



September 2021

Special Points of Interest

- Emotional Intelligence
- Coping and Resiliency
- Transitioning from SEA to Secondary School
- Inclusive Schools Project
- Lessons Learned during the Pandemic
- Promoting Mental Health in Education
- SSSD Symposium
- SSSD Services
- Employee Recognition

Special thanks to the Editorial Committee:

- ◆ Professor Dennis Conrad
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- ◆ Ms. Kimberly Campbell
- ◆ Ms. Suraiyah Deen
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SSSD INSIDER

Term I – Academic Year 2021/2022

Manager's Remarks: Professor Dennis Conrad

For everything, there is a season: a time to say hello and a time to say goodbye. This is the time to pass the baton, teammates. It was a pleasure and challenge to serve as your manager in support of our many students. I took the challenge of helping transform SSSD using a relational approach and authentic leadership because I believed in you, the professionals, and other committed stakeholders on the ground; I believe that the context is more powerful than the individual. I believe that a commitment to serve the marginalised is honourable and worth more than individual power, small-mindedness, insecurity, and ego. I believe that there are persons across SSSD, the MoE, and among the NGOs who not only work hard, but also value and support others despite divergent views. There are more persons who believe in teamwork and commitment to service than those who pretend to.

The challenge is, how do we accomplish the mission when we are faced with inadequate resources, and overwhelmed colleagues? I suggest that we recognize that our strength is in succession planning, leadership development, self-care, and networking.

The various heads of departments and administrative functionaries within SSSD are rich with strong, committed professionals, and I salute them all. Yes, we have had fervent 'fights' in the interest of our clients and professional differences. Yes, we can improve our teamwork; and yes, the COVID-19 pandemic handicapped our efforts. However, we are resilient, and SSSD's resolve in the interest of our students will not be compromised.

Our successes include but are not limited to:

- The Community Voices mission of our dedicated school social workers and the 'ready for print' handbook
- The mentorship, succession planning efforts, and completed guidance and counselling handbook
- Autonomy and leadership opportunities among the psychologists within the DAIU
- Success in increasing the student aides
- Expansion of the Wharton-Patrick Special School
- Acquisition of assessment instruments
- Significant collaboration with the UWI and other tertiary institutions
- Formal start of the Inclusive Schools Project
- Dedication and teamwork evidenced by those committed to the SSSD Insider

I ask that in moving forward, you respect, honour, and value each other. Stay humble and never forget that it is *all about our children*. We are the change. Be true to yourself!

Emotional Intelligence for Students

What is emotional intelligence?

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage our own emotions in positive ways. Think about the two words that make up this concept:

- Emotional describes internal feelings and sensations.
- Intelligence refers to the ability to understand and make application.

Why is emotional intelligence important for students?

1. Students who develop emotional intelligence gain the confidence to interact with others, even if it means they may face some level of rejection. They acquire higher self-esteem.
2. Students become more emotionally self-aware and, therefore, can deal with difficult issues that encourage maturity.
3. Students can take on greater responsibility due to the maturity gained from investing in their thoughts, emotions, and the actions that follow.
4. Students can build empathy by emotional association.
5. Emotional intelligence can help students make good decisions. Someone who understands his/her emotions, and the consequences of acting on those, has an important base for a life skill.
6. Students can communicate effectively with others, especially regarding how they feel about an issue negatively affecting them.
7. Developing relationships would be easier, since communication would be better.
8. Students who develop emotional intelligence can manage the stresses of examinations. It is critical that students reach a level of emotional maturity that can encourage a confident, positive approach to pre-examination preparation and application during the exams.

What are the core concepts of emotional intelligence?



1. Identify what you are thinking clearly.

- A good exercise is to try to remember something recent that had some level of emotional impact on you. Then, as much as you can remember, write down every thought you had relating to it.



2. Recognize the emotions you are feeling, along with your thoughts, and understand whether those will influence you negatively or positively.

- Write down the emotions you felt associated with the thoughts.



3. Decide on your actions, based on the self-awareness achieved from identifying your thoughts and recognizing your emotions.

- You can begin to see the importance of emotional intelligence based on your actions or inaction in any situation.

Coping and Resilience in Students

What are coping and resilience?

Coping refers to the psychological, emotional, and behavioural skills developed and utilised to help manage stressful situations.

