



JAMAICA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION
97B CHURCH STREET
KINGSTON

MEETING OF GENERAL COUNCIL
Saturday, September 26, 2020

SECRETARY GENERAL'S REPORT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

I extend a warm and cordial welcome to this our first meeting of General Council for the 2020-2021 Conference Year. The fact that we are meeting virtually highlights the times we are living in. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to dictate the way in which we do business, we are still grateful that as an Association, we can do most of our activities in serving our members. We extend very special welcome to those who are first-time members of General Council in every sense of the word. We salute you for accepting the opportunity to serve and trust that your contribution will assist in a meaningful way in enhancing the work that we do.

The challenges occasioned by COVID-19 will no doubt impact the way we do business but we hope that it will not, in any way, limit our willingness to go the extra mile in serving your colleagues. For sure, we all will have to recalibrate and become innovative and flexible if we are going to survive and make a positive difference during these times of uncertainties and great risk taking. Our teachers are among the most creative and resilient in the country and as such, we will survive.

We pause to take note of the rising number of persons who have contracted the virus and note with much sadness the deaths of over seventy (70) of our citizens, including our beloved colleague, Juliet Wilson, who was serving as Vice Principal of Kingston College at the time of her passing.

We must acknowledge our President Gabriel and commend him for so smoothly easing into the President's chair. We feel his presence on the media landscape. We can readily embrace his measured utterances as he utilizes the various opportunities to speak on our behalf. The closure of schools has limited the visibility of Presidents but we are aware that

Immediate Past President Speid has been giving his full support to the work of our President.

We commend Mr. Linvern Wright, President of the Jamaica Association of Principals of Secondary Schools (JAPSS) and Chairman of Salaries and Conditions of Service Committee for his informed posture and solid contribution in the media.

The Association is even more challenged in these times to provide the kind of leadership that will inspire confidence and point the way we must go educationally at such a time like this.

Colleagues, you too have your role to play and being part of the inner circle of the Association at this time is not a coincidence. Please make sure that your presence is felt as a valued member of the 2020-2021 General Council.

Again, welcome and we encourage you to participate fully in our deliberations.

2.0 THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR

As we are all aware, the start of the new school year has been delayed to Monday, October 5, 2020. This of course, is due to the increasing presence of COVID-19 in our communities. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Information has indicated that schools will be operating using the online modality. While we welcome the planned start up, we are conscious that even this approach will exclude a significant number of our students who for a number of reasons will not be able to participate. The limitation or absence of connectivity, as well as devices are two of the more glaring issues that schools will have to grapple with. The Association is committed to playing its part in the effort to educate our children but we will always be guided by the Public Health Guidelines because the preservation of lives remains our priority. We encourage everyone to exercise our best judgement in all that we do.

3.0 CSEC/CAPE

The Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) released the 2020 examinations results on Tuesday, September 22, 2020. The challenges associated with COVID-19 which led to a postponement of the examination did not seem to negatively impact the overall performance. We must commend our Principals and teachers for the role they played in the preparation of our students. Despite some disquiet over the grading of the examination across the region, we commend our students who defied the odds and for the most part, did well.

4.0 MEETING WITH THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION YOUTH AND INFORMATION

On Wednesday, September 16, 2020, President Gabriel, Immediate Past President, Speid and Secretary General Farquharson had an introductory meeting with the new Minister of Education, Youth and Information, Honourable Fayval Williams and Minister of State, Honourable Robert Morgan. Discussions were had on issues surrounding the planned re-opening of schools on October 5, 2020.

5.0 56TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

We are very pleased to report that despite the many challenges, we were able to stage a very successful Annual Conference. This was held at the Hilton Rose Hall Resort and Spa, Montego Bay, St. James, August 17-19, 2020. We are very grateful to the hotel for the effort they made to accommodate us amidst the COVID-19 strictures and we believe that they did a great job. We commend our delegates and observers for their co-operative spirit. Special acknowledgement for the hard and efficient work of the Administrative Staff.

6.0 CONSTITUTION OF GENERAL COUNCIL AND COMMITTEES

The constitution of General Council and committees was completed at a special meeting of General Council on Saturday, September 12, 2020. The President is in the process of issuing mandates to committees. It is anticipated that they all will be meeting early in the new month.

7.0 THE SOUTH EAST REGIONAL OFFICE

The South East Regional Office has been relocated to the ground floor at 97B Church Street. It has been operating in its own space since September 1, 2020.

