



Ministry of  
Education, Culture, Youth &  
Sport

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## **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

TO THE BOARD OF THE  
**FOUNDATION FOR ACADEMIC AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION (FAVE)**

**September 11, 2018**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Shortly after my appointment as Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, I started to monitor the print and social media as they reported on the dispute between teachers of the PSVE section, the Principal, and the Board of said school. Knowing that if the differences between the various parties were not addressed immediately they could eventually escalate to a stand-off, I contacted the Schoolboard and offered to mediate in the interest of maintaining the peace at the school and continued education of the students.

From August 14 to August 30, 2018, my Cabinet Chief-of-Staff, Peter J Gittens and I held meetings with:

1. The Schoolboard;
2. Teachers' Union (WITU);
3. Schoolboard, WITU, Management and Staff of PSVE, in which the teachers and staff presented their concerns, grievances and accusations mainly related to the functioning of the Principal;
4. Schoolboard, WITU, Management and Staff of PSVE, as well as my Cabinet Staff, in which the Principal responded to the concerns, grievances and accusations raised by the teachers and staff in the previous meeting.

Rather than give an itemized report of the various meetings, I will present general observations and recommendations which I believe, if followed,

could bring about the needed change in the relationship between the Board and the teachers as well as between the Principal and the teachers. From my observations, I conclude that poor communication between all parties is the crux of the problem.

## **THE SCHOOLBOARD**

1. The communication between the Board and the Principal appears to be sound. However, the Board has neglected its communication responsibility towards its teachers and staff and has turned this over to the Principal. There are certain responsibilities that the Board should not delegate to the Principal, especially knowing the tenuous historical relationship between teachers and Board. Even though the Principal has strong management skills, the Board should not add its responsibility of communicating with the teachers to her task. For example:
  - a. Fundamental reforms related to the PSVE, such as rebranding the school and introducing new educational programs like the CCSLC should be communicated, in first instance, directly by the Schoolboard to the teachers. Teachers should not get the impression that it is the Principal who is independently making sweeping changes at the school.
  - b. Matters related to hiring and firing of teachers and staff should be conveyed, to the teacher or staff member concerned, by the Board. The Principal should not be the messenger in these matters.
2. Written and even verbal communication directed to the Board should be addressed as soon as possible by the Board.
3. Not only written communication is important but face-to-face contact with the teachers and staff as a group as well as with individual teachers and staff members is also essential. A back-to-school breakfast alone is not sufficient. Especially now, when the school is making major changes in the philosophy, vision and direction of the PSVE, the Board should be clear in communicating such with the staff and teachers. After the Board has informed the teachers and staff, then the Principal can further explain and work with the staff and teachers to execute the Board's philosophy and vision. Having a good Principal does not preempt the Board from communicating with the teachers and staff.

4. The current tension between the Board and the teaching staff might have been mitigated if the Board had given the teachers the due respect by just listening to their grievances in a timely manner and giving them a professional and honest explanation.
5. It is understandable that due to the lack of administrative assistance, the Board was unable to fulfill its role as employer towards the teachers and staff. However, now that the Board has employed a capable secretary, it is strongly recommended that the Board executes its role as employer and let the Principal handle the educational and operational leadership of the school.
6. The Board should ensure that the job descriptions of its support staff such as the advisor to the Board, the HR staff member and the secretary of the Board are clearly defined to avoid role and function overlap. This will facilitate efficient administration of duties for all parties.
7. The Board is currently busy developing new procedures with the assistance of outside consultants. It is strongly advisable that the Board informs the teachers and staff about the pending changes and why these are necessary. This should not be done by the Principal.
8. It was noted that even in a time of crisis, the full Board was never present at any of the meetings. Barring sickness, it is imperative that all Board members attend such crucial meetings.
9. The Board should try to attract "fresh blood" (new members) and begin to coach them in gradually taking over Board responsibilities.

## THE PRINCIPAL

I believe that all three parties (Board, Principal and teachers) are contributory to the misunderstandings, tension and confusion. The role that the Board played in the communication process was described earlier, and later in this paper, I will describe the role of the teachers. This chapter will highlight the role of the Principal in this current situation.

1. The Principal possesses the necessary management skills (i.e. administrative and organizational) to run the PSVE. In the past, the Principal functioned as a school coach at the PSVE and, at that time, apparently had no problems relating to and communicating with the teachers and staff. However, her return to the PSVE as a Principal has brought about much tension between herself and the teachers.
2. Prior to the appointment of the Principal, there was a history of teacher non-compliance with the school's rules. Hence, the Principal cannot receive all the blame for the current conflict.
3. Due to hurricane Irma, the PSVE campus now had to accommodate two schools and follow tight time schedules. Some teachers apparently have some difficulty adjusting to the new schedule as well as to the new educational direction that the school is taking.
4. In some instances, it seems as if the Principal also took on the role of the Board and was communicating as if she were part of the Board.
5. Hearing the Principal speak about the way she communicated with the staff and reading her emails to the staff, it is noted that her communication style is very professional. However, during her presentation to the teaching staff, there seemed to be a sense of irritation, reprisal, disdain and a tinge of pride.
6. In the absence of some teachers and staff, it would have been more professional to not discuss their personal short comings in such detail.
7. During her presentation the Principal mentioned the 5 stages of team development namely (1) Forming, (2) Storming, (3) Norming, (4) Performing and (5) Adjourning. It must be noted that in each of these stages, the team leader (in this case the Principal) plays a pivotal role in keeping the team together and moving it through the various stages.

