



**JAMAICA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION  
97B CHURCH STREET  
KINGSTON**

## **VIRTUAL MEETING OF CENTRAL EXECUTIVE FRIDAY, APRIL 24, 2020**

# **SECRETARY GENERAL'S REPORT**

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### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Colleagues I greet you well and trust that you and your families are safe as we collectively struggle with the challenges associated with COVID-19. Our relatively safe and familiar world has changed significantly and frighteningly so because we are experiencing a pandemic of enormous proportions.

This pandemic has virtually brought the operations of our association down to almost nil. Most of our planned programmes and activities since March have been cancelled or placed on hold and even at this point the way forward is shrouded in uncertainties and even fear.

We are forced to change the way we traditionally do business and perhaps that is not a bad thing. Today's meeting being held via Zoom is a first for us but clearly will not be the last. Like in everything there are challenges and we ask that you bear with us as we adjust and adapt to the new normal.

Despite the many challenges and uncertainties, we are grateful to God that he has kept us going and as a country we have not been overwhelmed by these challenges.

The education sector has held up well and our teachers are to be congratulated for so readily and effectively switching to the use of technology. Online teaching is proving very effective.

Yes, we are aware of the many challenges and the inequities that exist and that cannot be solved over night. Our teachers for the most part have risen to the challenges and we salute them.

So we hope going forward, more teachers and students will be able to benefit from Online Learning.

Due to the impact of COVID- 19 and the abrupt way the school system was forced to change course, my report will not cover the many activities that we would have traditionally be involved in at this time.

## **2.0 CLOSURE OF SCHOOLS**

As you are aware schools have been closed since March 13, 2020 and the approach to teaching and learning has been via Distance Learning/Online. The Easter Holidays were observed April 9- 22, 2020 and “reopened” on April 23, 2020 using the online modality. The jury is still out as to how effective and far reaching is this process,

Like was stated before our teachers are to be applauded for their willingness and flexibility to adjust to this approach to teaching and learning. The association has participated in some of the discussions and would have shared ideas as to what we think the approach should be. We have some concerns. These include:

- the allocation of resource and the existence of appropriate resources system wide
- The communication of roles and expectations of teachers and school administrators in the process
- How will the system treat with internal and external examinations to include PEP, CSEC and CAPE

## **3.0 RESUMPTION OF DUTIES**

Members have been asking how resumptions will be treated with in light of the fact that there is no physical school to report to and what happens to persons who are overseas.

All schools would have received a Bulletin from the Ministry entitled: Education Administration in Emergency. Essentially it states that letters of Resumption should be sent via email to the Principal/Chairman and when able hard copies be left at the institution.

#### **4.0 CLOSURE OF THE OFFICES OF THE JTA**

The association consistent with the advice from the government of Jamaica, and our own assessment of the situation closed its offices since April 3, 2020. Except for our Security Staff and two (2) Ancillary Staff members who provide service to our tenants, staffs are operating from home.

From time to time some staff members report to base. It should be noted however, that all efforts are made to serve our members. In this context all staff members are paid their salaries like public school teachers. We are conscious that we will have to retool in order to better serve our members and adjust to the emerging realities occasioned by COVID-19.

#### **5.0 CANCELLATION OF ACTIVITIES**

The following activities had to be cancelled

- Education Conference
- Tours, both Easter Tour to Disney World and Summer Tour to Scandinavia

The Association will be making refunds to persons who paid for these events.

In terms of refund for Education Conference, [persons will have to make the request in writing and submit a copy of their evidence of payment.

#### **6.0 CARE PACKAGES**

We commend our President and Colleague Keisha Hayle for the idea of care packages for our retired teachers. Based on the feedback received and commends shared by the parishes, it is clear that the gesture was timely and highly appreciated.

We commend the Parish Presidents and the teams who took on this pleasurable task so successfully. All parishes are asked to submit their request for reimbursement to the office of the Secretary General.

The request should be accompanied by a list of the beneficiaries

#### **7.0 EDUCATION WEEK 2020**

The activities that we have grown accustomed to during Education Week unfortunately will not happen this year. The tokens that are normally given on Teachers' Day are stuck somewhere and will not be arriving anytime soon. This will have to be distributed at another time.

However, we would like to select a theme for Education Week which will serve us going into Conference and most of the ensuing conference year.

#### **8.0 JTA/SAGICOR ATHLETIC CHAMPIONSHIP**

We regret to report that this activity is cancelled for this year. Again due to COVID-19. I wish to report that the Caribbean Union of Teachers (CUT) has also cancelled their Biennial Athletic Championship that should have been held in St. Kitts in July until 2022.

#### **9.0 PRESIDENT ELECT ELECTION (2020-2021)**

The indication thus far is casting doubt over the undertaking of this activity in the way that we would traditionally do it. It means that we will have to come up with some alternatives. Your ideas are welcome and by next meeting of Central Executive if not before a Plan B will be in place.

#### **10.0 TABLET COMPUTERS FOR TEACHERS**

The distribution process for the Tablets has been significantly impacted by COVID-19. The Tablets will be coming from China. To date there are Five Thousand (5000) Tablets delivered to ELearning and another Four Thousand (4000) are due in May. If all goes well, it is anticipated that the Tablets could be ready for distribution by early June 2020.

Distribution will be done on a parish by parish basis. We note that this gadget would have been very useful at this time.

#### **11.0 MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH HEART TRUST/NTA:**

The association is in the process of signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with HEART TRUST/NTA. This MOU will provide significant training opportunities for teachers free of cost. We will provide you with more information as time goes by.

#### **12.0 JTA/BITU COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENT**

The association has signed a Collective Bargaining Agreement with the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU) on behalf of the Clerical, Accounting, Ancillary and Security Staff. This agreement is for the period April 2018 – March 2020. The new rates in April 2020 and the retroactive amounts will be paid in May 2020.

### **13.0 CARIBBEAN UNION OF TEACHERS (CUT)**

The association has received information that the CUT President, Mr. Ashworth Azille has resigned. We await the official information on that matter and the implications going forward.

### **14.0 CONCLUSION**

We can all agree that the world is a different place to live and operate in due to COVID-19. We believe that new challenges also offer new opportunities. We must do everything to survive and as such we have an obligation to heed the advice that we receive from the ministry of Health and Wellness as well as keep abreast of international developments in this regard.

We must not only be concerned about ourselves but must realize that we are all in this together. Remember when our back is against the wall, united we stand, divided we fall.

Let us by words and action do all we can to reduce the spread of the virus. Let us obey the laws and observe the recommended practices like staying home or wearing a mask.

As time evolves, certainly in the short term we will provide you with updates in regards to planned activities. Much of what we do is reactive because we are not sure of the nature of this “beast” but we hope that the decisions that we make and the actions we take will serve the best interest of our members and staff.

We commend President Speid in keeping the issues in focus despite the deafening noise of COVID-19.

Let us continue to pray for our land and our world and in all things let us continue to Unite and Serve.

#### **Submitted by:**

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