



**Summary of Proceedings
Public Hearing**

Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration

Held on Wednesday March 16, 2016

Inquiry: An inquiry into the current level of violence among students in schools with particular focus on physical and cyberbullying.

Venue: The public hearing was held on Wednesday March 16, 2016 from 1:40 p.m. to 3:41 p.m. in the J. Hamilton Maurice Room, Mezzanine Floor, 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. Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine, MP
3. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP
4. Ms. Khadijah Ameen
5. Mr. Hafeez Ali

Witnesses who appeared

The following officials of the National Council of Parent-Teachers Associations (NPTA) appeared before the Committee:

- Ms. Zena Ramatali - President
- Ms. Maureen Taylor-Ryan – 1st Vice-President
- Ms. Anna Maria Jackson – General Secretary
- Mr. Theophilus Nedd - Member

The following officials of the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association (TTUTA) appeared before the Committee:

- Mr. Davanand Sinanan - President
- Mr. Martin Lum Kin – 3rd Vice President

The following officials of the Anti-Bullying Association of Trinidad and Tobago (ABATT) also appeared before the Committee:

- Ms. Yvonne Joseph – Director
- Dr. Alicia Martin – Senior Serving Member

Key Issues Discussed

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

- i. The development of an education system that “leaves no child behind” and ensures that all children go to school and have an opportunity to take advantage of a rich and diverse curriculum;
- ii. The performance of teachers is assessed against the delivery of the school curriculum which encourages teachers to focus on completing the syllabus and achieving a high examination pass rate. Little focus is placed on the developmental needs of the child;
- iii. A radical overhaul to the approach to education is needed;
- iv. Challenges faced in enforcing the National School Code of Conduct;
- v. The refusal of some schools to have PTAs and the need to have structured PTAs that are not dominated by the principals of schools;
- vi. The need to provide teachers with specialised training to handle violent/deviant behaviour;
- vii. Training programmes are organised by TTUTA for teachers;
- viii. Teacher absenteeism and access to substitute teachers; it is easier to source substitute teachers for primary schools than for secondary schools;

- ix. The need to institute special arrangements to allow parents to get time-off from their place of employment to attend to urgent matters in school without incurring losses in remuneration;
- x. The possibility of holding PTA meetings on Saturdays to encourage greater attendance;
- xi. Collaboration with the police is needed to serve suspension notices to parents who do not respond to requests made by Principals to collect suspension notices;
- xii. The need for educators to acquire a greater appreciation of the environment/community in which students are being nurtured;
- xiii. Neglect of under-achieving students leads to increases in school violence;
- xiv. More time and attention must be given to “at risk students” and students with special needs;
- xv. The purpose of the ‘Out of School Suspension programme’ is to provide an alternative and suitable learning environment for students on suspension;
- xvi. The need for sufficient guidance officers, psychologists and social workers to support schools;
- xvii. The concept of ‘Anonymous Anti-Bullying Clubs’ in schools, proposed by the Anti-bullying Association;
- xviii. None of the stakeholders agreed with the use of boot camps as a strategy for rehabilitating violent or delinquent students; and
- xix. The procedure followed by teachers for dealing with violent situations in a classroom.

Recommendations proffered during the Public Hearing

The following recommendations emanated from the discussions:

- i. that all schools should have a PTA that holds regular meetings;
- ii. there should be at least one person (parent/guardian or otherwise) who can be called upon to engage with school administrators and/or account for a student;

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

- iii. that the internal school disciplinary systems should be reviewed to empower members of the student body such as Prefects and or the Head Boys/Girls to act as mentors and guardians to the rest of the student population;
- iv. that school prefects be used to monitor classes when teachers are temporarily absent from the classroom during the school day;
- v. that there be specialised training for teachers to handle violent children and those with special needs;
- vi. that there should be a sustained programme that involves psychologists assessing the behavioral patterns of school children 12 years and under with a view to detecting violent tendencies at an early age;
- vii. that remedial interventions be provided to students who have difficulties with their school work;
- viii. that a School Leadership Institute be established to train principals to be better leaders and managers.

View the Hearing

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

<https://youtu.be/xeUzgcWzTL4>

Contact the Committee's Secretary

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Committees Unit

March 16, 2016