

TTUTA ON TUESDAY

Leadership in Times of Crisis

NEWSDAY

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TTUTA

ASTUTE, decisive, and strong leadership is critical in times of crisis. This maxim also holds true for the education sector. Unfortunately, some of the key decisions made affecting education during the covid19 pandemic have been characterized by inconsistency and flip-flopping.

This has and continues to create more confusion and anxiety on the part of stakeholders. Thus far it has been a tale of contradictions and uncertainty. Major decisions are being made without details being worked through before announcement.

Regarding the postponement of CSEC and CAPE, the Education Minister indicated that Cabinet had agreed that despite what was being touted by CXC regarding the restructuring of CSEC, TT will retain the examinations in their original configurations.

TTUTA and many other stakeholders welcomed this news, since many felt and still do, that the omission of the Paper II component will place a huge question mark over the integrity of the assessment, Paper II being the heavier weighted paper testing higher-order skills and learning outcomes.

Lo and behold, following a meeting with regional education officials and CXC, that position of Cabinet was altered, the explanation being that we have to go along with the rest of the region since it's a regional examination. This is the same country that refused to go along with the rest of the region and CXC on the issue of CPEA (Caribbean Primary Exit Assessment), preferring to retain the SEA.

To date no one has explained the weighting of the SBA component versus Paper I, nor the refusal by CXC to adjust Paper I to attempt

to compensate for testing some of the learning outcomes that would have been captured in Paper II. This will have serious implications for students' future careers. Based on CXC's logic there may be no need for a Paper II going forward. That would certainly save them a lot of money.

In order to get schools prepared to host CSEC and CAPE, principals were asked to indicate what infrastructural preparations were needed to be undertaken by the authorities, which they instantly did. With under two weeks to go before the start of the exams there is no sign of any work being done at any school.

The minister also announced the new deadline date of June 30 for uploading SBA and IA scores. On June 16, schools would have received instructions that the deadline date for the upload of scores for subjects that require moderation is 16/06/20. Again, no explanation being proffered for the variation from the public announcement by the minister. T

his was after it was acknowledged, thanks to the agitation of TTUTA, that many SBAs and IAs were incomplete and the authorities asked teachers, knowing their commitment to their charges, to voluntarily return to schools to have these exercises completed given the decision to have the exams in July.

Then came the dreaded SEA. TTUTA was asked to consider October as the time to administer the SEA, to which it readily agreed after careful consideration. Again, this decision was reversed in a most clandestine and high-handed manner, following the intervention of an inter-ministerial team, to August 20.

Among the concerns raised by TTUTA regarding the hosting of these examinations during the vacation period is the issue of annual school repairs that are done during the July/August vacation period. This has been casually ignored it would seem. Notably, no fixed date has been given for the release of CSEC, CAPE and SEA results, nor has the proposed revised structure of the coming academic year been outlined.

Education decisions cannot be ad hoc and segmented. They must be taken as part of a comprehensive overarching plan, after genuine consultations with stakeholders and devoid of extraneous self-interests. Too many innocent lives are negatively impacted by these inconsistent positions that have left school officials bewildered and with more questions than answers.

Our CSEC and CAPE students will be returning to sit their critical but hugely truncated exams after being home for four traumatic months. SEA students will be returning to a significantly modified school setting for one month before they sit their exams. The past three months have also witnessed several instances of instructions emanating from the ministry that were inconsistent with the public health regulations.

These concerns are unfortunately viewed by many as typical obstructionist conjecture of recalcitrant teachers, who, incidentally, still mark SBAs and IAs for free while teaching in schools that are resource-deprived and OSH non-compliant.