



Summary of Proceedings

Public Hearing

Held on **Friday, February 21, 2025**, from 10:15 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 state's response to underperformance at the Nation's Primary and Secondary Schools, the adequacy of the Student 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. Roger Monroe, MP –Vice Chairman
- Mr. Avinash Singh – Member
- Mr. Esmond Forde, MP - Member
- Mr. David Nakhid – Member

The following Committee Members were excused:

- Ms. Vandana Mohit, MP - Member

- Ms. Pennelope Beckles, MP – Member
- Mr. Rohan Sinanan – Member

Witnesses who appeared

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

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

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 **Association of Principals of Public Secondary Schools of T&T** (APPSSTT) 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

Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association (TTUTA)

Variation in performance between government and denominational schools

- i. The stratification of the education system remains a significant challenge, with certain entities benefiting from the prestige associated with high-performing schools.

- ii. The Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) continues to reinforce stratification by placing higher-performing students in well-resourced schools, while lower-performing students are allocated to institutions with fewer resources and support systems.
- iii. Denominational schools receive financial and infrastructural support from past pupils' associations and alumni, whereas government schools often lack access to similar networks.
- iv. Underperforming students, often placed in resource-limited schools, do not receive adequate literacy and vocational training support, particularly in Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

Challenges in Teacher Training and Professional Development

- i. The teaching profession lacks a clearly defined career progression framework, leading to some individuals viewing teaching as a temporary occupation.
- ii. While the Bachelor of Education has become the standard qualification for primary school teachers, the minimum entry requirement remains five O Levels, contributing to inconsistencies in teacher preparedness.
- iii. Tertiary-level training programmes must incorporate modern education delivery techniques and innovative teaching methodologies.
- iv. Ministry-provided training is inconsistent, often failing to align with the practical realities of classroom instruction.
- v. TTUTA facilitates professional development in classroom management and encourages schools to conduct termly professional development sessions.
- vi. The Ministry offers training during vacation periods, but teachers' personal and family commitments often hinder participation.
- vii. Previous attempts to mandate training were met with resistance; TTUTA instead recommends demonstrating the benefits of training to encourage voluntary participation.
- viii. The Ministry's Teacher Development Unit has introduced relevant courses, including AI integration in classrooms, though professional development opportunities remain insufficient.

Financial Gains in Educational Materials and Sponsorship Disparities

- i. The unregulated sale of SEA mock papers and textbooks has allowed publishers and private tutors to profit, sometimes unfairly influencing the market.
- ii. Some educators who write SEA examination questions gain an advantage in preparing their students due to their knowledge of question trends.
- iii. Schools with strong academic reputations attract corporate sponsorships, while underperforming schools struggle to secure financial support.
- iv. The Ministry has attempted to encourage public-private partnerships to address sponsorship disparities.
- v. Larger corporations generally prefer associating with prestigious schools, exacerbating existing inequities.

Administrative Challenges with the Ministry of Education

- i. TTUTA has not been able to meet with the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education (MoE) at the required frequency, prompting formal requests for ministerial intervention.
- ii. Despite a requirement for monthly meetings, the last recorded engagement between TTUTA and the MoE occurred in October 2024.

- iii. Issues related to infrastructure and technical challenges necessitate discussions with the Chief Education Officer; however, the infrequency of meetings limits the association's ability to represent its members effectively.
- iv. While collaboration with education administrators in Tobago has been somewhat more consistent, overall feedback and engagement remain inadequate.

Gaps in Student Support Services and Psychological Interventions

- i. The Student Support Services Division (SSSD) is severely understaffed and lacks adequate resources to address student psychological and socio-economic challenges.
- ii. While the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) has a dedicated unit to address cases involving students who experience psychological trauma from unstable home environments, resource constraints hinder its ability to respond comprehensively.
- iii. TTUTA has requested discussions with the Ministry of Education regarding the structure and effectiveness of the SSSD; however, no meeting has been convened since 2023.

Continuous Assessment and Alternative Evaluation Methods

- i. TTUTA supports continuous assessment but found flaws in the 2023/2024 implementation process.
- ii. The Continuous Assessment Component (CAC) should commence at Standard 1 rather than Standard 4 to allow for a gradual adaptation period and provide sufficient training for educators.
- iii. Additional training and structural adjustments are necessary for the successful reintroduction of CAC.

Effectiveness of Suspensions

- i. There must be interventions leading up to the suspension of a student – that is, a progressive discipline approach. Suspension should be the last resort – unless the student is violent and needs to be removed from the school environment immediately.
- ii. Some form of remediation or reformation must also be provided during the suspension when the child is outside of the school environment to encourage the required behaviour modifications.
- iii. The paperwork associated with suspension is an inhibiting factor. Suspension involves signing several documents.

