

**The Ministry of Education’s Response to the recommendations/comments contained in the Fourth Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an inquiry into the prevalence of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) amongst school students and into the general services administration to treat STDs in Trinidad and Tobago**

The response from the Ministry of Education on the recommendations/comments contained in the Report is outlined below:

**OBJECTIVE 1: To determine the prevalence of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) including HIV/AIDS amongst secondary school students:**

- A. Response from the Ministry of Health.**
- B. That there be greater collaboration between the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health to better equip teachers to effectively deal with sexual behavior among the student population and with students and co-workers who are infected with Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs); and.. (p.28)**

The Ministry of Education (MoE) recognises the importance of better equipping teachers to deal with sexual behaviour among the student population through collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MoH). In April 2017, the MoH together with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), UNFPA and MoE collaborated on a presentation on teaching *Comprehensive Sexuality Education* (CSE). This was part of the roll-out of sensitising administrators and teachers of Forms 1 to 3 employed at government secondary schools on the implementation of Health & Family Life Education (HFLE), with a focus on sexuality and sexual health. In the “Sexuality and Sexual Health” module of the HFLE Curricula, students are exposed to positive life skills such as responsible decision making, problem solving and leadership with regard to their sexuality and sexual health. The MoH continues to be a valuable resource for teachers and administrators on information relating to sexuality and sexual health.

In 2001, the National Policy on Health and Family Life Education proposed the establishment of a National HFLE Committee. It is recommended that the members of the National HFLE Committee be drawn from the various state ministries and CSOs under the aegis of a National HFLE Coordinator. One of the key Ministries on the

proposed Committee is the Ministry of Health (MOH). The National HFLE Committee will assist the National HFLE Coordinator with the implementation of HFLE project/ plans at the national and community level for primary and secondary schools. Further collaboration among the MoH's Public Education Committee and the Divisions of Student Support Services and the Curriculum Planning and Development of the MoE, to provide training and support to teachers in HFLE from Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) to secondary level will assist in positively influencing sexual behaviour among school students.

In January 2018, the Ministry accepted an invitation to be part of a MoH Committee to plan a pre-Carnival programme to reduce the incidences of STD's or STI's (Sexually Transmitted Infections) including HIV/AIDS. This programme will include the continued use of RapPort facilitators (under the Ministry of Health) to target at risk schools using an interactive approach including schools in School Improvement Project - Laventille.

**C. That social media be utilized as a communication platform for the promotion of abstinence, safer sex and furthermore, boost awareness of the various health risks associated with unprotected sex (p.29).**

The MoE through our Facebook page and our MoE website [www.moe.gov.tt](http://www.moe.gov.tt) has educational information in relation to healthy sexual practices and will continue to utilise this medium to sensitise students and the general population. UNFPA, one (1) of the partners of the Ministry of Education, has developed a mobile application that is being customized for circulation to students. This mobile application will contain material pertaining to puberty for males and females and contact information on organisations such as Ministry of Health, Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, Childline, Family Planning Association of Trinidad and Tobago, Pan American Health

Organisation, World Health Organisation, where they may access information and support.

**OBJECTIVE 2: To assess strategies the line Ministries is implementing to reduce the rate of infection amongst this cohort:**

- A. We recommend that a continuous education approach be adopted in respect of teachers who deliver HFLE. This approach would ensure that existing and new teachers are equipped with the most current knowledge and skills associated with family life education. To circumvent financial constraints, the MoE and MoH can seek to incorporate online resources into teacher training and/or seek technical assistance from International organizations such as the Pan American Health Organization.**
  
- B. The implementation of a National School Health Policy and establishment of an Adolescent Health Service (p.38) ....**

The Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health have collaborated over the years to implement a National School Health Policy. However, the Policy is currently being expanded to include a governance framework.

- C. In light of the reservations expressed by some denominational schools and parents with reference to participation of students in the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE), the Committee recommends that an appropriate forum be established to facilitate dialogue on such issues between Denominational Boards, the MoE, MoH, Trinidad and Tobago Parent Teacher Association, T&TUTA and other relevant stakeholder with a view to determining appropriate ways of teaching the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) Programme in these schools (p. 38).**

The Ministry of Education (MoE) agrees with the recommendation to establish an appropriate forum where all its stakeholders are able to hold discussions and build consensus on strategies to teach the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) Programme in schools. It is proposed that the relevant stakeholders be invited to meet at least once per year. Specialists in this field will be a part of the conversation to treat with the concerns of the different stakeholders.