

**“Transforming to a Brighter Future” – Address by Hon. Stephen A. Lashley, M.P. to the Opening Ceremony of the Resource Centre at the Milton Lynch Primary School on Friday, April 23, 2009**

Principal, Teachers, members of the ancillary staff and students of the Milton Lynch Primary School, representatives of the University of the West Indies and the Ministry of Education, students of Community Organisation Class of the University of the West Indies, parents, students, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my distinguished honour to have been asked to address you on the occasion of the opening of your resource centre and in contemplating with you the so many areas of interest that this centre can and should now focus this school’s attention on.

At the onset, I wish to congratulate and commend the four Social Work Students of the University of the West Indies who had the vision to choose this school for such an exciting project which is focused, among other things, on improving the knowledge and skills of you the students and teachers of this school by making relevant information more readily available to you and in assisting you with building partnerships with agencies, parents, institutions and communities. And permit me to call their names – **Faith**

**Alleyne, Michael Waterman, Sharon Weekes-Cumberbatch  
and Elizabeth Jones.**

Upon first learning of this project from Sargeant Michael Waterman, I had no hesitation in providing the requested assistance and support.

With your anticipated permission, I have borrowed your project name, **“Transforming to a Brighter Future”** as the focus of my address to you this morning.

You should take a bow for daring to connect academia with the realities of life in our communities. I do agree with what your project appears to be saying to all of us – that the future development of our schools must be based on solid partnerships with our communities and that the need to improve the knowledge and skills base of both students and teachers requires a renewed focus on the provision of timely and relevant information.

While addressing the speech day of the Deighton Griffith School a few weeks ago, I believe I may have anticipated the launch of this project because I made the point that our schools are not only vital elements of our communities but are being called upon in today’s world to respond to and offer

solutions to what is happening across Barbados and indeed the wider world.

It is my view that given the new economic and social challenges we face as a nation that we have no choice but to become more innovative in how we prepare our children for the world of work and further study.

Our primary schools must become more dynamic and futuristic if we are to meet the challenge of creating entrepreneurs to take our country forward – if we are to succeed in **“transforming to a brighter future”**. To do this our schools generally must better understand the communities in which they operate and tailor our learning to provide to our young minds an early focus on our developmental goals.

Schools must steadfastly work with and assist the Ministry of Education and Human Resources in the development of policy that supports the real issues that you have to deal with right here at school where it all happens on a daily basis. This policy must evolve based on the rapid changes that we continue to experience within our communities. Our schools must become open campuses for community enrichment and development in order to support our national agenda for change.

I am concerned, for example that we have been slow to respond to the early problems that present themselves in the primary schools that are clearly connected with what is happening within the family.

When parental guidance is lacking at home, this creates challenges of discipline for our teachers. Therefore, when these early warning signs appear, there needs to be early intervention to correct these problems within the home itself.

I invite the social work students who have championed this innovative project, to encourage their colleagues to focus on gathering information on the problem of early deviance and family problems that impact on the school. There must be renewed focus on creating partnerships with all parents particularly given the poor attendance by both teachers and parents at PTA meetings. Perhaps we need to begin to create a report card recording the attendance at PTA meetings to encourage a turnaround. Or perhaps, PTA meetings must be held at more convenient times to facilitate greater participation.

There is no doubt in my mind that parents and teachers need to work together in a spirit of harmony and mutual respect

with one shared goal in mind – the disciplined and purposeful development of our children.

At the moment, for example, there appears to be a blossoming debate about whether corporate punishment should be abolished in our schools. My view is that, notwithstanding the importance of this issue to some people, there are many more important issues that should occupy our attention at this time.

Revolutionising our primary school system to become more relevant to the development of our communities is one such important issue. Just as there will always be diverse views on whether we should abolish capital punishment, there will always be diverse views on the use of corporate punishment within our schools. We must aim however for national consensus and be guided by the experience of others who have passed this way before.

What we need to focus on in my view, is providing support and encouragement to our teachers and principals who are called upon to ensure that we produce disciplined and well-rounded students at all levels of our education system.

Maybe I should ask you students what you think about this debate on corporal punishment. I do believe that the

challenges of discipline within our schools will not be resolved by saying that corporal punishment should be abolished. We need to focus on teacher and parent training to ensure that we are all reading from the same page when it comes to matters of education development. All of the available tools, including the regulated use of corporate punishment, that support discipline in our schools must remain available to our teachers who are trained to use them wisely and smartly.

My appeal to you students is that you aim to avoid corporal or any other kind of punishment by focusing on your school work and by being obedient to the instructions and guidance of your teachers and parents. Do not encourage your parents to come rushing to the school to be rude to teachers each time you are punished or faced with some challenge.

Be ware of the negative influence of the use of illegal drugs and the dangers in engaging in sexual activity at an early age. Learn as much as possible about HIV/AIDS. Even at this early stage of your education, I want you to begin to dream about what you want to be in life. Who you want to become, and choose friends and good role models who are not necessarily glamorous or rich but who associate with good solid morals and who by their examples encourage discipline and safe habits.

Practicing discipline, regular attendance at church and Sunday School, wide reading, avoiding chat forums, web sites and DVDs that focus on violence and sexual promiscuity will stand you in good stead for life.

I sincerely hope that this resource centre at your school will help to provide solutions to some of the challenges we face at school and in our communities and that students and teachers alike will engage in productive activity designed to improve our education system in a practical way.

Again I wish to commend our social work students and the University of the West Indies along with all stake-holders who have assisted in making this resource centre possible.

Do continue to aim for excellence as we join hands *in transforming our nation to a brighter future*. I thank you.

- *End* -