National Primary Schools Principals' Association (NAPSPA)

Inequalities in Schools

- i. The systemic inequalities in the education system are influenced by both political and financial factors, benefiting certain groups while disadvantaging others.

Challenges with SEA Examination

- i. The complexity of SEA questions has increased, with some incorporating secondary-level concepts.
- ii. Examination writers often introduce highly challenging questions, placing undue stress on students.

- iii. Certain schools encourage teachers to become SEA question writers, thereby securing an advantage in preparing students for the examination.

Government Schools and Sponsorships

- i. Urban schools receive significantly more corporate sponsorships than rural schools, leading to disparities in infrastructure and available resources.
- ii. Corporate entities are more inclined to support successful schools to enhance their brand image and public relations efforts.

Effectiveness of Student Discipline

- i. Post-pandemic behavioural challenges, including bullying, cyberbullying, and disengagement, have increased significantly.
- ii. Socio-economic background, home environment, and parental involvement are critical factors influencing student behaviour.
- iii. There is an urgent need for additional social workers, guidance officers, and special education teachers to support students.
- iv. Currently, one social worker, guidance officer, and special education officer are responsible for multiple schools, making the workload unsustainable.

Remediation Programmes

- i. After-school and Vacation Revision Programmes have shown limited success, primarily due to low student attendance.
- ii. Socio-economic barriers continue to impact participation in these remediation efforts.
- iii. More tailored remediation strategies are needed to address the specific learning needs of students.

Association of Principals of Public Secondary Schools of Trinidad and Tobago (APPSSTT)

Student Readiness for Secondary School

- i. There is a notable disparity in students' preparedness when transitioning from primary to secondary education.
- ii. Some schools conduct diagnostic assessments in Form 1 to evaluate students' abilities relative to their SEA results.
- iii. Behavioural challenges among Form 1 students have increased post-pandemic, making classroom management more difficult.
- iv. Many students exhibit reduced interest in learning, exacerbated by distractions such as excessive mobile phone usage and cyberbullying.

Challenges in Filling Teacher Vacancies

- i. Staffing shortages persist due to delays in recruitment by the Teaching Service Commission.
- ii. Some schools rely on alumni or PTAs to fund temporarily teaching positions to mitigate disruptions in education delivery.
- iii. The shortage of vocational subject teachers negatively affects students pursuing CVQs in cosmetology and technical drawing fields.

Variation of Teaching Methods

- i. Having a variety of methods, especially technologically sound methods, will benefit students who learn differently.
- ii. More resources are needed to create smart classrooms or implement technological provisions, such as internet access and interactive learning programmes.
- iii. Due to resource availability, the respective school's ability to implement these provisions would vary.

Variation of school types and outcomes

- i. In Trinidad and Tobago, there are three main types of schools in operation, the denominational schools, the government schools and a hybrid – a unique experiment (e.g., Bishops/Trinity East), which differs from traditional school structures.
- ii. Based on the existing placement examination (SEA), high performers will be placed in better-performing schools based on their academic results.
- iii. It was the view of the first vice president of the APPSST^T that the concordat and the 20% placement allotment allow for the socio-economic advantages to reside in particular schools. This enables these schools to have the opportunity to be able (either through assistance with the Government or through alumni associations, or individuals) to afford some of the necessary equipment and technologies that will provide them the opportunity to utilise different methods for teaching students.
- iv. Political will and legislative support are needed to make the necessary changes to ensure equitable resource distribution across all schools.
- v. Government schools face restrictions in acquiring resources compared to denominational schools.
- vi. V. The system by which government schools get quotes from suppliers and procure goods and services may need to be liberalised.

Gap at CSEC Level

- i. Many students struggle with fundamental comprehension and numeracy skills, significantly affecting CSEC performance.
- ii. Parental involvement is a key factor influencing student outcomes, with denominational schools generally experiencing stronger parent-teacher engagement.

Effectiveness of Disciplinary Measures

- i. The effectiveness of detention is limited due to lack of parental support and concerns about student safety after school hours.
- ii. Suspensions must be supplemented with targeted remediation efforts to achieve lasting behavioural changes.

Gang Activity and Security Concerns in Schools

- i. Student rivalries rooted in community conflicts contribute to school violence and disruptions.
- ii. Reports indicate that some students are recruited to distribute illicit substances within schools.

Remediation Programmes

- i. Government interventions have targeted 26 schools for the Vacation Remediation Programme.
- ii. Attendance has remained low, as participation is voluntary, and at-risk students often fail to engage.

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

[26th Meeting - JSC Social Services & Public Administration - February 21, 2025 - SSSD](#)

Contact the Committee's Secretary

jscsspa@tpparliament.org or 624-7275 Ext. 2283/2284/2277

Committees Unit

February 28, 2025.