Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Digital Transformation

PADT: 4/1/98 Vol. I

September 28, 2021

Ms. Jacqui-Sampson-Meiguel
Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration
Office of the Parliament
Parliamentary Complex
Cabildo Building
St. Vincent Street
Port-of-Spain

Dear Ms. Sampson-Meiguel,

First Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an inquiry into the effects of the hybrid learning system on student performance in government and government-assisted schools during the revised COVID-19 restrictions

Further to your letter Parl: 14/3/56-4 dated July 12, 2021 on the subject at caption, please find enclosed the Ministry's response to your requests.

An e-copy is simultaneously submitted to the cott@ttparliament.org for your attention and records.

Sincerely

....

Mr. Claudelle McKellar
Permanent Secretary (Ag.)

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Response to the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration (SSPA)

First Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an inquiry into the effects of the hybrid learning system on student performance in government and government-assisted schools during the revised COVID-19 restrictions

Request for Written Response

September 2021

A Response to the JSC SSPA on an inquiry into the hybrid/blended learning system, on students' Performance in government and government- assited schools during the revised Covid 19 restrictions

Request for Written Submission

No.	Recommendations	Page No.	Ministry of Digital Transformation
	Objective 1 **To assess the effectiveness of the hybrid/blended learning system used by government and government-assisted schools in curriculum delivery.** (a) The Support system for Special Needs students to be strengthened via greater collaboration among stakeholders to improve educational outcomes for Special Needs students. This can be done in the form of a multi-sectoral taskforce charged with the responsibility of ensuring that a greater percentage of Special Needs students are in receipt of educational support.		(a) TATT will consider expanding its persons with disabilities PWD universal service initiative (USI) to include a wider range of special needs students with disabilities. The USI involves the provision of a subsidy for the purchase of smart phone assistive technologies. (a) iGovTT will make consideration for Stakeholders for provisioning of facilities: Access Centres, Business Partnership- devices and ISPs. MoE stakeholders: Analytics via Teams for education for effectiveness and reach: reports on student's adherence to the platform: attendance to classes and submission of assignments online and Reports on parents' access via region and schools. Taskforce assigned to accelerate adoption in schools with low utilization. (a) While there is a training and education component of TTWiFi which aims to create partnership with education and training stakeholders- Ministry of Education can use the National Training Agency, UWI open Campus, YTEPP to bring the relevant program delivery both virtual and in-person where applicable\feasible, however, the plan makes no specific mention of support or systems for special needs.

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		(a) The MoE acknowledges the useful ness of a multi-sectoral taskforce and supports the re-establishment of (multi-sectoral) National Task Force/Advisory Committee on Special Education to support/strengthen the work of the Special Education Unit. It is recommended that the a Task Force of this nature should be charged with responsibility to: 1. Review and revise policies, and design targeted programmes proposed by various stakeholder groups. 2. Implement the strategies identified to meet the identified needs of various disability groups. 3. Advance recommendations to address gaps in the provision of human, material and financial resources to support programme delivery etc., and 4. Evaluate the systems implemented to meet identified objectives for the improvement of special education service delivery.
	(e) The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation and the Internet Service Providers should conduct a feasibility study on the use of itinerant mobile hotspots to provide internet access in communities without connectivity.	(e) TATT's digital inclusion survey 2021 will identify communities without connectivity. TATT has a GIS (that is continuously updated) which identifies the current telecommunication infrastructure coverage for Trinidad and Tobago, based on submissions by the service providers. These tools can be used to inform the proposed feasibility study.

