



Summary of Proceedings

Public Hearing

Held on **Wednesday February 17, 2021** from **10:22 a.m. to 12:29 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. Avinash Singh
- Mr. David Nakhid
- Mr. Rudranath Indarsingh, MP
- Mrs. Penelope Beckles-Robinson, MP

The following Committee Members were absent:

- Mr. Esmond Forde, MP
- Mr. Roger Munroe, MP
- Mr. Rohan Sinanan

Witnesses who appeared

The following official of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (SDMS) Board of Education appeared:

- Mr. Jeewan Ramdhanie Assistant Secretary

The following official of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Trinidad and Tobago appeared:

- Mr. Ravi Rambarran Secretary

The following official of the Presbyterian Primary Schools' Board of Education appeared:

- Ms. Geeta K. Maharaj General Secretary

The following official of the Baptist Board of Management appeared:

- Mr. Michael Hills-Wilson Secretary

The following official of the St. Joseph Cluny Board of Education appeared:

- Ms. Debra East Principal (Secretary) Ag.

The following official of the Anjuman Sunnat ul Jamaat Association (ASJA) Board of Education appeared:

- Mr. Rahimool Hosein General Secretary

The following official of the Anglican Board of Education appeared:

- Mrs. Avion Alexander-Titus Member (Representative of the Anglican Teachers Association)

The following official of the Presbyterian Secondary Schools' Board of Education appeared:

- Mr. Joel Bajnath General Secretary

Key Issues Discussed

The following are **general issues expressed during the hearing**:

Communication between the Ministry of Education and Denominational Boards:

- i. The Ministry of Education communicates directly with Principals. However, information communicated to Principals is not consistently shared with Denominational Boards;
- ii. The Boards expressed interest in having access to the statistics submitted by the Ministry of Education to the Committee in respect of this inquiry;
- iii. Boards have not received communication regarding criteria for the proposed means test used by the Ministry to assess which students should be given devices;
- iv. Greater guidance is needed from the Ministry of Education on standardized methods for evaluating students and performance management arrangements for teachers.

Additional Support Required:

- i. The online environment has intensified the need for intervention from Student Support Services;
- ii. Schools require individualised ICT support;
- iii. There is an urgent need for school vacancies to be filled, particularly middle management positions; and

Collaboration Among Denominational Boards:

- i. Boards do not have the capacity to share financial resources but they collaborate on developing solutions to their shared challenges; and
- ii. There has been a proposal developed to secure low-cost internet connectivity for Denominational Schools.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha(SDMS) Board of Education:**

Access to Devices and Connectivity:

- i. Student access to devices and connectivity often depends on a combination of geographical and economic factors;
- ii. There has been an improvement in students accessing devices and connectivity via assistance from the SDMS Board, the Ministry of Education and parents;
- iii. Approximately 30% of SDMS students are without devices. These students are mainly in the lower classes in the Primary Schools and lower forms in the Secondary Schools;
- iv. 50 devices were donated by private citizens and 500 devices were acquired from the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT);

Transition to Hybrid Learning:

- i. The transition to hybrid learning in the upper forms has been good; and
- ii. Schools have been adjusted timetables so that online learning does not clash with face-to-face learning.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Trinidad and Tobago:**

General Information:

- i. The Arya Pratinidhi Sabha is responsible for nine (9) Primary schools and One (1) Early Childhood Centre. These schools are primarily located in rural areas;

Access to Devices and Connectivity:

- i. There has been mixed experiences with the connectivity and devices;
- ii. For example, all students at the Ghandi Memorial (Aranguez) have access to both devices or connectivity. The General Secretary attributes this to the higher socio-economic status in that area. However, in the Barrackpore/Rio Claro area, many students do not have access to devices and/or internet connectivity;
- iii. Approximately 15 % of students do not have access to the online learning environment; Many of these students were under-performing prior to the pandemic. This amounts to approximately 200 students without devices;
- iv. The Arya Pratinidhi Sabha recommends a targeted intervention by the Ministry of Education for students who are not accessing education, particularly those of low socio-economic status;
- v. The majority of devices acquired by the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha were donated by the Private Sector;

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Online Learning Environment:

- i. One of the advantages of the online learning environment is that students have become more computer literate;
- ii. One of the disadvantages of the online learning environment is that assessment tools are unreliable as teachers suspect that some parents have been assisting their children; and
- iii. The online learning environment is not ideal for Primary School students.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Baptist Board of Management**:

Access to Devices and Connectivity:

- i. Approximately 75% of students under the purview of the Baptist Board of Management have been able to access the online learning environment;

Response to Printed Packages:

- i. Parents have been collecting printed packages. However, some of the completed packages are not returned to the schools in a timely manner; and

- ii. The Baptist Board of Management recommends that Social Workers should be assigned to visiting the homes of students whose packages are not returned on time.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Presbyterian Primary Schools' Board of Education:**

Access to Devices and Connectivity:

- i. Approximately 87% of students are online. The remaining students lack devices and/or reliable internet connectivity;
- ii. The Presbyterian Primary Schools have received devices for approximately 3 schools through the Adopt-a-School Programme;
- iii. 1/3 of schools have received just over 300 devices from the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT);
- iv. Standard 5 students have been given preference to receive donated devices;
- v. Approximately 2,500 Standard 5 students received devices from sources including the Ministry of Education and Private Sector;

