

Preparations For Going to Secondary School - Part 1

Dear Friends,

At the end of my July article, I discussed the next stage of a student's school journey. Our *Akrampa School is Kindergarten through 9th Grade*. And once students have passed from Kindergarten all the way through the Junior High stage (9th Grade), then the next stage is Senior High School, Grades 10th -12th. In Ghana this is known as the beginning of Senior Secondary School, or SSS, and is the pre-tertiary stage.

Admission for our *students* (or as we call them, the *Learner*) into Senior Secondary School, in Ghana, happens in a very different way than it does in the United States. Let me refresh your memory with a bit from my last article:

"Before the National Examinations, throughout Ghana, the 9th Grade Learners/students are invited to register for the National Examination, B.E.C.E - and unique index numbers are given to them individually. In the course of the registration, they are asked to select Six Senior High Schools they would prefer to attend. A computer system is in place to automatically select from the six, the three schools that by the Learner's performance, he or she may be admitted into. If the first choice is unavailable to the Learner/student, either as a result of the Learner not getting the requisite score or unavailability of space (where more than the number available becomes an issue), then the second choice will be offered. When that fails, there is always the third choice. The choosing of a school by the Learner, and the subsequent selection of the Learner/student by a school is done by feeding the data into the Examination Office Computer, which is known as Computer School Selection Placement System (CSSPS)."

Now, I'd like to share some additional information about the examination system that directs and controls all "Pre-tertiary Examinations" in Ghana, and even beyond Ghana, for the West African sub-region. In the past, the English-speaking countries of West Africa ran their own independent local National Examinations, until 1952. Then the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) was established to coordinate the holding of examinations and the award of certificates issued to candidates. The partner countries were, and still are, *Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Gambia*. This means that in these countries the examinations are described and known as West African Examination, and the Certificates awarded are known as issued by the WAEC, designated by the awarding country. The examination schedules differ from country to country.

After writing the examination, the Learner/student waits anxiously for the results that will be published by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). The waiting period is now 'about' three months from the end of the examinations. Often though, within two months, the results will be published & then parents will begin putting together the Learner/student's "KIT" to take to school. In Ghana, 'the Kit' is considered to be part of a *sustenance or survival box*, that is generally referred to as a **Chop Box**. This would contain food items that the student would depend on for his snacks when he/she is hungry and cannot wait to go to the cafeteria to join the rest of the Learners/students for the meal provided by the school. In this will be biscuits, sardine, Gari sugar, etc. It would also contain, a cutlass (machete), portable broom, exercise books, other books, and so on and so forth. When it is completely filled with all that must go in, it really is heavy.

As I have mentioned in earlier articles, the Ghanaian schools now provide Fee-Free education for all Learners in the Senior Secondary Schools (SSS) - 10th- 12th Grade. However, it is the responsibility of the parents to provide the funds and resources for the student/Learner to stay in the boarding house/dormitories ... and sadly, for many parents, this is a real financial challenge. For this reason, around half of the Akrampa parents are never able to send their children to Senior Secondary School. Thus, *some* of these children, who have no other options, end up becoming **street-children** some of whom are led away into gangsterism and juvenile misbehavior.

Meanwhile, some of the more motivated Learners/students whose parents are **unable** to afford the costs of sending them to Senior High School are very determined to pursue progress in education for personal development. These 9th Grade students want to be gainfully employed and hope to become established later in life. These students begin resourcing themselves by intensifying farming activities and doing menial jobs that pay. As they work hard for this money, they are able to save it for the opportunity to continue their schooling.

There's a particular local system known as *Susu*. Susu is a type of informal savings club arrangement between a small group of people, sometimes led by a Registered Vendor who would be licensed by the nation's central bank, sometimes led by the members of the group themselves. The name is used especially in West Africa and the Caribbean. The basic principle is that each member of the group

makes a standard contribution to a common fund once per some agreed upon time period. Then each period the contributions are disbursed to a single member of the group. The recipient changes each period in a rotating fashion such that all the members of the group are eventually recipients.

The money is distributed to the person in a lump sum and the individual may use the money for their chosen purpose. Some of the very determined Learners/students are members of a Susu for their personal need. These are Learners whose parents don't have the resources to provide for them. The students start buying and putting together items for their "Kit", so that as soon as they are chosen by the *Computer School Selection Placement System*, they will have what they need to begin Senior Secondary School.

Blessings, Pastor Ben