is equal to 65 cents (US) per day. Test results suggest that the Omega schools have significantly outperformed other private and public schools. In reading, Omega students are 4 years ahead of those in nearby public schools and 2 years ahead of other low cost private schools. ([www.omega-schools.com/index.php](http://www.omega-schools.com/index.php))

As with top-tier charter school operators in the US, none of these three or other low-cost private school companies operate campuses outside of their countries. Getting one of them to come to The Bahamas will take some wooing, negotiation, and likely the need to find entrepreneurs and school founders game for taking the lead.

There are also some options that may be worth pursuing with respect to expanding the capacity of The Bahamas's secular schools. Cristo Rey, a network of 32 Jesuit high schools in America, provides a good academic education that is combined with one day per week of work at a professional workplace. Companies pay the school for sending a student each day of the work week, in essence having a full-time equivalent employee. This makes the school financially viable. Cristo Rey is strict about expansion site criteria, including an urban population of one million or more, but there is a lot about the model that could be replicated by a dynamic, entrepreneurial school founder. ([www.cristoreynetwork.org](http://www.cristoreynetwork.org))

Seton Education Partners (a non-profit the author of this report co-founded) has transformed twelve urban Catholic schools into blended learning schools, where students spend 40% or more of their instructional time on computers. It has increased learning while also increasing enrollment and boosting economic viability of each school. Seton is not eager to stray from its focus cities, but a

partnership school in The Bahamas is a possibility. ([www.setonpartners.org/what-we-do/blended-learning-initiative](http://www.setonpartners.org/what-we-do/blended-learning-initiative))

#### **4. Workplace Learning Standards & Opportunities.**

Over the past few decades, many countries have been exclusively focused on improving their students' academic skills and knowledge. Vocational training and preparation for success in landing and keeping a desirable job has fallen victim, in the United States and elsewhere, to an aversion to tracking kids, to having "the system" decide early on which kids should prepare for which jobs. Yet many businesses are finding that school graduates are not prepared for the jobs they need filled, and those school graduates are having a hard time finding employment.

In this vein, The Bahamas could help its students and its businesses succeed by finding more ways, starting in secondary education, to help students explore career possibilities and then begin learning the particular work skills and habits needed for success in their chosen career. There are countries with robust apprenticeship programs, as well as some promising examples of the rebirth of vocational education, that is crafted in a way which allows students to choose their focus.

Two nations have set the standard for career and technical education, Switzerland and Singapore.<sup>xviii</sup> In both countries, government and businesses have worked together to set occupational skill standards. Students receive a great deal of experience working, either on site at businesses or in school-based simulations that look like the real thing. Employers are required to pay the apprentices on a schedule that is agreed nationwide. Singapore mostly uses the school-based apprenticeships and Switzerland the employer-based apprenticeships, but both countries can provide their students with industry environments in which to train.

The challenge of replicating the Singaporean or Swiss career education model in The Bahamas, the United States, or many other countries is that even the low-performing students on PISA (the international academic test) in Singapore or Switzerland are way ahead of the best students in those other countries. Another challenge may be the change and careful program execution it would require of the existing government school system.

Yet there are other examples of career-oriented education working in places with students who do not perform well on the international comparison tests. The best example is the state of Arkansas in the U.S. Beginning with students on track to graduate from secondary school in 2014, Arkansas implemented what it terms “Smart Core,” which requires that high school graduates complete four units each of English and math; three units each of social studies and science; half of a unit each of arts, economics, health and safety, physical education, and oral communication; and six units of career focus coursework.

A study of 100,000 of Arkansas students revealed some promising results:<sup>xviii</sup>

- Students with greater exposure to career and technical education (CTE) are more likely to graduate from high school, enroll in a two-year college, be employed, and earn higher wages.
- CTE is not a path away from college: Students taking more CTE classes are just as likely to pursue a four-year degree as their peers.
- Students who focus their CTE coursework are more likely to graduate high school by twenty-one percentage points compared to otherwise similar students (and they see a positive impact on other outcomes as well).
- CTE provides the greatest boost to the kids who need it most – boys, and students from low-income families.

In Colorado, a business-led initiative was launched in order to encourage new vocational training in the state. The Business and Schools in Collaboration (BASIC) was launched as a partnership of businesses, associations, school systems, colleges, and government committed to creating new apprenticeships for secondary school students. It has been working to design and pilot apprenticeship programs and is now working to implement the program on a broader scale.

A deliberate, system-wide effort, like the afore-mentioned programs to prepare Bahamian students for success in the workplace, can and should be pursued within the broader public education system. Additionally, there is also much that can be done with the Partnership School as well as the Low-cost Private School initiatives on this front. There are a growing number of new school models that are doing career education as a part of their academic program.

In the U.K., at the five year-old School 21 in London ([www.school21.org.uk/rwl](http://www.school21.org.uk/rwl)), every student, starting in Year 10, is required to successfully complete a Real World Learning Project. To do these projects, students spend half a day a week in

the workplace for a term and a half, and students are tasked with solving an authentic problem for a real organization. The projects can take any form, so long as there is an authentic outcome that students are required to produce.