8.0 CENTRAL EXECUTIVE TRAINING

In an effort to continue to empower our leaders, a two-part training exercise was undertaken. Part One of the training was carried out on Friday, September 18, 2020 at the Spanish Court Hotel in Kingston, while Part Two was done virtually on Wednesday, September 23, 2020. The feedback has revealed that members considered the training beneficial. It is believed that the impact of the training will be positively felt during the Conference Year.

We acknowledge the role of Dr. Gooden Monteith and her team in organizing this activity.

9.0 TERTIARY GRANT

We are now accepting applications. This will continue until the end of the month. Thereafter, the processing of applications will be done with a view of delivering the benefit in the shortest possible time. We remind members that each child can only benefit once.

10.0 MEMBERSHIP CARDS

We are happy to report that the Association has began printing its own Membership Cards. To date, we have printed cards for the following parishes: St. Ann, Portland, St. Thomas, Hanover, Clarendon and Trelawny.

It is expected that by the end of October, all parishes will receive their cards. We commend Dr. Nicely and the Membership Clerk Miss Camille Henry for doing a good job so far.

11.0 TABLET FOR TEACHERS

The distribution of Tablets for Teachers is almost complete. We are aware that some persons have not yet received their Tablet especially those who appealed.

Despite the long wait, most teachers seemed satisfied.

12.0 NEW TEACHERS SEMINARS

Due to COVID-19, the New Teachers Seminars will be held virtually this year. We have one seminar nationally held over two days, September 30 and October 7, 2020. We hope that we will be able to engage most if not all of our new colleagues.

13.0 LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Again, due to COVID-19, Leadership Training this year will be centrally co-ordinated via Zoom. The training session will take place on Tuesday, October 13, 2020.

14.0 EDUCATION SYMPOSIUM

Our annual Education Symposium is scheduled to be held virtually on Thursday, November 12, 2020. The focus will be on Digitalization. More information will be provided shortly.

15.0 WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

World Teachers' Day will be celebrated on Monday, October 5, 2020 under the theme "*Teachers: Leading in Crisis, Reimagining the Future*". Education International (EI) is encouraging units to make a special effort to observe the day. The North American and Caribbean Region will be planning activities in which member units can participate.

16.0 PRESIDENT ELECT ELECTION

You may recall that in June we embarked on an aggressive Membership Data Collection exercise with a view to provide an external body with a verified voters list in order to carry out online voting as was mandated by General Council.

We have submitted to an independent party, a list of approximately 16,000 members for verification. We are at the point where we hope to get a response early next week. Once this is done, we would be in a position to submit the voters list to the Mona Information Technology Services, UWI, who will be contracted to do the election. They had earlier indicated that, once they receive from us a verified voters list, they can conduct the election within two weeks.

If all goes well, we are therefore on track to do our election by the end of October 2020.

17.0 SALARIES AND CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

By December this year, the Association is expected to submit its claim for improved salaries and conditions of service to the Ministry of Finance and the Public Service.

As a prelude to this activity, the Association will be circulating its Salaries Questionnaire among the members. These responses will assist in formulating the claim.

18.0 COMPENSATION REVIEW

One of the conditions of the 2017-2021 Heads of Agreement is a Compensation Review Exercise. The Association has been invited to a meeting with the Ministry of Finance and the Public Serviced to be updated on the progress thus far. This meeting will be held on October 5 2020.

19.0 STAFFING

Two members of staff are no longer with the Association. Mrs. Janine Allen-Tooma resigned her position in the Accounts Department effective September 9, 2020 while Mrs. Claudette Palmer is currently on earned vacation leave to be followed by retirement. Mrs. Palmer served the Association as a Secretary for twenty-four (24) years. We thank both employees for their service and Mrs. Palmer in particular for many years of committed service. We wish her happy retirement.

20.0 CONCLUSION

The indicators are clear and ominous, the pandemic is not going away anytime soon, therefore what we are advised to do is to acquire coping skills that will enable us to live and function with COVID-19. As an Association, we are forced to adapt and adjust our

approaches to be new challenges in order to serve our members. Technology will have to drive this process. We therefore will have to do the relevant audits, both of personnel and other resources, as a matter of urgency. More of our meetings will have to be virtual. It follows also that our policies and guiding principles will have to be reviewed and amended to facilitate some of these changes.

We welcome ideas on ways of improving our approaches and ask that you be understanding and flexible.

As the Association seeks to rekindle its Vision and aggressively pursue its Mission, let us be guided by the core values of commitment, respect, honesty and integrity. Let us reaffirm our commitment to build a strong and vibrant organization and never ever forget our motto to *Unite and Serve*.

Submitted by: Byron Farquharson
Secretary General