The Principal, in her presentation, ascertained that the PSVE team is currently going through the "storming phase".

In a regular storming phase, when conflicts and differences of opinion, etcetera, occur between the members of the team, it is the "team leader" [Principal] who needs to be adept at facilitating the team through this stage".<sup>1</sup> In the case of the PSVE, the situation differs somewhat. Instead of team members' differing in opinion within the group and the team leader [Principal] guiding the group members to the next phase of team development, we identify a "storming" group versus the Principal, a calm "norming" group in favor of the Principal, and the Principal herself trying to manage both groups.

In the situation at hand, the most challenging group is the "storming" group, which the Principal must facilitate as she moves it the next phase. This is, of course, extremely difficult for the Principal who is considered by the "storming" group as the cause of the storm. Consequently, the Principal will not be able to lead the teachers and staff out of the storming phase. ***For this reason, it is strongly recommended to have an external management coach work with the Principal as the entire staff moves through the storming phase in which the leader is the controversial subject.***

8. The Principal's attitude (disdain, reprisal, irritation and pride) during the presentation makes it difficult for her to lead the teaching staff out of the storming phase because the staff does not believe that the Principal is objective and as such they have lost confidence her. This is the reason for recommending the external management coach for **six to twelve months**, until the storm is over, evidenced by the Principal regaining the trust of the teachers and staff.
9. The Principal has a management team at her disposal and it is important that the composition and structure of this team are clear to all.

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<sup>1</sup> The Five Stages of Team Development: A Case Study, Gina Abudi, May 9, 2010  
WSS/MECYS

**THE TEACHING AND SUPPORT STAFF**

1. From the perspective of the staff and teachers, their complaints are valid and as such should be accepted and respected by the Principal and the Board. Even though the Principal and the Board do not agree with the teachers' perspective, each complaint, grievance and even accusation should be responded to objectively while at the same time showing concern and maturity.
2. Teachers and staff however, must realize that their role is to assist the Board and the Principal to execute the core business of the school which is to offer students quality education.
3. Teachers and staff must also realize that the Board and the Management are the ones to establish the rules, policies and guidelines for the school. Once these rules have been communicated to them in a proper and timely manner, then as teachers and staff, they have no choice but to follow them. Teachers who are unable to abide by the policies and rules should consider resigning from the PSVE instead of remaining at the school and stirring up conflict.
4. Even though teachers were requested by my person to refrain from going to the media, it is unfortunate that during the time of mediation, they defied that request which, as a result, only worsened the relationship between the parties concerned.
5. Whether teachers like the Board or the Principal or not, they should relate to them in a proper and respectful manner and the Board and Principal in turn should do the same.

## **THE WINDWARD ISLANDS TEACHERS UNION**

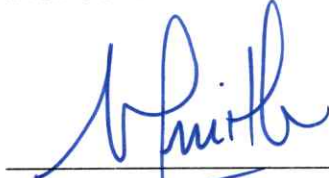
1. Since the mediation process, the Windward Islands Teachers Union has been very cooperative and professional in carrying out its role as representative of the teachers and staff. The Union listened to the Principal, the teachers and the staff. Upon the request of the Minister, the Union refrained from making further comments in the media which has been very helpful in mitigating and defusing the conflict.
2. While the Union's role in the first place is to ensure proper "working conditions" for the teachers, it can also play an important role in encouraging teachers not to lose sight of the education of the students. The role of the Union is not only to protect the rights of the teachers, but the Union is also there to remind teachers and staff of their duties towards the Schoolboard and the students.
3. In this situation where there is tension between the teaching staff and the Board and the Principal, the Board should be very open and honest with regard to decisions taken pertaining to the hiring and firing of staff. If this is done in a legal and fair manner, the Union would be able to understand the procedure and consequently be able to ensure the teaching staff that their rights are not being violated.
4. The Board should not perceive the Union as an enemy but rather as one of the stakeholders that can assist in implementing the educational goals of the school.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to maintain peace and continued education of the students at the PSVE, I recommend the following:

1. The Schoolboard should change its communication strategy towards the teachers, the staff and the Windward Islands Teachers Union.
2. The Schoolboard should demonstrate the necessary respect for the teachers, the staff and the Teachers Union.
3. The Schoolboard should hire a change management coach for the next six to twelve months.
4. The Schoolboard should begin to attract new members.
5. The Principal will need to accept that the "storming phase" in team development centers around her and therefore it will be extremely difficult for her to lead the teaching staff out of this stage. Consequently, she should rely on external help such as the change management coach to assist her and the Board in navigating out of this storm.
6. The teachers and staff should demonstrate respect for the Schoolboard and the Principal.
7. Teachers should abide by the policies and rules laid down by the Board and the Principal.
8. The Teachers Union should continue to protect the rights of the teachers, while at the same time remind the teachers of their duty towards the Board, the management and the students.

The above recommendations are presented to the parties concerned for their consideration.



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