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The Success of Jessie Ripoll Primary

Thirty one years ago, Jessie Ripoll Primary faced a challenge; how to provide additional learning space for the growing number of children in the area without resorting to a shift system. Using innovative strategies, the school has been nurtured into an institution that maximizes its partnership with parents and community and developed a culture that fosters discipline and continued improvement. The school has been moving from success to success in the past ten years. In 2009, 98 per cent of its students achieved mastery in the Grade 4 Literacy test and 85 per cent in the numeracy evaluation. Spaces at Jessie are hard to come by as its academic performance is at a level often associated only with private primary level preparatory schools in Jamaica.

Jamaica Partners for Educational Progress paid a visit to Mr. Michael Brown, the Principal of Jessie Ripoll Primary to find out what has been at the root of this success.



Photo credit: Jamaica PEP

Jessie Ripoll Students greet their principal.

Challenges and Strategies

Like most schools, Jessie has had to deal with behaviour problems, poor student nutrition, reading difficulty and psychological challenges. In response, it has created its own mix of approaches to ensure that its students receive the highest standard of education.

Approach: The school uses an integrated and inclusive approach to problem solving and programme implementation. Once problems are identified, the principal meets with class teacher and guidance counselors in order to decide an appropriate approach and parents are informed of the school's intentions. If school intervention does not work, external professionals are brought in. In building the spirit of home school partnership, the schools has even provided financial assistance to parents and negotiated with professional bodies to reduce their cost to the students and their families.



Photo credit: Jamaica PEP

Students receive focused attention in Special Education class.

Assessment: Understanding its importance, Jessie Ripoll Primary School has a history of using assessments to enhance planning and student performance. Mr. Brown asserts that “presently we use the Slosson, and the Mico diagnostic tests; so we are able to identify the challenges from as early as grade 1 and develop programmes/interventions to deal with challenges, which have paid off; by grade 3, the children were reading at grade level.”

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Photo credit: Jamaica PEP

Teacher holds students' attention during lesson.

Special Education: In order to support students who are gifted and talented, fast track programmes have been developed and are conducted by an information technology teacher who has had training in special education. There are also special programmes for children in need of remedial support.

Recognising that behavioural problems may manifest from poor reading ability because the child is seeking alternate ways to get attention, Mr. Brown noted that Jessie Ripoll has a special Education Programme that caters to a maximum of 5 students at a time. In addition to the special attention given to these students, each child has access to a computer, and “manipulatives” and other resources to enhance literacy and numeracy.

Staff and Professional

Development: Apart from in house training, teachers are encouraged to upgrade their skills. As a result, approximately 90% of teachers on staff hold at least a bachelor's degree. Mr. Brown explains, “We invite the university administrators to come in, and the JTA to talk about salary. For their

own self aggrandizement, we encourage them. So I will call in a teacher for example and say look, you have the diploma for 3 years, what are you doing about your degree?”

Parental Involvement:

Parents are actively encouraged to participate in their children's education and are given opportunities to support the school on a daily basis. Workshops in Mathematics and Science are organized for parents, and useful websites are made known to them. Mr. Brown explains “Our students are given projects from as early as grade 1; yes parents assist and you know when the parents do it, but at least there is parental involvement. So the parents collaborate with the teachers. Presently we have parents who are volunteers who work in the office and classes free of cost. They assist with the accounts and clerical tasks, sit in class and they are around for early work when the teacher is not here at 6:30.” In addition, the Parent Teachers' Association has contributed to the creation of a safe environment for children and protection of valuable equipment that has been acquired

to enhance learning by paying for security.

Community Involvement: For the school's nutritional programme, Jessie Ripoll has received assistance from the Sisters of Mercy, Corporate Jamaica, the Ministry of Education and Food for the Poor. In addition, community members have been given permission set up a fruit stall on the compound. Mr. Brown notes that “the Community have given back to us as we have given to them.” These vendors have donated an average of \$80,000 per year to the school's feeding programme and a lawn mower, and have also protected the school.

Lessons Learned as Principal



Photo credit: Jamaica PEP

Mr. Brown, Principal of Jessie Ripoll Primary School

- “Plan and work the plan in conjunction with other stakeholders from the beginning. Sometimes there are problems right before us and we do not see it, but others will”
- “We don't have to start with the big things. We can start with the small things and when we are successful at them, we move on easier than when we start with a big thing”
- “Development planning is important for a school. Chart where we take our students over time and what we will do or can do to correct the ... weaknesses”
- “Encourage teachers to be qualified and have updated information”