Resilience refers to a person's ability to withstand stressful and adverse events, using the acquired skills and experience to recover quickly from the said events.

Why are coping and resilience important for students?

1. It helps students with their psychosocial development and, therefore, their character development.
2. It encourages sustained good mental health of students.
3. It is an important asset in stressful examination periods where the expectation to perform is high.
4. Coping and resilience are important in times of tragedy, grief, and loss.
5. In crises like natural disasters, wars, pandemics, and social anarchy, coping and resilience can be the difference between life and death, not just for students but for everyone.
6. It is a life skill students can continue to develop throughout their lifetime.

What can students do to develop their coping and resilience?

1. Engage in stress-reducing activities: exercise regularly, get enough sleep, eat a balanced diet, and participate in recreation.
2. Communicate with your parents and older siblings about some of the same issues they faced.
3. Focus on vocations or talents that can help develop coping and resilience. The difference between this and engaging in stress-reducing activities is the type of character development that may be acquired.
4. Students should take the tenets of their religious or philosophical persuasion seriously. This can assist with a balanced way of thinking and help them shape their worldview.

Community Voices Project - Update

The first round of meetings was held on the 18th March 2021, and involved 25 communities and 408 participants, across all seven districts. Moving forward, meetings will be held **monthly**.

Emerging themes from the discussions:

- Crime/lawlessness
- Unemployment /socio-economic issues
- Lack of student supervision
- Barriers to learning
- Special learning needs
- Domestic violence and abuse
- Mental health and drug abuse
- Absenteeism and school leaving

Recommendations by stakeholders:

- More opportunities to build parental support
- Greater support and inclusion for the special needs community
- Increased resources at schools to manage mental health issues, behavioural problems, and poor academic performance
- Access to quality programs that facilitate training, tutoring, and development
- Acknowledge economic stress within areas

Transitioning from SEA to Form One: Expectations as New Child in Secondary School

Students, you have just crossed a significant milestone in your lives. Hooray! You may have many questions and concerns as you prepare for entry into secondary school. We are here to help make the shift an easy one for you and your parents. Here are some tips!

Understanding and Accepting Results

Here are two facts about results:

1. Everyone will not get his/her first-choice school.
2. Everyone can make the best of the school in which he/she is placed.

Students, here are some tips for dealing with results:

- Breathe.
- Tell yourself that even though you cannot change the results, you can decide to have a positive experience at your new school.
- Look for opportunities.
- Know that it is okay to feel sad or disappointed, if you do not get the school you wanted. Speak about it with someone you trust.
- Remind yourself of your long-term goals, such as getting a good education and having a career that suits you. Tell yourself that your new school will help you achieve these goals.

Parents, here are some tips to help your child:

- Breathe.
- Tell your child that you are proud regardless of the results.
- Help your child think about career goals and explain how these goals can be achieved.
- Never compare your child to other students, siblings, or family members because each child is unique.
- Let your child know that it is okay to be sad or disappointed.
- Tell your child you love him/her before and after the results.
- Remind your child that a school cannot make him/her successful.

Parents, help your child Transition to Secondary School with these 5 tips

1.) Encourage open communication

Talk openly with your child about what they can expect and what is expected of them at secondary school. Allow them to express how they feel. **LISTEN** to them.

2.) Reassure & Encourage Your Child

It is normal for your child to feel anxious about this transition. Use positive phrases. Instead of 'if you don't figure this out, you will fail', say 'I know you can do this'. In this way, you help build their confidence.

3.) Be Patient

Adjusting to secondary school within the new normal may be challenging for your child. It will take time for them to be efficient at online learning and meet the demands of secondary school. Be patient and give them the time and support to adapt.

4.) Do a walk (talk) through

Help your child establish a routine. Identify locations at home that provide a good learning environment. Talk through what a day might be like and some challenges they may face and how to overcome them.

5.) Seek support when needed

If you need additional support for your child, reach out to their teachers or the guidance officer, who are ready and available to provide support.

Transitioning from SEA to Form One: Expectations as New Child in Secondary School

Things to think about when starting secondary school:

1.) Get ready to make new friends!



Transitioning to a new school can make you anxious or even scared! Get ready to meet new students and teachers, and find new support at your school. Soon you will find your favourite teacher, guidance officer, and friend.

2.) Know your schedule



Write down all your subjects and subject teachers. Know when you have cases and assignments, and plan ahead.

