



Summary of Proceedings

Public Hearing

Held on **Wednesday January 20, 2021** from **10:30 a.m. to 12:50 p.m.**

Subject matter: 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.

Venue: Virtual via the Zoom platform

Committee Members

The following Committee Members were present:

- Mr. Paul Richards
- Mr. Esmond Forde, MP
- Mr. Roger Munroe, MP
- Mr. Avinash Singh
- Mr. David Nakhid
- Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh, MP

Witnesses who appeared

The following officials of the Ministry of Education appeared:

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| • Mrs. Lisa Henry-David | Chief Education Officer (Ag.) |
| • Ms. Anna Singh | Director, Curriculum Planning and Development Division |
| • Mrs. Kamini Bhagaloo | Assistant Director, Division of Education Research and Evaluation |

The following officials of the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association appeared:

- Mrs. Antonia Tekah-De Freitas President

- Mr. Bradon Roberts Tobago Officer
- Mrs. Lisa Ibrahim-Joseph Education & Research Officer

The following officials of the Association of Principals of Public Secondary Schools of Trinidad and Tobago appeared:

- Mrs. Sherra Carrington-James President
- Ms. Patricia Pitt Secretary

The following officials of the National Primary Schools Principals Association appeared:

- Mr. Lance Mottley President
- Ms. Paula Kalkman 1st Vice President

Key Issues Discussed

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Ministry of Education (MOE)**:

Distribution of Electronic Devices to Students

- The MOE entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT) to provide 10,000 devices to students;
- The criteria for the distribution of the devices procured by the MOE and through the Adopt-a-School programme are as follows:
 - Students of examination classes (SEA, CSEC, CAPE) would have the first priority; and
 - A means test will determine the distribution of the devices in the second instance.
- The means test will consider the following when deciding to distribute the device to students:
 - Number of children in the household;
 - Financial ability of the caregiver;
 - Number of devices in the household; and
 - Whether the household is in receipt of grants.
- Funds are currently being prioritised for the purchase and distribution of devices rather than on acquiring software for student assessment and monitoring..

Challenges of students without access to internet or devices

- The MOE has not received feedback on the number of students who access the educational content provided via TTT, Trinidad Guardian and 91.1FM Talk City.
- Students who are unable to access educational resources due to their poor socio-economic situation were referred to the Student Support Services Division.

- vii. While the MOE collaborated with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS) on the development of the Means Test for the distribution of devices and the distribution of hampers to students in need, the MOE agrees that closer collaboration with the MSDFS with regard to supporting students in poor socio-economic situations, was required.

Assessment of Student Performance/ Participation

- viii. The MOE has encouraged teachers to focus on project-based assessments for online and remote classes.
- ix. The MOE's standardised assessment was restricted to certification and placement classes while examinations such as the National Test and National Certificate of Secondary Education (NCSE) were used for monitoring the performance of students.
- x. Guidelines were provided to the schools and teachers identifying areas in curriculum on which teachers should focus. Curriculum officers were available to lend assistance to teachers in adapting the curriculum to an online platform.
- xi. Student performance in SEA 2020 compared to SEA 2019:
 - a. There was a 2% reduction in the success rate for Mathematics and
 - b. A 9% reduction in Language Arts.
- xii. The decline in the Mathematics scores is a reflection of worldwide trends as this subject requires a more hands on approach to teaching.
- xiii. The MOE admitted that it would be difficult to credibly assess student performance based on the printed packages as, teachers are unsure if the exercises therein were completed independently by the student.
- xiv. MOE indicated that based on data collected in their ongoing survey with regard to class checks in secondary schools:
 - c. 50% did random class checks;
 - d. 32% did pre-arranged class checks;
 - e. 14% did a combination of random and pre-arranged class checks; and
 - f. 4% did not conduct class checks.

Remedial Assistance

- xv. The MOE provided the following assistance to teachers whose students were in need of remedial work:
 - g. Advised teachers on how diagnostic assessments should be conducted;
 - h. Provided advice and assistance on interpreting and teaching the curriculum;
 - i. Provided resources to teachers and schools and was available to communicate with teachers on the curriculum via online, phone and email; and
 - j. Advised teachers on assisting students who may have problems with literacy.

