



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

MEDIA RELEASE

December 22nd, 2021

Dear Editor / Head of Department,

Matters Relating to the Physical Reopening of Schools

Term II 2021/2022- January 3rd, 2021

Ministry of Education officials, led by Ministers of Education, Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly and Lisa Morris-Julian, met with TTUTA and the wider stakeholder groups on November 25th and 26th, 2021 respectively, and again with TTUTA on December 10th, 2021 regarding operations of schools in Term II 2021/2022. Stakeholders were generally in favour of Forms 4-6 returning to physical attendance, while TTUTA recommended physical attendance for Forms 5 and 6, for practical subject elements only.

The major concerns which surfaced during stakeholder consultations centered around ensuring the safety of our children while maintaining the quality of their education.

The Ministry of Education, in considering the operations of schools in Term II, takes into account the recommendations of the stakeholders, as well as guidance offered by international bodies.

The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), in its December 18th, 2021 article titled, “UN Urges no School Closures Despite Increasing Omicron Cases”, admonished that schools should be the last to close even with rising COVID-19 infection rates and increasing Omicron cases.

The Centre for Disease Control (CDC) Guidelines; dated November 5th, 2021, recommends multiple layers of protection for students and school personnel to reduce the incidence of COVID-19 infections while maintaining physical school attendance. These layers of protection include:

- Vaccination for all eligible school personnel and students
- Universal masking for all school personnel, visitors and students, especially when optimal three feet physical distancing cannot be maintained.
- The use of rapid testing to afford results within 24 hours, which would allow for effectiveness of decision-making with respect to quarantine plans and infection management.

The Ministry of Education has implemented measures in schools to maintain as safe an environment as possible. Along with the provision of sinks for handwashing throughout school compounds, free-standing and handheld temperature scanners, cleaning and sanitization materials and the implementation of entry protocols; the following measures have been instituted:

- The Education District Health Unit (EDHU) of the Ministry of Education, established in January 2021, developed and implements the Guidelines for the Management of COVID-19 Cases in the Public School System. The Unit continues to work in collaboration with the County Medical Officers of Health (CMOH) and the Ministry of Health to provide clear guidance to schools on

protocols for case management to mitigate and prevent the spread of COVID-19, keeping schools as safe as possible.

- The National Maintenance Training Security Company Ltd (NMTS), which performs janitorial services at schools, has upgraded their duties to increase the sanitization of classrooms and high touch / high traffic areas.

The number of positive COVID-19 cases among staff and students at schools throughout Trinidad for the period October 4th – December 10th, 2021, when student and staff were in physical attendance at school was 162; which agrees with global reports that physical school has not been proven to cause significant rises in the level of COVID-19 infections within countries. Principals; students; staff and parents have been co-operating with the Ministries of Education and Health to keep schools as safe as possible.

While there are many different views on school re-opening throughout Trinidad and Tobago, the government has a mandate to preserve both the health and education of our future leaders- in that expressed order of priority. In furtherance of this mandate, the following decisions have been taken regarding the operations of schools in Term II 2021/22:

- 1) Post-secondary and Tertiary students will be allowed to attend physical classes for teaching and practicals from January 2022.
- 2) All students of Forms 4-6 or equivalent will attend school physically for teaching classes, practicals and school-based assessments from January 3rd, 2022.
- 3) Students of Forms 1-3 or equivalent are required to remain engaged in remote learning in January 2022, allowing schools to plan for their return to physical attendance in February 2022, on a rotational basis.

- 4) Primary Schools will continue to operate remotely in Term II, with the exception of Standard 5 students, who will attend school physically from February 2022.
- 5) The SEA will be held on March 31st, 2022. Delaying this exam, as was done in 2020 and 2021, results in many challenges; the major ones being the myriad difficulties of administering CXC and SEA exams concurrently; and the uncertainty of students with respect to transfer applications and the results of SEA reviews- which may result in them switching schools while already enrolled in Form 1.
- 6) ECCE Students, along with Standards 1-4 will resume physical attendance, on a rotational basis, in Term III (April 2022).

Though we are forging ahead towards normalcy, we must be mindful that we are still operating in a pandemic, and all decisions must be contextualized by this reality.

These proposed plans are predicated on the health circumstances of Trinidad and Tobago, and further details of physical attendance will be released after consultation with stakeholders.

The Government holds out to parents that COVID-19 vaccines are available, and continue to be the best protection against becoming grievously ill if students contract the virus. Parents are therefore strongly encouraged to vaccinate their children as they return to the classroom.

The Ministry lauds the efforts of all staff, stakeholders, parents, teachers, middle management, and Principals in meeting the needs of our students in these challenging times of the pandemic. Our continued cooperation and commitment during this transitional period will result in the best outcome possible for our

students of Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry of Education takes this opportunity to convey to all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago our best wishes for the holiday season and the New Year 2022.

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Corporate Communications

Ministry of Education

Corporate.communication@moe.gov.tt

622-2181 Ext 1355, 1427