

## Preparations For Going to Secondary School - Part 3: Testing &amp; Placement

Dear Friends,

In previous articles, (July, August & September), I have been discussing aspects of the education system in Ghana. I'd like to share a bit more detailed information about Ghanaian Schools, past the 9<sup>th</sup> Grade. {To remind everyone, our school in Akrampa goes from Kindergarten through 9<sup>th</sup> Grade. Once the children 'Graduate' from our 9<sup>th</sup> Grade, they have the possibility to move onto Senior Secondary School and then college.}

At the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> Grade, Ghanaian School Children (now known as, Learner) take the Basic Education Certificate Examination, or B.E.C.E. There is no certificate awarded for completing the B.E.C.E, but the student/learner's scores help with placement in Secondary School. Before the Learner gets to write the B.E.C.E., the parent (sometimes with the help of the Learner's teacher) would select SIX secondary schools that they are interested in attending, all with the ultimate courses that the Learner would pursue in college: the sciences, business, or medicine, etc. A system called: the **Computer School Selection and Placement System (CSSPS)** is the means by which every Ghanaian Learner can be selected or gain entry into the secondary school, whether for **day** or **boarding**. This computer system selects which school the student will be placed in, based on test scores and by using one of the six schools the student requested. It is therefore not automatic that the Learner will get their first-choice school. Sometimes it also happens that the CSSPS might choose for the Learner to be a **day** student even when **boarding** was the option.

The Ghanaian system of Secondary Education is split into two categories: **Day** and **Boarding**, meaning day schools or boarding schools. Either of which may be for both boys and girls (co-educational), or solely for a particular gender: boys alone, or girls alone. Those who select to go to **day** institutions, invariably are Learners/students who live in the community in which the school is located. Notwithstanding, a Learner/student living in the same community as the **boarding** school, could also choose to move from home to be in the school as a **boarder**, an option that the parent or guardian could select for peculiar reasons.

After (the B.E.C.E.) examination, the results are released by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and Learners, go to the website of the WAEC with their **registered numbers** given earlier, to find out if the required score that qualifies for entry into the secondary school was obtained. The secondary schools are also grouped into categories: 'A', or 'B', or 'C', or 'D'., depending on the location of the school and/or the acclaimed performance and credibility of the school over the years.

The Categorization of schools is such that all Learners would have access to quality education that is spread across the country. It is generally known that most category 'A' & 'B' schools are found in the southern part of Ghana, as a result of the colonization. The missionaries that started schools to promote education in the then Gold Coast, established their posts on the coast of the *Gold Coast*, consequently causing Learners/students and their parents that were seeking further education to come down to the south, to the coastal regions, for school. When a Learner/student chose to come down to the coast, then, the only option was to be a **boarder** since he/she could only receive education away from home, which was the best option. This meant that only those who could afford to send their children to school, away from home would benefit. This is the reason why the government decided to support **fee-free tuition and feeding** in the Secondary Schools, so as many children as possible would benefit from universal education, in Ghana.

When the test results are published by the WAEC, it is interesting and sometimes sad to watch parents and children gathering at the premises of schools to verify placement in the Secondary Schools. The system is **supposed** to do the placement, and all that the parent should need to do is prepare and send the child. However, unfortunately what happens is that *some influential individuals* will manipulate the system - bribe certain personnel - responsible for the system, and/or get the headmasters of the schools - to admit their children. This manipulation of the CSSPS is a phenomenon that is bedeviling the system. It goes without saying, that one might find a brilliant child not gaining access to his/her chosen school because the spot is offered to the child of an influential parent. I'm sad to say, that **several Akrampa children** have lost the opportunity to further education beyond junior high school, as a result of the exploitation of the system.

Pastor Ben