Challenges of Special Needs Students

- xvi. The Student Support Services Division (SSSD) of the MOE has been engaging special needs students via telephone and online platform and has also provided guideline videos to parents and teachers for these special needs students;
- xvii. The MOE indicated that the SSSD hotline has received an average of 50 calls per day on varying issues;
- xviii. Some special needs students require tactile support, which is not possible in the online environment;
- xix. Some parents of Special Needs students are not trained to meet the educational needs of their students.

Copyright Issues

- xx. With regard to the copyright restrictions on the material photocopied by teachers, the MOE have been providing copyright free resources for teachers and encouraged teachers to utilise open educational platforms.

Underperforming students and schools

- xxi. The MOE indicated that an adapted curriculum is utilised in schools which received a significant number of students in the Form One level who performed under 30% in the SEA examinations;
- xxii. There are currently 56 secondary schools that are utilising the adapted curriculum.

Examinations

- xxiii. The MOE stated that it continues to negotiate with the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) to treat with the learning challenges faced by students especially given that it is anticipated that these challenges will be exacerbated during the 2021 examinations;
- xxiv. The MOE advised that it has not received official feedback from CXC with regards the Council's decision on how it intends to treat with the educational issues faced by students at a regional level;
- xxv. The MOE indicated that it has changed the format for the 2021 SEA examinations; reduced the number of questions and indicated to teachers the format for the Creative Writing question.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association (TTUTA)**

Assessment of Student/Teacher Performance/ Participation

- i. There is a need to standardize rubrics for the assessment of students.
- ii. The use of timed assessments mitigates against parents assisting students with online assessments.

- iii. The software needed to monitor and assess students is costly, as such teachers and principals have been using moral suasion to encourage honesty in the assessment process.
- iv. The MOE has not collaborated with TTUTA on the framework for teacher assessment in the online environment and would like to see a more collaborative, rather than punitive approach to teacher assessment.
- v. The MOE needs to consider a macro approach to resilience planning by looking at the training and development of teachers and partnering with ministerial and non-ministerial stakeholders.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Association of Principals of Public Secondary Schools of Trinidad and Tobago (APPSSTT)**:

Challenges of Students/Parents with online/remote learning

- i. Some Secondary School students are absent because they have started dropped out of school and are working to support their families. APPSSTT estimates that in some districts 10-12% of students are currently working.
- ii. Beyond distribution of devices, there must be a drive to reach out to parents on the importance of education as this is not a priority in some households.
- iii. Some families have devices and connections for internet service but are unable to afford to pay for access.
- iv. Some parents are unable to collect packages during the stipulated hours. As at some schools, hundreds of packages are left uncollected.
- v. Additionally, there is also the issue of parents who collect packages but do not return the packages within the stipulated time period which puts a burden on the teacher who has to check the late submissions as well as the new submissions submitted by the students.
- vi. Of the packages that are returned, teachers are not always able to determine whether the student completed the work on their own.
- vii. There must be a greater collaboration among stakeholders to improve educational outcomes for students.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **National Primary Schools Principals Association (NAPSPA)**:

Assessment of Student/Teacher Performance/ Participation

- i. The difficulty faced by teachers to engage students who are utilising the printed packages.
- ii. Securing the participation of students at the primary school level in online or distance learning was more difficult as the students were not independent learners like those in the secondary schools.
- iii. Principals perform class checks for online line classes in the following ways:
 - a. Routine or random 'sit-ins' during a live classroom meeting;

- b. Review the teacher assessment and feedback from students; and
- c. Oral questions to students to determine how well the pupils are learning.

Student Absence

- iv. Some of the reasons for student absence from the online learning environment include:
 - d. Parents who work are unable to supervise their children;
 - e. Parents not having the resources to help their children.

Recommendations to Ministry of Education

- v. The NAPSPA suggested the following recommendation to the MOE:
 - f. Accelerate the plans for the distribution of devices and ensure that devices have connections to service providers as there are parents who are unable to afford internet services;
 - g. Collaborate with internet service providers to determine the areas which are outside their internet coverage areas and consider a solution to allow for these areas to be included in their coverage zones; and
 - h. Provide a timetable of the classes broadcast via, television and radio to schools so that they can be disseminated to teachers and students.

Challenges of schools with printed packages

- vi. Several primary schools are without photocopier machines or do not have the funding to maintain the machines. As such, these schools are not able to print packages for students without devices.

This public hearing can be viewed on demand via our YouTube Channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cv9W3bz2HSI>

Contact the Committee's Secretary

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Committees Unit

January 21, 2021.