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.....on Tuesday

It's Back to School Time

The excitement is in the air for thousands of children, parents and teachers as the new academic year begins. Teachers and students would have had a well-deserved respite from the stress of examinations and the routine of school, and all are anxious to commence another school year. Many parents would have made extra sacrifices to ensure that their children are adequately equipped with books, uniforms and other peripherals for school. This is another stark reminder to the national community that education is certainly not free. Parents should instil this fact into their children's minds, reminding them that they are making an investment in their future, and they should not waste the schooling opportunity. They should make it clear to their children that access to education is something they should not take lightly as they expend large sums of cash to get them back to school.

As children settle into the new term and academic year, parents are also reminded of their responsibilities to keep close tabs on their children's progress at school, making connections with teachers and the school. The school-home partnership is critical to the success of the child, for it is not enough for parents to simply provide the physical supplies for school. Again, schooling also requires an investment of a substantial amount of time on the part of parents, working in close collaboration with the teachers to ensure success. When parents take a keen interest in their children's progress at school, children know that they are being held accountable for the investment being made in their future by the state and the home. Too often children lack value for education and merely go through a robotic process.

Teachers too, must communicate high expectations to their charges at the start of the term, reminding them of the purpose of schooling. The vacation period would have been an ideal opportunity to reflect on their sacred roles as shapers of the future. Vacation time for teachers ought to have resulted in a personal recommitment to the belief that through children and the classroom one can make a fundamental difference. Such belief forms the philosophical foundation upon which a teacher stands. From this foundation will emanate the dedication and commitment that

makes the time spent with children worthwhile. The absence of such a foundation will be easily detected by students, fellow teachers and the wider community.

The start of the term also should see the establishment or reinforcement of bonds of caring, empathy and compassion between teacher and student. Winning their trust and confidence early on in the term bodes well for the emotional well-being of students, regardless of age. All children have that innate desire to know that their teacher genuinely cares, especially those that come to school with social deficits. Having recharged one's emotional quotient during the vacation period, teachers should work to reach out to those children that are vulnerable to instil a strong sense of self-worth and self-esteem. This is one of the most challenging dimensions of the job of any teacher but is one which can result in the most profound difference.

The start of the term is also an opportune time to remind all teachers of their obligations as true professionals. As self-directed life-long learners, innovation and adaptation become core characteristics of one's practice. Many of the challenges faced in the school and classroom require unorthodox and innovative approaches for which the capacity to think critically becomes an imperative. The teachers who leave an indelible mark on students are the ones that focus on the human dimension of the practice first and curriculum delivery afterwards, notwithstanding our society's obsession with high-stakes examinations.

As we look toward the academic year, teachers would do well to remember that we have entered into a social contract, with ethical consideration forming the core of our practice. Parents and the wider public have and continue to place high expectations on teachers and schools, very often abdicating their own responsibilities for the creation of the desirable social being. This is an onerous responsibility for which many teachers just are not prepared nor have been given the necessary support and training. Unfortunately, these are some of the stark realities of schooling – a result of the dysfunctional state of our society.

As the bell is rung for the start of another academic year, the reminder is going out to all – parents, teachers and students of their roles and responsibilities. Here's to a productive, enjoyable and successful year ahead.