To stay safe during this pandemic, classes will be hybrid - mix of online and face-to-face learning. Ensure you have all you need: connectivity device, internet access, books etc.

3.) Stay in touch



Know how to contact all your teachers. Reach out to them by phone, email, or messages, if you have any questions or concerns.

Stay connected with other students to help build friendships. Share ideas, or study together.

4.) Understand the rules and consequences



Similar to primary school, you are expected to follow all the rules of your school and instructions given by teachers. All choices have consequences so make good ones!

5.) Support is available!



Your Guidance Officer, teachers, and parents are all here to help you. Reach out if you are having difficulty with online

learning, specific subjects, making friends, or other challenges.

We are here to help you do your best!

6.) Be confident, you're ready!



It is ok if you feel nervous about starting secondary school. Adjusting to online learning and secondary school will take time.

Have patience and stay motivated.

Set goal that will propel you to success. Remember to be yourself and enjoy your secondary school experience.

WORD SEARCH

Below you will find a word search that contains words associated with changes you can expect in secondary school.

B F C A C A R E E R P A T H S E
R C O M P N R S E L E O N U R C
U N T I F O R U L E S N N S E I
E R R A Z S C H O O L H O U R S
T E A K Q W E A T S N O I T A L
C H V R L S R E H C A E T O R M
B N E W C L A S S E S N A P O P
Y X L E L W T E Y G I N L I N G
X I T I N T G D D O F X U N L O
S T I N U N I F O R M Z P Y S E
I H E R A R N U L K Z S O E R V
A G O H P T I Y X R O N P M I U
E X C I T I N G H T E B R O T N
Y O M U R L E F A G M L F P H E
H W E R P S T A M B O U X Z G R

1. Rules
2. Population
3. New classes
4. Teachers
5. Uniform
6. School hours
7. Travel
8. Career paths
9. Exciting
10. Changes



Time Management Tips



1. Make a to-do list
2. Get organised
3. Be assertive
4. Prioritise
5. Handle each piece of paper only once
6. Do not panic
7. Eliminate distractions
8. Make time for what is most important
9. Guard your health
10. Finish one task before moving on
11. Reward yourself for finishing projects
12. Terminate non-productive activities
13. Plan ahead
14. Break big projects into smaller ones

Inclusive Schools Project (ISP)

The Inclusive Schools Project (ISP) is an initiative adopted by the Student Support Services Division to provide quality education to marginalized and non-marginalized students.

The project's objectives focus on all children with mild to moderate Special Educational Needs (SEN) being able to access quality education at the general education schools within their community, and children with moderate to severe SEN accessing their needs at Public Special Schools (Resource Centres). This requires "...being proactive in identifying the barriers and obstacles learners encounter in attempting to access opportunities for quality education, as well as in removing those barriers and obstacles that lead to exclusion" (UNESCO, 2012, para. 1).

The ISP began in November 2019 when a series of focused consultations were held with key internal and external stakeholders, along with NGOs and advocacy groups. Many of the key recommendations emanating from these consultations were incorporated into the project design. Initially, the project was limited to twenty-one (21) schools: two (2) primary and one (1) secondary school from each of the seven (7) education districts in Trinidad. As seen in the table below, this has now been expanded to include thirty-two (32) schools, inclusive of ECCE centres and schools in Tobago.

ECCE	PRIMARY	SECONDARY
TOBAGO		
MT. GRACE	PARLATUVIER GOV'T	HARMON SCHOOL OF SDA
	TABLEPIECE GOV'T	
NORTH EASTERN		
SANGRE GRANDE GOV'T	SANGRE GRANDE GOV'T	GUAICO
	CUMACA R.C.	
ST. GEORGE EAST		
LA GOYA GOV'T	TUNAPUNA GOV'T	EL DORADO WEST
	ARIMA WEST GOV'T	
PORT-OF-SPAIN AND ENVIRONS		
LA PUERTA GOV'T	TRANQUILITY GOV'T	EAST MUCURAPO
	PATNA/RIVER ESTATE GOV'T	
CARONI		
ROYSTONIA	ORANGE VALLEY GOV'T	CHAGUANAS NORTH
	MONTROSE GOV'T	
VICTORIA		
HARMONY HALL GOV'T	MONKEY TOWN GOV'T	DEBE
	ST. PAUL'S A.C.	
ST. PATRICK		
FYZABAD GOV'T	SOUTH OROPOUCHE GOV'T	VESSIGNY
	PALO SECO GOV'T	
SOUTH EASTERN		
NORTH TRACE GOV'T	NEW GRANT GOV'T	RIO CLARO EAST
	ST. MARY'S GOV'T	
8	16	8

