

June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2023

## **CPEA 2023, Solid Evidence of Successes in the Education Revolution**

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### **Introduction**

One of the most attached policies of this Unity Labour Party administration, is the education revolution with its many facets covering early childhood to university education. This revolution that was rolled out within the first term of the ULP coming into office represented a visionary and transformative approach to education that was hitherto absent from previous policy initiatives. The policy as outlined was to address immediately the issue of universal access to secondary education and increase opportunities for our nation's students at all levels including adult and continuing education. It is noteworthy to keep in mind that the same parliamentary opposition that today speaks only negatively of the education revolution and its many successes, never supported the policy, and most importantly doesn't have an alternative to present to Vincentians. During their 17 years of government, stakeholders in education can remember the many unresolved challenges that were encountered and their seeming inability to develop any strategy to deal with the worsening situations in our country's education system. It was during this period of governance by the NDP, that approximately 40% of our 12-year-olds were accommodated in secondary school with the other 60% left to face very uncertain futures. Unfortunately for our 12-year-old, the then government didn't have a plan to address this situation, since admittedly, they were unable to address the possibility during their term of office. That government was so devoid of ideas regarding education, that they could only admit defeatedly to the World Bank that any consideration of the implementation of universal access to secondary education could not occur before 2030 and even then, it was merely a consideration, not an attempt at implementation. Education was in very bad shape, and it required the preparation, planning and swift execution of a revolutionary intervention that only the ULP could deliver.

### **Setting the Groundwork**

Once the ULP got into office in March of 2001, the new government went to work addressing the deficiencies in our education system it had identified even while in opposition. The first task was to address the physical shortfalls with the schools' buildings across the country embarking on a full-scale repair program of all education facilities including the replacement of damaged furniture. The images of parents, teachers and students from different schools picketing the Ministry of Education early in the school year to raise awareness of inadequate furniture in schools, was not something that the new ULP government was willing to let continue, and so it moved swiftly to address this. Making sure that students and teachers were more comfortable in their physical environment and that it was conducive to teaching and learning was a priority.

Another key ingredient to the development of primary education was the training of teachers, both as teachers' college but also at university level in critical areas. When the ULP came to office in 2001, there were a total of 4 graduate teachers in the primary system and there was a need to improved training in literacy, numeracy, and other areas in early childhood education. This ULP administration provided training opportunities through tuition assistance, scholarships, and other forms of support for hundreds of teachers to pursue various areas of training that were critical in the primary school system. Today, with the hard work and dedication of teachers, the discipline and drive of our students, the education revolution is paying dividends as our students excel and make their parents and our nation proud.

### **CPEA 2023, Shows Success Across our Nation**

Back in 2005, when universal access to secondary education was implemented (some 25 years before the 2030 year for consideration by the NDP), the naysayers were out loud and strong, presenting every reason why the government should abandon its policy. The Ministry of education had indicated that all students who sat the Common Entrance Examination, would be accommodated at secondary school regardless to whether they passed the examination or not. Naturally those who passed would have their choice of secondary school to attend and therefore the motivation to perform well was always present. The naysayers including the members of the NDP presented a contrary argument, suggesting that the students would lack motivation to perform since they would be accommodated in secondary school regardless and this would lead to reduced performance and pass rate at the exit examination. Year after year since the

implementation of universal access to secondary education, the results have always surpassed the rate that existed when the ULP came to office, the rate of 38%-40% pass at Common Entrance. This year 2023, the pass rate at the Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment (the exam that replaced common entrance) was in excess of 85%, with more than 1400 of the 1692 students who wrote the exam receiving a passing grade, this is indeed remarkable. Instead of watering down the education system, instead of demotivating the students, there seems to be additional motivation for our students to do well. Additionally, the improved results are experienced across the country with more and more students from rural schools, challenge for top places among the more traditional top performers. It is difficult to understand how anyone challenging the efficacy of this policy, can even from the face of it refer to it as a failure given the remarkable results at all stages, year after year. In September 2023, close to 1700 students will start their journey into secondary school, as part of the fresh cohort of students taking advantage of universal access to education here in SVG. These students will be informed that this opportunity was not always available, for previous governments couldn't deliver it, and even when the ULP delivered it, those who couldn't deliver it, didn't support it and to this day seek to discredit this marvelous policy. This ULP will continue to deliver on education to make our people marketable and able to function in the modern, competitive, many-sided, post-colonial economy that is at once local, national, regional and global that we are constructing.