



Summary of Proceedings

Public Hearing

Held on **Wednesday 29 January 2025**, from 10:38 a.m. to 01:06 p.m.

Venue: J. Hamilton Maurice Meeting Room, Ground Floor, Parliamentary Complex, Cabildo Building, St Vincent Street, Port of Spain.

Subject matter: An examination into the states response to underperformance at the Nation's Primary and Secondary Schools, the adequacy of the Student's support services division (SSSD) and its impact on school dropouts between primary and secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago.

The **objectives of the inquiry** are as follows:

1. To assess the current performance levels at key examination checkpoints including SEA, CSEC and CAPE;
2. To examine the rates of truancy and school dropouts at the primary and secondary school levels over the past decade;
3. To evaluate the capacity and effectiveness of the Student Support Services Division and interventions for students; and
4. To review and analyse the effectiveness of current strategies aimed at addressing underperformance, truancy and school dropouts at primary and secondary school levels.

Committee Members

The following Committee Members were present:

- Dr. Paul Richards –Chairman
- Mr. Esmond Forde, MP - Member
- Mr. Avinash Singh – Member
- Ms. Vandana Mohit, MP - Member
- Mr. David Nakhid – Member

The following Committee Members were excused:

- Mr. Roger Monroe, MP –Vice Chairman
- Ms. Pennelope Beckles, MP – Member
- Mr. Rohan Sinanan - Member

Witnesses who appeared

The following officials of the **National Primary Schools Principals' Association** (NAPSPA) appeared:

- **Mrs. Monique Scipio-Daniel**
President
- **Ms. Carlene Hayes**
First Vice-President

The following officials of the **National Council of Parent Teacher Associations** (NPTA) appeared:

- **Mr. Walter Stewart**
President
- **Ms. Zena Ramatali**
First Vice-President
- **Ms. Ayana Leacock-Sarjeant**
Education Officer

The following officials of the **Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association** (TTUTA) appeared:

- **Mr. Martin Lum Kin**
President
- **Mr. Adesh Dwarika**
First Vice-President
- **Ms. Marsha Huggins**
Second Vice-President

The following officials of the **Officials of Association of Principals of Public Secondary Schools of T&T** (APPSSST) appeared:

- **Ms. Sharlene Hicks-Raeburn**
President
- **Mr. David Simon**
First Vice President
- **Ms. Patricia Pitt**
Secretary

Opening Statements

Officials from the various entities made opening remarks.

Key Issues Discussed

The following are the main themes arising from discussions with the **National Council of Parent Teacher Associations**

Curriculum Challenges

- i. The National Council of Parent Teacher Associations (NPTA) stated that students are experiencing curriculum overload.
- ii. The NPTA underscored the need for a relevant curriculum that accommodates diverse learning styles.
- iii. The Association noted that some teachers offer extra classes, particularly for Standard 5, free of charge to complete the curriculum.

Teacher Shortages

- i. The Association reported a teacher shortage, which negatively affects students, leaving several subjects untaught.

Book Grant

- i. The NPTA highlighted that the book grant application process needs to be simplified and made more accessible
- ii. Parents require details on the application process and eligibility criteria for the book grant.

Parental Support

- i. NPTA acknowledged that parental involvement positively affects children's performance at the Early Childhood Care, primary and secondary school levels.
- ii. Parental involvement appears stronger in denominational schools than in government schools.
- iii. Parents cite workplace time-off as a challenge when attending parent-teacher meetings.
- iv. Some Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) have collaborated to fund various subject areas for the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examinations.

Nutrition

- i. The NPTA suggested that the National Schools Dietary Services Limited has received no complaints regarding the School Nutrition Programme.
- ii. Some students rely primarily on nutrition provided by the National Schools Dietary Services Limited.
- iii. Parents with limited financial resources should ensure their child is enrolled in the School Nutrition Programme.

Targeted Education Programmes

- i. According to the NPTA, the remediation programme has positively increased student performance.

- ii. The Association highlighted the positive results of the 2024 Vacation Revision Programme, with over 4,000 students participating.
- iii. The NPTA will launch a parenting initiative to sensitise parents and foster greater parental involvement in schools.

Access to Technology

- i. The Association underscored that some students in rural areas lack access to technology, such as Wi-Fi or devices, which limits their ability to use Zoom or Google platforms and hinders learning.
- ii. The NPTA emphasised the need for training for those assisting children in using devices.
- iii. Existing data on children's access to Wi-Fi and devices may need to be updated to address technology access issues.

Learning Challenges

- i. The NPTA noted an approximately two-year wait for a child with learning challenges to receive an appointment to be tested by a psychologist.
- ii. This appointment delay frustrates parents and hinders the child from receiving the necessary support at the SEA level.

School Drop Outs

- i. The NPTA noted that adolescent pregnancy, a lack of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TEVT), parental, peer, socio-economic and academic factors influence student dropouts.

Recommendations

- i. The NPTA recommended establishing an affiliated parent-teacher association in every government school.
- ii. While a social worker is assigned to each of the eighty schools of focus, the NPTA recommended placing social workers in every school.
- iii. The Association endorses the Adopt-A-School Programme and emphasises the need for further corporate intervention.
- iv. The NPTA indicated that engagement with other ministries is needed.
- v. It recommended implementing preventive measures, including assessments by psychologists and psychiatrists starting in the first year of school, with follow-ups at the CSEC and CAPE levels.

