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Finishing school for youth may soon be a reality

Antiguan software developer and businessman Lawrence Jardine is seeking to enrich the nation's education system through what he has dubbed the Antigua & Barbuda Youth Enlightenment Academy (ABYEA).

The Academy will be a finishing school geared towards augmenting the existing school system by encouraging civic pride and general responsibility in students through a series of lectures. A proposal for the Enlightenment Academy said it aims to create a new performance culture in Antigua & Barbuda.

Jardine said he was motivated by the apparent decline of moral fibre in the country's youth.

"When I was growing up having good manners was so important and it appears to me as though the more knowledgeable we become, the more disrespectful we become," he said.

The school will target students approximately between ages 11 and 16 attending secondary institutions.

"The focus is essentially the public school system starting from the last year in primary school, so we're looking to enlist the support of the parents and the government in getting to these youth," he said.

In efforts to avoid further burdening students in what is already a taxing school environment, Jardine said the school will have no exams or homework. Rather, students will have the option to rack up National Good Citizen Projects which will then be redeemable for scholarships.

The draft proposal for the ABYEA curriculum includes 27 modules ranging from teamwork to sexuality, relationships and family, to financial and resource management and entrepreneurship.

"We're trying to assist the traditional school system in the courses which are somewhat left behind because of the very nature of our development," he said.

“It’s not to load the kids with more of the traditional school work. It’s so when they go to school they’ll see the need for it. It’s not about just getting a job or making some money. It’s about more than personal development, it’s about the development of your community and your nation.

In an interview with *OBSERVER media* Jardine said the project was still in its conceptual stages and that he hoped to gain national support for the endeavour.

“I’m trying to stimulate a national debate and see if we can have some consensus on as to what we need to do to improve Antigua & Barbuda on a whole and specifically our youth,” he said.