Lessons Learned During the Pandemic School Year: Students' Perspective

We all know the story: Covid-19 threw the world into a tailspin and disrupted the education system. In March 2020, the Ministry of Education and stakeholders were forced to reimagine schooling in the throes of a pandemic. We have certainly been inundated with the adult perspective during this crisis, but what about how students' experience schooling during these unprecedented times?

A few (54) primary and secondary students briefly shared what they learned during the pandemic school year (2020/2021). The most popular lessons learned were condensed and categorised as follows:

Learned This About Myself

- I'm easily distracted.
- I do/do not work well on my own.
- I can get good grades if I focus & don't let friends distract me.
- Friends are very important to me.
- I'm bad at time management.
- I'm organised/disorganised.
- I'm definitely an outdoor person. Being stuck inside makes me unhappy.
- I understood my learning style (visual, auditory, read& write, kinesthetic).

Learned This About Teachers/School

- In-person school is easier & more fun than online school. School is my happy place.
- Teacher guidance is important; I was confused & frustrated without it.
- Teachers were not understanding: the workload was heavy; they did not try to explain; and they assumed we had unlimited time, since we were at home.
- My teachers were helpful, creative, concerned. I need to show more appreciation.

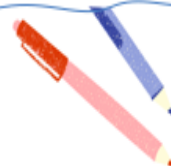


Other Popular Bits

- Most frequently used to describe schooling during the pandemic: ***hard, boring, stressful***
- Major complaints about schooling during pandemic: ***no device/malfunctioning device, internet issues, no at-home and teacher support***
- What students missed most about in-person school: ***friends, activities, routines, teachers***

Learned This About Family/Parents

- My parents are/are not interested in my education.
- My parents are/are not good with technology.
- My parents are/are not good teachers.
- My parents are very patient/impatient.
- I learned to appreciate my family more. They have helped during this difficult time.



Promoting Mental Health in Education: Laudable Efforts from our Youths

Youths throughout Trinidad and Tobago came face to face with the COVID-19 monster. We were all forced to isolate, schools were shut, and social distancing meant few opportunities to socialise. In addition to trampling on persons' livelihoods and physical health, COVID-19 has peddled its pain in the form of trauma, anxiety, depression, and loneliness. The adverse effects of this reality are not limited to adults but can also have lasting psychological consequences for children.

The Promoting Mental Health in Education (PMHE) project, with specific focus on assessing and sustaining students' mental health, both during and post the COVID-19 pandemic, was quickly put into motion. Thus, recognizing that some students may begin experiencing symptoms associated with anxiety, depression and trauma, SSSD posted sensitization materials on the School Learning Management System (SLMS) platform, as well as the Ministry of Education Facebook and Instagram pages, to support mental health in the student population.

As part of the sensitization campaign, a small number of primary and secondary schools were asked to support, by presenting dramatic pieces (mimes, monologues, and theatrical readings) to encourage psychological resilience and interpersonal sensitivity among students. The arts are wonderful for self-expression and provide an opportunity to help students cope during these uncertain times by having their voices heard.

With strong support from the **Curriculum Planning and Development Division**, the SSSD was able to construct a rubric guideline for performances from students in two (2) categories: students from Standards 1 to 4 and Forms 1 to 4.

Contributions are as follows:

- Nine students represented Orange Valley Government Primary School with a theatrical reading titled "A Day in the Life of Online School."
- One student of St Mary's Government Primary School completed a piece "I Can't Stand Him."
- One student from Tunapuna Government Primary School provided a monologue entitled "Breathe In, Breathe Out."
- One student from Tunapuna Secondary School contributed a monologue titled "How You Coping?"
- Two students from Bishop Anstey High School contributed a guest appearance monologue, "The Last Thing I Remember."
- A student from Trinity College, as a guest, constructed a stress reduction game.

Students of participating schools were delighted to assist in promoting the message that mental health in education is important for the positive functioning of students within the nation's schools.