The following are the main themes arising from discussions with the **National Primary Schools Principals' Association**

Teacher Shortage

- i. The National Primary Schools Principals' Association (NAPSPA) highlighted that teacher shortages or absenteeism lead to learning loss.
- ii. The Teaching Service Commission oversees the hiring and disciplining of all substitute teachers.
- iii. According to NAPSPA, principals can recommend substitutes to the system.

- iv. However, the online platform designed to facilitate recommendations and request substitute teachers is currently non-functional.
- v. NAPSPA appealed for the timely release and posting of teachers.

School Drop Outs

- i. NAPSPA noted that behavioural challenges, emotional, socio-economic, parental, and academic factors influence student dropouts.
- ii. The Association noted that boys have higher dropout rates than girls.
- iii. There are limited tools for tracking and addressing student absenteeism.

Recommendations

- i. NAPSPA recommends:
 - o parental engagement programmes;
 - o mandatory workshops for parents;
 - o an expanded mentorship programme;
 - o a digitised attendance system to flag absent students;
 - o timely interventions with SSSD; and
 - o counselling to empower parents to support student attendance.
- ii. The Association indicated that engagement with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services is needed.
- iii. It was stated that a cohesive and collaborative plan is needed to improve student performance.

The following are the main themes arising from discussions with the **Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association**

Curriculum Challenges

- i. The Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers Association (TTUTA) acknowledged that it is unethical but not illegal for teachers to offer private lessons at a cost instead of completing the curriculum during the normal term.
- ii. It was noted that students with learning deficiencies may require additional support.
- iii. The Association indicated that factors like disruptions, hot classrooms, and students with learning disabilities hinder teachers from fully delivering the curriculum.

Teacher Shortages

- i. TTUTA noted that teacher shortages are critical, forcing administrators and vice-principals to teach classes while fulfilling their core responsibilities.
- ii. There is a shortage of educators in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).
- iii. The Association indicated that the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) is understaffed and under-resourced, thus hindering promotion and vacancy fillings.
- iv. TTUTA stated that the MoE is not timely in providing vacancy information to the TSC.
- v. TTUTA highlighted that, on occasion, court intervention by the denominational schools regarding new appointments stymies the filling of teacher vacancies.
- vi. Denominational boards use the Concordat Agreement to fill vacancies with teachers of their specific faith, consequently affecting the timely filling of positions.

- vii. Trinidad and Tobago's culture does not encourage a teaching career, and individuals considering teaching a transient occupation fill some vacancies.

Resource Constraints

- i. TTUTA underscored that funding is not received promptly to support educators, and secondary school allocations have been reduced in recent years.
- ii. The Association indicated that some teachers use their financial resources to purchase items such as toiletries and stationery to fulfil their duties.
- iii. TTUTA highlighted that the MOE identified financial constraints as a barrier to allocating funding for necessities such as stationery and toiletries.
- iv. TTUTA emphasised that the Student Support Services Division requires additional human and financial resources to function effectively.
- v. The Association indicated that the number of counsellors, child psychologists, and social workers is insufficient.

School Drop Outs

- i. Students over 16 are not legally required to attend school.
- ii. TTUTA noted that emotional, socio-economic, parental, and academic factors influence student dropouts.

Recommendations

- i. The Association indicated that greater collaboration with other ministries is needed. The Association also recommended:
 - a. the implementation of special education teachers in all schools to address special education needs;
 - b. the provision of additional resources to educators.

The following are the main themes arising from discussions with the **Association of Principals of Public Secondary Schools of Trinidad & Tobago**

Teacher Shortages

- i. The Association of Principals of Public Secondary Schools of Trinidad and Tobago (APPSST&T) highlighted a gap in the TSC's ability to assign teachers promptly, contributing to teacher shortages.
- ii. APPSST&T acknowledged that teacher requests are made to the Ministry of Education (MoE), but responses are often unfavourable.
- iii. Due to teacher shortages the workload of existing teachers has been maximised, as per the MoE's guidelines.

Resource Constraints

- i. According to APPSST&T, workshops in government schools are closed due to a lack of TVET teachers.
- ii. The Association noted that the MoE reintroduced retired teachers in the technical-vocational area. Many received one-year contracts instead of two. This decision has impacted the teaching of Form 4 students, as the syllabus requires continuity through Form

5, creating challenges in managing the curriculum. Additionally, some contracts have not been renewed since the term began.

- iii. The Association further highlighted that social workers are overloaded with responsibilities.

Learning Challenges

- i. APPSST&T indicated that more secondary school students need additional support post-pandemic, revealing a significant disconnect between primary and secondary education.
- ii. At the MoE's request, each secondary school established a school-based intervention team to assess student challenges internally and reduce external referrals to the Student Support Services Division (SSSD).
- iii. While the school-based intervention is intended to manage high case volumes, this approach increases teachers' stress and frustration.

School Drop Outs

- i. APPSST&T highlighted that a lack of TEVT, socio-economic, academic and parental factors influence student dropouts.

Recommendations

- i. The Association emphasised the importance of reviewing and improving subjects offered within the curriculum.

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

[25TH Meeting - JSC Social Services & Public Administration - January 29, 2025 SSSD](#)

Contact the Committee's Secretary

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Committees Unit

February 18, 2025