Response to Printed Packages:

- vi. The schools have consistently prepared packages for students without access to the online learning environment. However, there is a challenge whereby parents are not collecting or returning these packages for correction within a timely manner;

Additional Support Required:

- vii. Schools need more support from the Student Support Services Division to assist with behavioural and other challenges. Additional challenges faced by students include a lack of parental supervision, stress and absenteeism;
- viii. The Presbyterian Primary Schools' Board of Education recommends having more guidance counsellors and social workers assigned to each school district; and
- ix. One concern with the anticipated return of Standard 5 students in April is that the proposed number of medical personnel to service each school district is insufficient.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **St. Joseph Cluny Board of Education:**

Access to Devices and Connectivity:

- i. Most students have access to both devices and the internet. These devices were provided by the Board, Alumni, and other stakeholders;
- ii. 4 of these devices were donated through the Adopt-a-School programme;
- iii. Some students are using mobile phones to access classes;

Response to Printed Packages

- i. The package system was not effective as there was inconsistency in students' work being returned to the school;

Mental Health Concerns

- i. Some students have been experiencing isolation and other mental health challenges during the transition to online learning;
- ii. Life Skills workshops have been implemented to support students' mental health;
- iii. There is a compulsory period each week where students meet with their class teachers to address any issues;

Transition to Hybrid Learning:

- i. Teachers assigned to upper-forms are required to set asynchronous work for online students on the days they teach face-to-face;
- ii. Teachers are not allowed to cover new topics online when their students are required to attend school face-to-face sessions for labs, SBAs or Internal Assessments;
- iii. Form 5 students have not had the opportunity to sit mock exams. They have been exposed only to continuous and formative assessments. However, CSEC exams will be summative in nature;

Review of Grant Allocations:

- i. A review of grant allocations to schools is necessary as Cluny Schools have not received grants needed to run labs. With Covid-19 protocols in place, students need to have individual lab stations and previous allocations are insufficient to cover this cost.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Anjuman Sunnat ul Jamaat Association (ASJA) Board of Education:**

General Information:

- i. ASJA is responsible for thirteen (13) Government-assisted schools- seven (7) Primary Schools and six (6) Secondary Schools;

Access to Devices and Connectivity:

- i. The majority of ASJA students are able to access devices. However, the Board is concerned that the children who are not able to access devices are at a disadvantage;
- ii. Less than 10% of students are without devices;
- iii. The majority of devices donated to ASJA schools came from the Private Sector;
- iv. Teachers are adjusting well to the online learning environment;

Adapting to the Online Learning Environment

- i. One of the advantages of the online learning environment is that teachers are able to access teaching resources quickly to address questions that come up in real time;
- ii. Some teachers face a challenge in balancing time between online teaching and collecting/returning packages;
- iii. Some teachers have had to subscribe to personal Zoom accounts in order to facilitate one-on-one meetings with students as the Ministry of Education's platform does not allocate enough time;

Transition to Hybrid Learning:

- i. There have been no reported problems with the return to face-to-face lessons for some upper-form students; and
- ii. Timetables have been adjusted to avoid clashes between face-to-face and online learning.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Anglican Board of Education**:

Access to Devices and Connectivity:

- i. There has been an increase in the number of children who are able to access synchronous online learning. However, this increase has been attributed to the use of mobile devices;
- ii. Between 25% and 30% of students do not have access to devices;
- iii. Access to devices has been inconsistent due to devices being damaged;

Students from Vulnerable Groups:

- i. Depending on the school district, there is a disparity in the level of responsiveness from Student Support Services to student absence from the online learning environment;
- ii. There are students who the schools have not been able to reach at all. These students are often from families of lower socio-economic status;
- iii. There are homes where students have access to both devices and internet connectivity but do not log in for classes due to lack of supervision or low value placed on education by their families;

- iv. Interventions from Student Support Services often take place with the student. However, including other family members in the interventions will be more effective in resolving challenges experienced by the student.

Adapting to the Online Learning Environment:

- i. Some students take up to an entire term to become acclimatised to the online learning environment thereby requiring teachers to re-teach certain subjects;
- ii. Performance Task Assessments are used to evaluate students. In this form of assessment, students meet with teachers one-on-one online and answer comprehensive questions based on skills taught throughout the term; and

Response to Printed Packages:

- i. Packages are effective for reinforcement of lessons but are ineffective as a means of teaching new concepts, particularly for younger students;

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Presbyterian Secondary Schools' Board of Education**:

Access to Devices and Connectivity:

- i. The majority of students have received devices. However, connectivity remains a challenge for some students;
- ii. 95% of students attend online classes;

Adapting to the Online Learning Environment:

- i. Parents are contacted when students do not sign-in for classes;
- ii. Assessment tools include project-based assignments and require students to submit hard copy assignments to the school; and

Transition to Hybrid Learning:

- i. One of the challenges with students returning to in-person learning has been the need to hire private safety officers and additional staff to maintain Covid-19 protocols.

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMhZRffMXC8>

Contact the Committee's Secretary

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Committees Unit

February 24, 2021.