



Summary of Proceedings

Public Hearing

Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration

Held on Wednesday, January 31, 2017

[10:35 a.m. to 12:42 p.m.]

The follow-up on the First Report of the JSC on Social Services and Public Administration on the current level of violence among students in schools with particular focus on physical and cyberbullying

Venue: A.N.R Robinson Meeting Room (East), Level 9, Office of the Parliament, Tower D, the Port of Spain International Waterfront Centre, 1A Wrightson Road, Port of Spain.

Committee Members

The following committee members were present:

1. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir – Chairman
2. Mr. Esmond Forde, MP – Vice-Chairman
3. Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine, MP
4. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP
5. Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith, MP
6. Ms. Khadijah Ameen
7. Ms. Allyson West

Witnesses who appeared

The following officials were present:

*Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration
(Including Education, Health, Gender, Tourism, Public Administration, Labour, Culture,
Community Development and other Social Services)*

Ministry of Education

- i. Mrs. Lenor Baptiste - Simmons – Permanent Secretary
- ii. Mr. John Roopchan - Chief Education Officer (Ag.)
- iii. Mr. John Thompson - Director of School Supervision
- iv. Ms. Darlene Smith - Guidance Officer II
- v. Mrs. Theresa Neblett -Skinner - Curriculum Coordinator
- vi. Mr. Gerald Phillip - Curriculum Officer/Lead, ICT in Education
- vii. Mrs. Leticia Rodriguez-Cupid - Special Education Coordinator
- viii. Ms. Avril Rahim - Director, Legal

Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association

- i. Mr. Lysnley A. Doodhai - President
- ii. Ms. Kyrila Robertson - 2nd Vice-President
- iii. Mr. Fitzroy Daniel - General Secretary

The National Parent Teacher Association

- i. Mrs. Raffiena Ali-Boodoosingh - National President
- ii. Mr. Clarence Mendoza - National 1st Vice-President
- iii. Mr. Shawn Campbell - National Education Officer

Key Issues Discussed

The following are the key subject areas/issues discussed during the hearing:

Issues discussed with the Ministry of Education

- i. The Ministry's review of and efforts to implement the recommendations made in the Committee's First Report;

- ii. The acknowledgment of the Committee's recommendation to develop a holistic school approach which encourages collaboration between stakeholders on initiatives to reduce the incidence of violence and indiscipline in schools;
- iii. The Ministry's continued engagement of stakeholders to facilitate creative and workable initiatives to create a peaceful environment within schools;
- iv. The School-Based Management System as a mechanism to democratize educational institutions and create a peaceful space in which learning is enhanced.
- v. The School-Based Management System as a means to facilitate the development of policies regarding school violence and indiscipline. The Ministry is aware that some schools are more advanced than others in their development and implementation of a School-Based Management System;
- vi. The integration of data-driven strategies to ensure the best learning environment for students;
- vii. That Principals and Teachers have been mandated to report on instances of physical and cyberbullying within schools;
- viii. The need for greater collaboration between the Ministry, the TTUTA¹ and the NPTA² as it relates to data collection with respect to school-based violence;
- ix. The continued prevalence of physical and cyberbullying in schools. However, the Ministry noted a decrease in school violence and indiscipline;
- x. The implementation of a National Strategy to specifically address physical and cyberbullying in schools;
- xi. The development and implementation of Discipline Plans in all Primary and Secondary schools, at the levels of the education districts and the Ministry;

¹ Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association

² National Parent Teacher Association

- xii. All schools are mandated to develop its own discipline plan. It was reported that 444 Primary and 125 Secondary schools have developed a School Discipline Plan;
- xiii. There are 7 Disciplinary Committees established at all education districts.
- xiv. The reporting relationship between the Ministry and School Disciplinary Committees;
- xv. The procedure to address reports of school violence which are recorded by the School Disciplinary Committees;
- xvi. That a Guide of Operation is utilized by District Supervisors;
- xvii. The ability of schools to identify remedial strategies for the rehabilitation of offending students;
- xviii. That the concept of 'restorative justice' is a critical part of the rehabilitation process for students enrolled in Learning Enhancement Centres (LECs);
- xix. That the SSSD³ provides rehabilitative support to both parents and students, for example through Parenting Education Programmes. Furthermore, the Ministry conducted multiple home visits to parents and children as a part of the intervention and rehabilitation process;
- xx. The need for an inter-ministerial approach to address the prevalence of violence and indiscipline in schools;
- xxi. The existence of multiple vacant specialist positions within the Ministry. The SSSD is severely understaffed;
- xxii. The ratio of students to Guidance Councillors. Currently, one (1) social worker is assigned to six-hundred (600) students;

³ Student Support Services Division

- xxiii. The attempts made by the Ministry to fill vacant positions as it relates to Guidance Councillors and Social Workers.
- xxiv. The fact that many Teachers are employed on one month contracts;
- xxv. The existence of a mobile phone and social media policy. The policy advocates the responsible use of mobile phones by students;
- xxvi. A zero tolerance policy with regard to the inappropriate use of social media;
- xxvii. The integration of modules on Visual and Performance Art and Health and Family Life into the curriculum. The Guidance curriculum is utilized in schools to promote anger management, ethics, appropriate behaviour and morality in schools;
- xxviii. The review of the Primary School curriculum in 2013;
- xxix. The implementation of a positive reinforcement system in schools. This is done through tangible and intangible reward systems e.g. being selected as class prefect;
- xxx. The issue of absenteeism among teachers and the need to better monitor their punctuality and attendance. The use of substitute teachers to address the issue of teacher absenteeism in the interim;
- xxxi. The process for the reintegration of students who have been on medical leave;
- xxxii. The high level of admittance to the LECs in the North-Eastern district; and
- xxxiii. The need for timely intervention for victims and perpetrators of violence in schools.