In the U.S. and now four other countries, students in the 65 Big Picture high school students ([www.bigpicture.org](http://www.bigpicture.org)) design a personalized learning program with their advisors, and a key part is the work-based learning they must do through internships. They intern--often twice a week for an entire school day--with experts in their field of interest, completing authentic projects and gaining experience and exposure to how their interests intersect with the real world.

The Cristo Rey schools, 30 private high schools in the U.S. serving low-income families, provide career education through the day-a-week internships all of their students spend working at a partner worksite.

In addition to providing its young people with better job-related skills that will lead to employment, the career education in all of these cases improves school attendance and motivation to graduate.

## Next Steps

Based on new advances and trends drawn from around the world, the future of The Bahamas can be improved by substantially expanding education options for Bahamian students. It is strongly recommended to pursue the following four initiatives simultaneously.

1. The creation of fifteen “Partnership” schools.
2. The founding of Teach for The Bahamas developing a special new corps of 10-20 teachers each year.
3. The expansion of high quality existing and creation of additional very low-cost private schools that can serve lower income families. Additional expansion can come through the possible adoption of new schools models, new technology and adoption of linkages to vocational training and placement.
4. The Launch of Secondary School Apprenticeships like Colorado’s BASIC to foster collaboration between business and schools that includes paid, part-time apprenticeships as well as the development of competency standards and standards for the apprenticeships themselves.

The creation of Partnership schools will require the passage of appropriate legislation. Additionally, a recruiting effort could be launched for school founders. Simultaneously a founding CEO of Teach for The Bahamas can be recruited and set to work in short order. Conversations should be formally begun with leader of high-performing yet low- cost private schools currently operating in The Bahamas, as well as those in Africa and the Philippines.

Two other items are critical to developing these four concepts: funding (about \$1M per Partnership school and about \$175K per year for Teach for Bahamas), and facilities. New Partnership schools or low-cost private schools all require buildings that are affordable, safe, and near the students they seek to serve.

The above reforms will undoubtedly require significant effort on the part of both private and public sectors. However, the investment of time, effort and resources toward innovation and expansion in the Education system will inevitably prove one of the most reliable and valuable investments in the future of The Bahamas and its people<sup>[RM14]</sup>.

## About the Author:

Scott Hamilton has been working to improve learning opportunities for American kids for 25 years. Scott designed and for 5 years led the effort to grow KIPP (the Knowledge is Power Program) from two schools in 2000 to now over 200 of the celebrated inner-city public schools in the U.S. During this time he was also the President of the Pisces Foundation, a philanthropy created by the founders of the Gap, Inc., Doris and Donald Fisher. Previously, Scott served as Massachusetts Associate Commissioner of Education, and in Washington, D.C. with the U.S. Secretary of Education and at the White House.

## Footnotes

---

<sup>i</sup> The Learning Crisis: A Bahamian Public Policy Essay, Ralph J. Massey, Nassau Institute, 2009

<sup>ii</sup> In Pursuit of Employable Skills: Understanding Employers' Demands, Analysis of The Bahamas' 2012 Wages & Productivity Survey, Maria Victoria Faziio & Etoile Pinder, Inter-American Development Bank, 2014.

<sup>iii</sup> Bahamian Youth: The Untapped Resource, The Coalition for Education Reform, 2005

<sup>iv</sup> New Paradigm for "Stupid" in The Bahamas, Sally Black, BahamasB2B.com, August 5, 2011

<sup>v</sup> Looking at Bahamian Education, Tribune 242, September 5, 2012

<sup>vi</sup> No Breakdown of Exam Results, Tribute 242, August 10, 2016

<sup>vii</sup> Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements & Challenges, EFA Global Monitoring Report, UNESCO, 2015

<sup>viii</sup> Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do it, James Q. Wilson, 1989

<sup>ix</sup> Teacher Attrition in South Africa: Trends, Challenges, and Prospects, Victor Pitsoe, 2013

<sup>x</sup> National Charter School Study, Center for Research on Education Outcomes, Stanford, CA, 2013

<sup>xi</sup> A Growing Movement: America's Largest Charter Public School Communities and Their Impact on Student Outcomes, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016

<sup>xii</sup> A Growing Movement: America's Largest Charter Public School Communities and Their Impact on Student Outcomes, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2016

<sup>xiii</sup> Interview of Sir Michael Barber, former Prime Minister Tony Blair's Chief Adviser on Education Delivery, February, 2017

<sup>xiv</sup> Interviews with Chester E. Finn, Jr. (author of Charter Schools in Action, 2001), Nina Rees (CEO of National Association of Public Charter Schools), Kevin Wilson (Principal Advisor, New Zealand Ministry of Education), and Sir Michael Barber (former Chief Advisor on Deliver, United Kingdom).

---

<sup>xv</sup> Results from the Teach fo America 2015 National Principal Survey, RAND Corporation, 2015

<sup>xvi</sup> How the World Best-Performing School Systems Come Out on Top, McKinsey & Company, 2007

<sup>xvii</sup> The Phoenix: Vocational Education and Training In Singapore International Comparative Study of Leading Vocational Education Systems, Marc S. Tucker, Center on International Education Benchmarking, October 2012

<sup>xviii</sup> Career and Technical Education in High School: Does It Improve Student Outcomes?, Shaun Dougherty, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, April 2016.