



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

MEDIA RELEASE

June 12, 2023

Dear Editor / Head of Department,

Statement on the Expansion of the MoE's Vacation Revision Programme

The Vacation Revision Program (VRP) of the Ministry of Education (MOE) has been expanded in 2023 to cater for students currently in Standards 3 and 4, along with those who scored less than 50% in SEA 2023. The VRP supports the transition of primary school students into Secondary school. This programme, along with the Remedial Education Programme, ongoing in 106 schools (80 primary and 26 secondary), both supported by the Digital Transformation Programme initiatives, are tangible actions taken by the Ministry of Education to address the longstanding issues of student achievement and equity in educational opportunity. Any attempt to pretend that the levels of student achievement in Trinidad and Tobago have undergone a sudden decrease is deliberately misleading and disingenuous.

Data from 2010 to present, and even prior to this, show a consistent, and troubling, percentage of students that do not achieve 50% and over in the SEA. In 2010, of the 17 265 students who wrote the SEA, 32.5% scored under 50% and 11.6 % under 30%. These figures remained generally within this range over the last twelve years with notable fluctuations during the implementation period of the Continuous Assessment Component. As was evident from data around the world, COVID 19 had a debilitating impact on education system, with Trinidad and Tobago being no exception. Of the 19 544 and 19 079 students who wrote the exam in 2021 and 2022, 47.7% scored below 50% and 17.7 below 30% in 2021 and 62.9% below 50% and 27.8% below 30% in 2022. In addition, data from the National Test, administered to students in Standards 1 and 3 over the years 2010-2018 also showed less than optimal percentages of students with a satisfactory level of numeracy and literacy.

Over the years, there have been numerous approaches to improve student achievement, a most notable one being the attempt to boost SEA grades by using a Continuous Assessment approach between 2012 and 2016. This initiative was predictably unsuccessful at sustainable improvement in student achievement, as it did not address the root problem, and the numerous operational difficulties associated with its implementation led to its discontinuation in 2016.

The need for a programme to transition students from primary to secondary school has been articulated for many years, as it is a global best practice, and promotes students' acclimatization to and achievement at Secondary School. The urgency of this need in Trinidad and Tobago was exacerbated by the learning loss associated with the COVID 19 experience of students, many of whom spent two (2) years away from the physical classroom between 2019 and 2021.

The first VRP took place in 2022 and catered only to students who scored 30% or lower in the SEA. However, based on the data and feedback collected, parents of students who scored over 30% indicated their willingness to have their children attend the programme, which includes not only remedial Mathematics and English Language and English Language Arts Writing, but mentoring, counselling, parenting sessions, and exposure to TVET and paramilitary organizations such as Cadets, Scouts and Girl Guides. In addition, students currently in Standards 3 and 4 at the 80 primary schools of focus are now catered for in the VRP. These students had the opportunity to attend free After School Tuition offered at their schools throughout Academic Year 2022/23, one of the initiatives of the Remedial Education Programme.

Although the results of SEA 2023 have not yet been released, the VRP has been announced well in advance of its intended start date. This gives parents of Standard 3 and 4 students in the 80 selected Primary Schools of focus, as well as parents of SEA students, adequate time to plan for their children's attendance. Therefore, the increase in the number of students targeted for VRP 2023 does not speak to a decrease in student

achievement, it speaks to the increase in the number of students that are being offered support to achieve educational success.

The Remedial Education Programme, ongoing in 106 schools of focus is similarly designed to sustainably increase student achievement and equity in educational opportunity, issues which faced Trinidad and Tobago long before the learning loss associated with the COVID 19 experience. This programme started in Academic Year 2022/23, immediately as students returned to physical classes, and is ongoing, as the issue of increasing student achievement is not one that will be solved by a quick-fix or magic wand approach.

This programme is as wide-ranging and multi-pronged as the factors which affect student achievement, and includes:

- free after school tutoring in 80 schools of focus,
- increase in Student Support Staff, and services with upgrade in facilities.
- teacher training in remedial Math, English and Writing,
- Principal and Administrator training,
- school infrastructure upgrade,
- establishment of restorative practices in schools and training for teachers and administrators
- the assignment of Learning Support Assistants, among other initiatives.

To reiterate, the VRP is part of an ongoing programme, currently benefitting over 25,000 students in 106 schools. It is not a knee-jerk plan or reaction.

The challenge of vacancies in Technical and Vocational teachers is another issue which has plagued the education sector for some time but has the active engagement of the MOE. The Ministry advertised for teachers in 2022 and again in 2023, for fourteen (14) TVET subjects, as efforts are made to fill these critical vacancies; however, the supply has dwindled over the years, and is much less than the demand. To address this, the MOE is in discussion, with the post-secondary institutions, on a dedicated training

programme to provide a cohort of TVET teachers to fill these vacancies, even as the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) continues to prioritize recruitment in these areas of critical shortages.

The Ministry takes this opportunity to encourage all parents of students eligible for VRP 2023 to take advantage of the opportunity and register your children as soon as possible. The registration links will be made available from the week of June 12, 2023.

The MOE further takes the opportunity to encourage the public to visit our website, moe.gov.tt, for further on the Remedial Education Programme, the VRP, and the Ministry's Digital Transformation Programme, all of which are designed to support the educational needs of students at all levels and directly address the operational inefficiencies currently being faced in the education system

As the old adage goes, "Education takes a Village"; the Ministry of Education therefore encourages all stakeholders, especially those with public platforms, to join the list of civil organizations and corporate sponsors which partner with the MOE in taking tangible action to impact the lives and holistic education of our young people.

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