

PRESIDENT: ANTONIA TEKAH-DE FREITAS
GENERAL SECRETARY: KADY BECKLES

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO UNIFIED TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

Head Office: Corner Fowler Street & Southern Main Road, Curepe, Trinidad West Indies. Phone: 663-2738, 645-2134, Fax: 662-1813

South Office: 32 Donaldson Street, San Fernando, Trinidad. Phone: 657-5086, 657-6033. Tel/Fax: 657-6033

Tobago: Corner Kirk Street and Mc Kay Hill, Scarborough. Phone: 639-3448. Tel/Fax: 639-3468

E-mail: gensec.ttuta@gmail.com

June 2nd, 2020

Our Ref. _____

Please Quote in your reply

Date: _____

STATEMENT BY TTUTA ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE CSEC AND CAPE EXAMINATIONS IN JULY 2020.

The onset of the COVID 19 pandemic has created circumstances that are not what we are accustomed to in Trinidad and Tobago. Many adjustments to our normal way of life have been made in an effort to protect lives.

Our education system has not been immune to the vicissitudes of this situation. Schools were declared closed from March 13th and are scheduled to reopen on September 1st. Such a closure has many implications for our students writing examinations both at the Primary and Secondary schools. Our education professionals have shown their willingness to go beyond the call of duty for the education of their students. This has been demonstrated by the tremendous effort educators have made to continue engaging their charges through the many forums available to them.

TTUTA salutes the teachers of Trinidad and Tobago for their sterling service.

The Ministry of Education has taken the position that the CSEC AND CAPE Examinations as administered by CXC, will be held in July 2020. Although TTUTA pleaded with the Ministry to consider the readiness of all pupils to comfortably and confidently sit these examinations, these entreaties have fallen on deaf ears.

TTUTA reasserts its positions that -

- The efforts of our educators to facilitate emergency remote teaching was an ad hoc, emergency measure in this time of crisis. Not all students would have been engaged, for a range of reasons. It is therefore unfair for the Ministry of Education to presume that all students would be in a state of preparedness to do the examinations.
- Having students return to school to go immediately into 'examination mode', without first attending to the psychosocial needs of the students is inhumane.

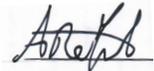
- To ensure that **all** students have a fair chance of success at the examination, students should be given enough time to interact with their teachers to allow for the completion of School Based Assessments (SBAs) and receive the necessary support for examination preparation.
- Administering the CSEC and CAPE examinations in July 2020 will only serve to exacerbate the inequalities experienced by students who were not involved in emergency remote learning due to lack of devices, lack of internet access, or who experienced psychosocial challenges. The ‘stay at home’ measures instituted by the state for public safety had diverse impacts on different sectors of society. The welfare of many should not be sacrificed for the self-interests of some.
- TTUTA is not convinced that all systems are properly in place for the sanitisation and repopulation of secondary schools. Ministry of Education officials indicated that the procurement of cleaning agents was still at the tender stage. It is expected that the supply and distribution of cleaning materials will be done prior to the repopulation of schools. While there was mention of thermal screening and guidelines for social distancing, no tangible information has been provided on the competent Ministry of Health personnel who will be deployed to the secondary schools to support the screening process. The presence of ancillary and support staff of schools will also be required, in order to clean and prepare the classrooms and other areas of the compound.
- The provision of personal protective equipment, as well as other health protocols, **must be in place in secondary schools before principals, teachers and students return to the various compounds.**
- Education professionals (supervisors, guidance officers, school social workers, curriculum officers, principals, teachers) have not been designated as ‘essential services’ required to be on schools’ compounds, under the current Public Health Regulations. Public servants who returned to work during Phase Three of the reopening were identified as personnel allowed to return to work. Education professionals must be granted official permission from the Ministry of Health to return to the compounds of secondary schools, if they are to support students in their preparations for the examinations. Furthermore, the Public Health Regulations currently allow only five persons in a space. This is indeed not practical, if teachers and students are to interact to facilitate the completion of SBAs by students.

After discussion, the General Council calls on the Ministry of Education to make definitive statements on these issues -

- The Ministry of Health has advised that all persons displaying flu-like symptoms should not be allowed to write any examination. What are the legal implications of denying a student the right to participate in the examinations?
- During what period will students receive laptops, if examinations are to be done in July?

In conclusion, TTUTA reiterates that quality education, as public good, should not be an afterthought during policy planning, even in times of emergency. Meaningful consultation with all relevant stakeholders is critical, to ensure effective collaboration and policy implementation. As education professionals, our positions have been guided by critical research, rather than sectoral interests. If Trinidad and Tobago is seeking to fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 of the United Nations, we must ensure that quality education is sustained, and that all students are treated equitably within the education system.

Regards,



ANTONIA TEKAH-DE FREITAS
PRESIDENT