

Submission by Red Thread and Help & Shelter on the Draft Education Bill under consideration by the Education Task Force

Preliminary

1. A separate submission is being made calling for the removal of the provisions for corporal punishment from the draft Education Bill.
2. This submission relates to concerns at inclusions and omissions from the draft Bill.
3. Help and Shelter is an organisation which works against the abuse of children. Red Thread Women's Development Organisation works for the development of women and children.

Submissions

1. Penalties

The fines are derisory: we can only assume that are yet to be adjusted to reflect the value of Guyana's currency.

2. Section 2(1)

"special education" should be defined as educational programmes and support services suitable for children whose needs cannot be met by the standard curriculum because of their different abilities.

3. Section 3

Availability of resources is always a limiting factor but it is inappropriate for legislation to provide lack of resources as a ready-made excuse for failure to implement goals and objectives. It is the responsibility of government to ensure that adequate resources are allocated in the national budget.

4. Decentralisation of administration

There is over-emphasis on the Chief Education Officer: the geography of Guyana requires greater decentralisation of education administration.

5. Section 9 & Schedule 1 - composition of the Education Advisory Board

The Education Advisory Board should comprise individuals recommended to the Minister by technical officers within the Ministry of Education. Many of the organisations listed in the schedule no longer exist

6. Section 16(a) – tuition charges

Free tuition should be provided to **all children of primary school age**, as provided in Article 28(a) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. There should be no discrimination based on the citizenship status of the child or the parents of the child.

7. Include 'Responsibilities of Teachers'

The responsibilities of teachers should be set out and include that teachers are responsible for:

- 1) Planning and teaching assigned subjects and courses using the approved curricula
- 2) Establishing and maintaining an effective learning environment which is pleasant, orderly, respectful and conducive to students' learning.
- 3) Responding to behaviour in a manner that takes the circumstances and needs of the students into account
- 4) Evaluating student achievement and explaining the assessment and evaluation procedures to be used in each area of the curriculum
- 5) Applying sound instructional, assessment, evaluation and reporting practices that promote validity, reliability and fairness to all students
- 6) Communicating information about student progress, attendance, behaviour to students, parents, and the administration
- 7) Providing an environment that will promote self-esteem
- 8) Providing role models that establish a positive tone in the school
- 9) Ensuring that students are referred to appropriate special services when necessary
- 10) Maintaining order and discipline among pupils attending or participating in activities that are sponsored or approved by the school, whether inside or outside the school

- 11) Advising pupils as to what is expected of them in school, reviewing their assessments with them, providing for meaningful student involvement in the assessment process, evaluating their progress and reporting on the progress to parents
- 12) Using the results from assessment and evaluation to enhance teaching and learning that the minister directs.
- 13) Ongoing professional development and involvement in professional learning communities
- 14) Being on duty in the school at least 10 minutes before the morning session begins and at least five minutes before the afternoon session begins, unless prevented from doing so by exceptional circumstances
- 15) Completing attendance reports and providing the reports to the principal when required.

8. Section 29 - Principles for admission

Head teachers should be given the discretion to admit children to school in the absence of a birth certificate.

9. Section 33 – Effect of disease

It should be made clear that HIV/AIDS does not fall within the definition of contagious disease and that no child may be refused admission to a school or class if he or she is HIV positive.

10. Typographical errors

Section 40(2) - substitute 'excused' for 'executed'

Section 146 – substitute 'convicted' for 'convinced'

11. Matters to be included

The following matters should be included:

- 1) The adoption of a policy of zero tolerance for bullying
- 2) Provision of clear guidelines on reporting and investigation of all cases of physical, sexual and psychological abuse of students by teachers.
- 3) A detailed step-by-step process should be developed, which gives equal weight to reports or evidence by students and teachers
- 4) Provision of clear disciplinary measures for teachers found guilty of abuse of students and for their transparent and objective application
- 5) We recommend that expertise be sought in the area of reporting and investigation of and penalties for sexual abuse and sexual harassment of students
- 6) Provision for at least one trained welfare officer capable of dealing with a wide range of social problems in every school. The primary interest of such welfare officers should be the students. Guidelines and protocols for school welfare officers should be developed
- 7) Provision for female students who become pregnant to be able to complete their education
- 8) Equal access to education for disabled children
- 9) Provision for a mechanism for consultation and involvement of students in the development of their schools