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	(e) The MoE takes note of this recommendation and would engage the Ministry of Digital Transformation to determine the efficacy of such research.
(h) The Ministry of Education in collaboration with stakeholders serving Special Needs students should conduct a gap analysis on the assistive technologies required by Special Needs students	(h) TATT can collaborate with the MDT/MoE, regarding the assistive technologies available via smartphones, currently used in TATT's PWD USF initiative.
(l) The Ministry of Education should use findings from research conducted on the hybrid/blended educational system to inform adjustments to the National Curriculum as it relates to both using ICTs in Education Delivery and equipping students for the knowledge-based economy.	(l) As part of TATT's Strategic Plan 2019-22, an initiative to influence the national secondary school curriculum, has commenced in 2021 with the engagement of the MOE in discussions regarding enhancement to the curriculum in the area of ICTs.
(n) The MOE should create an adapted curriculum to include application of information technology skills across disciplines.	(n) An adapated curriculum is expected to be an outcome of the initiative outline in (l) above.

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(o) The MOE in Collaboration with the MPADT should develop satellite schools using community centres, religious institutions and other community-based spaces that can facilitate adequate social distancing/ where students and parents can access learning resources.		(o) Should the MOE determine the need for such initiative, TATT can contribute to that collaborative effort.TATT, via its USF initiatives, is currently rolling out TTWiFi to primary schools without connectivity and engaging with ISPs to improve service to those where the connectivity does not meet the requirements. Additionally, TATT is rolling out ICT Access Centres in the following communities: Lopinot, Roxborough, Toco, Moruga, Fifth Company. These multipurpose centres will assist in providing free Wi-Fi and ICT access facilities to the community. (o) The Access Centre Program, apart from providing the ability to use technology, aims to focus on the needs of the community and create value for its residents which can manifest as being described but again under MOE's charge. The MoE takes note of this recommendation
Objective 2 **To compare and contrast student performance using traditional versus hybrid/blended learning systems for similar time periods** (b) The Ministry of Education should strengthen initiatives to train parents of vulnerable students on how to effectively use digital learning platforms. This solution may involve		(b) As part of TATT's USF initiative which provided 10,000 devices to the MOE for students of public schools, training videos were developed for recipients of the devices and their parents. These videos were produced collaboratively with NALIS and CyberSafeTT. These videos are currently available on the MOE educational platform, TATT's website and on YouTube. Although the videos were originally developed for recipients of devices, they will soon be extended to all students and parents, on the recommendation of the MOE. This is expected to be formally introduced to students in the new school term commencing in September 2021.

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	creating video tutorials that can be viewed on demand.	
	Objective 3 **To examine the systems and methods used to monitor and evaluate student performance in the hybrid/blended learning environment.** (c) Given the additional expense to procure software used to monitor and assess students, the MOE could consider collaborating with the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation and Private Sector Information Technology professionals to develop monitoring and evaluation software suitable to the local education environment.	(c) Already available via MOE's Teams for Education are full profiles of students and monitoring solutions for the full education triangle: Parents, Students and Teachers. Partnership with MOE, Microsoft and possibly MDT to rollout can be considered if this feature has value. This can also be synergised with an online course delivery platform which can track and keep history on learning paths. MoE did develop such a platform, and through the MEA, a community learning portal can also assist in that regard. (c) Inter-Ministerial collaboration and the engagement of the private sector for the development of software solutions would still incur a cost. As with the procurement of goods and services, the efficacy of the finding must still be determined at the end of the procurement process as government funds will be expended. The MoE will, however, continue to engage the Ministry of Digital Transformation on all matters related to education technology.

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(f) MOE needs to ensure teachers have hardware (computers/tablets) and maintenance needed to execute in the hybrid system. Teachers also need subvention for Wi-Fi access to be able to carry out their duties in the hybrid learning environment.	(f) iGovTT is only guided for procurement based on requests coming from MoE. Presently we are completing procurement for laptop devices and MiFi devices to the quantiies of 20,000. However, it is our understanding that this is for student use and not for teaching staff. MoE can confirm details and future plans. (f) The MoE has consistently provided access to hardware to teachers during face-to-face instruction and as well during the pandemic that saw the move towards online learning. To that end: - **2,725**, representing **45.27%** of all Primary School teachers accessed a MOE loaned laptop during the academic year **2020 / 2021.** - **3,731**, representing **59.90%** of all Secondary School teachers accessed a MOE loaned laptop during the academic year **2020 / 2021.**