Issues discussed with the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association

- i. The concerns of TTUTA as it relates to the general prevalence and daily reports of physical and cyberbullying in schools;

- ii. The Association noted that the prevalence of physical and cyberbullying in schools has not change subsequent to the Committee's First Report;
- iii. The need for an increase in efforts to address the prevalence of school violence;
- iv. A lack of empirical data on the current level of school violence;
- v. Over 100 vacant posts within schools (e.g. Deans) and the Teaching Service Commission's inability to fill these vacant posts. Vacant posts remain unfilled subsequent to interviews conducted during June and July 2017;
- vi. Instances of school violence being reported to the Association as it relates to violence against teachers. Reports of violence against teachers to recorded with the TTPS. However, violence against teachers has since stabilized;
- vii. The absence of TTUTA representation during School Disciplinary Committee meetings;
- viii. Disciplinary Committees are not functioning as required and mandated;
- ix. That the SSSD of MoE does not have adequate staff to effectively address the prevalence of school violence;
- x. The need for the concept of 'restorative justice' to be considered as a means to rehabilitate perpetrators of physical and cyberbullying in schools. 40 teachers were exposed to restorative justice training;
- xi. The absence of representation for the TTUTA in the strategic planning process;
- xii. The need to enhance public awareness of School-Based Management Committees and their role as it relates to physical and cyberbullying in schools;
- xiii. The notion that cyberbullying acts as a trigger for physical violence amongst students;
- xiv. The need for legislative provisions whereby the act of cyberbullying is made a criminal offense;

- xv. The role of the Association in addressing teacher punctuality and absenteeism.
- xvi. Teachers present for duty are forced to perform extra duties as a result of the high prevalence of teacher absenteeism within schools.

Issues discussed with the National Parent Teacher Association

- i. The need for stakeholders to take a more progressive in order to better facilitate the needs of students;
- ii. Members of the PTA remain unaware of the operations of School-Based Management teams within Schools;
- iii. The lack of communication between school Principals and members of the PTA;
- iv. Training was provided by the MoE to PTA members on the School-Based Management System;
- v. The lack of communication between the NPTA and district School Disciplinary Committees. The NPTS is not aware of the operations of the 7 district disciplinary committees;
- vi. There are 300 PTAs affiliated with the NPTA. However, not all PTAs are affiliated with the Association;
- vii. The extreme trauma affecting students that is associated with physical and cyberbullying in schools;
- viii. A regular monthly meeting between the Association and MoE;
- ix. The Association has observed a reduction in the level of suspension of students in schools;
- x. Training provided by the Association to better equip its staff to address the prevalence of physical and cyberbullying. Training in the support and rehabilitation of victims and perpetrators of school violence was also provided;

- xi. The lack of support from parents as relates to addressing the prevalence of school violence;
- xii. The Association's use of social media to promote the issues surrounding school violence and indiscipline;
- xiii. The need for the Association to get more involved in the affairs of the household as it relates to students who are victims and perpetrators of physical and cyberbullying;
- xiv. The need for training to be provided to students in the ethics of phone use and maintenance of a positive social media presence;
- xv. The perennial importance of communication between parents and children;
- xvi. The need for parents to be allotted appropriate time off from work to attend PTA meetings. Currently, an *ad hoc* system exists whereby parents are allotted time off to attend PTA meetings;
- xvii. The Association's recommendation for the establishment of a Parental Academy;
- xviii. The current inability of schools to obtain substitute teachers in the absence of substantive teachers.

Recommendations proffered during the Public Hearing

The following recommendations emanated from the discussions:

- i. That statistics be collected on the current level of school violence;
- ii. That there be greater collaboration between the Ministry of Education, the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association, the National Parent Teacher Association and other relevant stakeholders as it relates to addressing the ongoing issue of violence and indiscipline in schools;

- iii. That the concept of restorative justice be utilized as a mechanism for the rehabilitation of perpetrators of physical and cyberbullying in schools;
- iv. That all relevant stakeholders are engaged by district School Disciplinary Committees regarding violence in schools;
- v. That the use of mobile phones by students be limited or restricted during school hours;
- vi. That consideration be given to the inclusion of modules on Anger Management, Ethics, Appropriate Behaviour and Morality in the national curriculum. Furthermore, that counselling with components on Visual and Performance Art as well as Health and Family Life be utilized to assist in the reduction of violence amongst students;
- vii. That school support staff play a more active role in addressing the issue of violence and indiscipline in schools.

View the Hearing

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube channel via the following link:

https://youtu.be/UPNHFO_odUE

Contact the Committee's Secretary

jscspa@tpparliament.org or 624-7275 Ext. 2283

Committees Unit

February 5, 2018