SSSD Online Symposia

Student Support Services' Developmental Assessment and Intervention Unit (DAIU) and the Special Education Unit (SPED) collaborated with the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists (TTAP) to host the two-day Online Symposia Series "Valuing Psychoeducational Assessments" and "Exploring the Role of the School Psychologists in Trinidad". The two-part series was held via live webcast on June 22nd and June 29th, 2021.

These symposia aimed to clarify the role of district school psychologists and show how psychoeducational/educational assessments form a critical part of the intervention process for students. The goal was to facilitate focused conversations among internal and external stakeholders, inclusive of SSSD staff, teachers, principals, tertiary education students, psychology practitioners, and other Ministry of Education (MoE) personnel.

The two-day event hosted approximately 557 persons and 25 facilitators (keynote speakers and panelists). The event was successful as it enabled dynamic discourse among professionals of diverse backgrounds, and those discussions presented a solution-focused framework geared at enhancing student services. An extensive list of recommendations was subsequently summarized into the following broad themes:

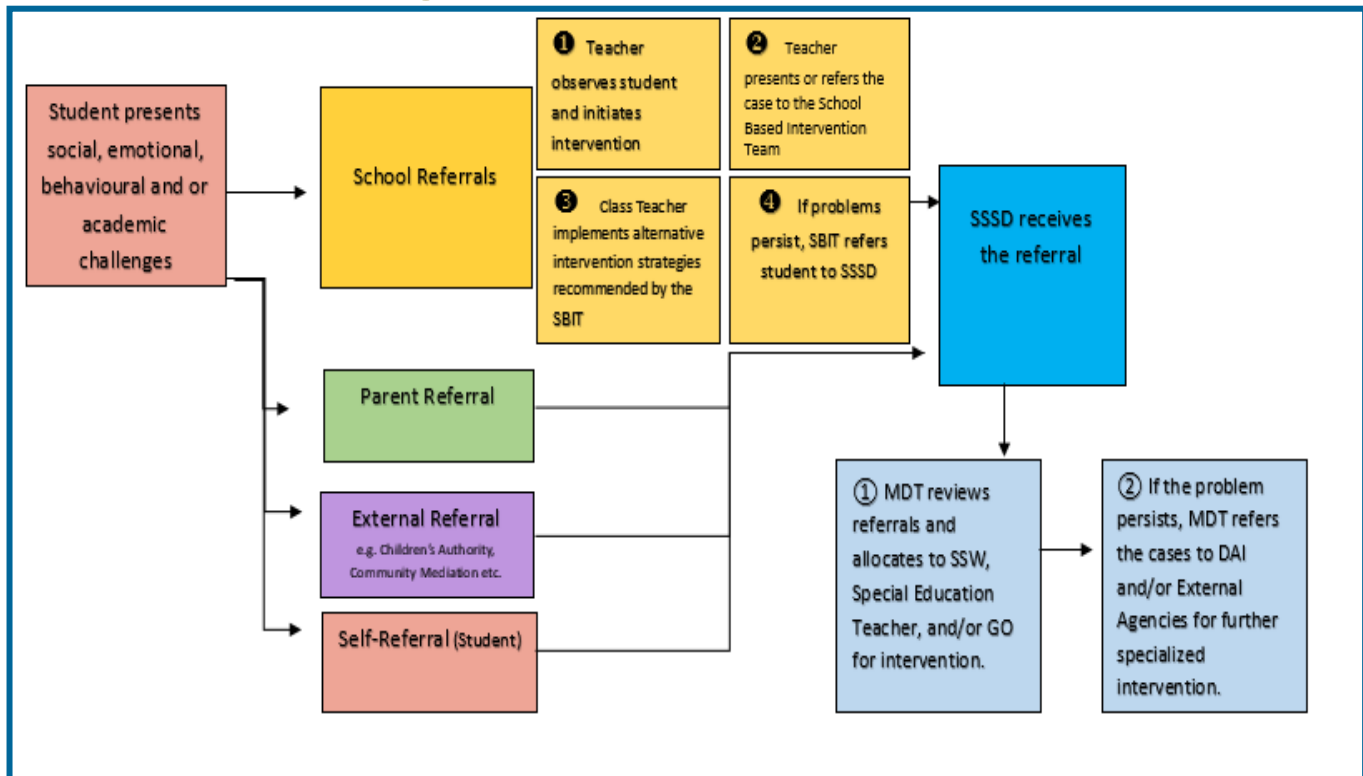
- Enhancing the efficiency and broadening the range of assessment services
- Improving collaborative practice within SSSD
- Increasing programme development and early intervention
- Reinforcing and expanding the competencies of the MoE's psychologists

Special thanks are extended to the TTAP for their endorsement of this initiative. Contributions from our keynote speakers, **Mrs. Leticia Rodriguez-Cupid**, **Professor Surendra Arjoon**, **Dr. Korinne Louison**, and **Professor Frank C. Worrell** were invaluable and added richly to charting the way forward. Additional thanks to our divisional, interdivisional, and external partners for their support. Further acknowledgement is given to **Professor Dennis Conrad**, Manager of SSSD; he envisioned a platform where focused conversation could build consciousness and foster understanding for stakeholders invested in providing effective student support.

Selective Images of Keynote Speakers and Participants



Accessing SSSD Services: Referral Process



Concession Application Process

Special Concessions are offered to eligible students registered for local examinations, such as Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA), Primary School Leaving Certificate Examination (PSLCE), and National Certificate of Secondary Examination (NCSE).

Students may qualify for special concessions under the following circumstances:

- Students with learning disabilities/neurological /developmental disorders
- Students with medical, physical, and sensory impairments
- Other special circumstances

Guidelines for submitting applications for Special Concession can be found under the 'Resources' tab on the MOE website.

Remember to note:

- Applications must be resubmitted for any student repeating the SEA or any other local assessment.
- Applications received after the final deadline **will not** be considered.
- Students for whom applications have been submitted may be visited or contacted by officers of the Student Support Services Division (SSSD), Ministry of Education.

The **deadline** for submission of the application is **30th October, 2021**.

See Volume 1 Issue 2 of the SSSD Insider for more information on the Referral Process, Concession Application Process, and Psychoeducational Assessment Process.



Mrs. Amanda Pedro



Responsibility for the Student Support Services Division was, to me, a sacred duty, and so I did my endeavour best in my role as Manager to facilitate the collaboration of the four disciplines, with diverse perspectives and histories, to explore and implement the Ministry's strategic plan. The year 2018 provided professional development training from the Ministry of Planning and experts at our own Education Planning Division, and SSSD middle management had the opportunity to understand the content and processes of monitoring. This facilitated rationalizing the collection of data and the timely reporting link between the Strategic Plan and the various work plans, which school-based SSSD colleagues were already executing with poise and determination.

Earlier career path: From 1990-2009 I worked as a Guidance Officer I at El Dorado Secondary School. From 2000 to present, I have advocated for the utilization of psychological instruments that the Guidance Unit and Special Education Units had obtained from the Pennsylvania State University, School of Psychology. In the role of Manager, I championed a revival of the use of these screening and assessment instruments. In 2009, promoted to Guidance Office (GO) II, I began in the St George East Education District until my relocation to the North Eastern Education District in 2014. A major milestone was the teamwork with GOIIs Carla Harrington, Hazel-Ann Boynes-Dillon, and Susan Ramsden (now retired) to revisit SSSD's Out of School Suspension Programme and design an expanded therapeutic and remedial reading approach into the Learning Enhancement Centres. Staff challenges and the end of the partnership with the Ministry of National Security compromised outcomes.

Major efforts during the period: Those include the justification for new staff contracts; furthering the groundwork on the job descriptions of permanent positions in SSSD for approval of the Chief Personnel Officer; networking within the Ministry; and the eventual relocation of SSSD to the Education Towers.

Memorable moment: On July 2, 2018, the Division held a general meeting at UTT Couva, where, despite torrential rains, at least some persons from every district in every discipline converged and interacted. The personal highlight for me was the engagement I observed - it was a representation of the level of goodwill, which always was and still is, present in this wonderful institution.



September 2021							October 2021							November 2021						
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19	20	21	22	23	24	25	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
26	27	28	29	30			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	28	29	30				
							31													

Important Dates:

- Deadline for Concessions - 30th Oct
- Community Voices Meeting - 23rd Sep, 28th Oct, and 25th Nov
- ISP Advisory Committee Meeting - 17th Sep, 15th Oct, and 19th Nov
- Career Fairs - TBA