



May 2022

**Special Points of Interest**

- Depression
- Stress
- Benefit of Attending Physical School
- Preventing and Lowering Absenteeism
- Poems By Students
- Identifying Students with SEN
- Career Fairs
- SSSD Events

**Special Thanks to the Editorial Committee:**

- ◆ Dr. Sherry-Ann Ganase
- ◆ Ms. Kimberly Campbell
- ◆ Ms. Suraiyah Deen
- ◆ Mrs. Ace McBarnette
- ◆ Ms. Pilaiye Cenac
- ◆ Mr. Brenton Nicholas
- ◆ Mrs. Marcia Bridgewater

# SSSD INSIDER

## Term III – Academic Year 2021/2022

On Tuesday 19th April 2022, students from across Trinidad returned to physical school in full. According to data submitted to the Ministry of Education, 52% ECCE, 64% primary, and 67% of secondary school students attended physical classes within the public school system across Trinidad. This corresponds to a total of 124,058 students throughout more than 820 public schools.

As our students return in full, here are some tips for the success of face-to-face schooling:

- Return to school with an open mind and a willingness to follow all protocols.
- Feel free to talk to a teacher, Guidance Officer or School Social Worker if you feel anxious or unsure about anything.
- Be sure to pack your bag beforehand with all the materials required for school, including two (2) face masks: one to be worn at all times and another as 'back-up'.
- Remind/familiarise yourself with the school rules, ensuring that you have the approved attire or uniform. Pay attention to personal grooming.
- Know the safety rules for COVID-19, which are:
  - ◆ Watch your distance
  - ◆ Wash/sanitise hands
  - ◆ Avoid touching face (ears, nose, eyes, and mouth)
- Walk with sanitiser if you can.
- Do not share food, snacks, drinks, and stationeries with others.



For parenting tips for the return to face-to-face schooling, see SSSD Insider Volume 2 Issue 2 for further details:

[SSSD-Insider-Volume-2-Issue-2-2.pdf \(moe.gov.tt\)](https://moe.gov.tt/SSSD-Insider-Volume-2-Issue-2-2.pdf)



## Depression: Symptoms and Tips

Depression (major depressive disorder) is a mental health disorder that negatively affects the way you feel, think and act. At its core, depression is said to be a loss of interest or loss of feeling of pleasure in activities.

To be diagnosed with depression, a full diagnostic evaluation, consisting of an interview and a physical examination, should be conducted by a health professional. Depressive symptoms must be present during the same 2-week period, with at least one of the symptoms being either (1) depressed mood or (2) loss of interest or pleasure.

The symptoms can vary from mild to severe and include:

1. Depressed mood most of the day (for example, feelings of sadness or hopelessness). In children, this can present as irritability, decreased or increased sleep, or frequent expressions of physical illness, such as headaches or stomachaches.
2. Significant weight loss when not dieting.
3. Loss of energy nearly every day.
4. Recurrent thoughts of death.



### Tips for Dealing with Depression – Treating Adults and Children



- Stay connected to friends and family, as it may help them understand what you are experiencing and how they can help.
- Regular exercise helps create positive feelings and improves mood.
- Getting adequate sleep is important for physical well-being, mental acuity, and concentration.
- Eat well-balanced meals.
- Avoid excessive alcohol. Alcohol can exacerbate depression and depressive symptoms and consequently interfere with recovery.
- Journal recurring thoughts. Negative beliefs about oneself and the future are often misrepresentations that appear true, and they commonly reinforce unproductive behaviours.
- Limit the number of times you relive stressful experiences. When you become self-aware, you can redirect to thoughts that can create joyful feelings.
- Practice self-compassion. Forgive and be kind to yourself.

If you are experiencing depressive symptoms or need mental health support, please seek professional help.

#### Available Resources:

- National Family Services: 623-2608 ext.6701/6707
- Child Guidance Clinic: 623-2348
- Children's Authority: 627-0748
- Pembroke Street Mental Health & Wellness Centre: 623-9084



## Stress: Red Light, Green Light 1 - 2 - 3!

It's fair to say that this *red light, green light* game recalls some of our best childhood memories. Remember the adrenaline rush when your friend hurriedly mumbled "onetwo-three" in an attempt to catch you moving or stumbling, to send you back to the starting position? At that moment, you made sure to stand extremely still. At first, it was easy, but after a painstaking 30 seconds, you might have found your body less able to balance on one foot or three toes, depending on where "three" found you.



The effect of stress works in a somewhat similar fashion. Stress can be any experience/threat that exceeds our ability to cope. Some common stressors are school, work, relationships, or financial issues. Stress is not always a negative thing; in fact, stress can motivate us to complete our tasks or improve ourselves in some way, for example, when facing impending deadlines. However, prolonged exposure to stress can have a debilitating effect on our physical and mental health and even our behaviour.

Much like in our childhood game, our body can tolerate stress for a period of time, but chronic stress can negatively impact our immune system. With the immune system compromised, the body becomes susceptible to infections and communicable diseases, adding to the strain it may already be experiencing. Ultimately, stress can result in chest pain, heart issues, high blood pressure, muscle pain, headaches, and nausea.



In terms of emotional health, stress can lead to irritability, anxiety, depression, frustration and/or anger. These symptoms can manifest in behaviour through temper outbursts, substance abuse, social withdrawal, and changes in sleep and eating habits, all unhealthy coping strategies, which adversely affect functioning. Depending on the situation, stress can even lead to the loss of relationships, employment and/or housing if not effectively managed. As such, stress management is essential to our quality of life.

Here are some simple ways to help relieve stress:

- Talk with a trusted friend
- Find time to laugh
- Guided meditations on YouTube
- Exercise (enough to break a sweat)
- Prioritize sleep
- Eat well
- Practice deep breathing



Professional help should be sought if you are:

1. Feeling overwhelmed
2. Engaging in unhealthy behaviours to cope (e.g. alcohol/drug abuse)
3. Having self-harming thoughts



Don't let yourself get caught up and stuck on red light. Relieve the stress to help your body function at its best.

## The Benefits of Attending Physical School

COVID-19 hampered the daily operations of students by replacing the 'normal' physical class with online schooling. Two years later, efforts are being made by the Ministry of Education to transition back face-to-face learning.

While some students and parents are considering the drawbacks of the pandemic, here are some benefits of attending physical school.



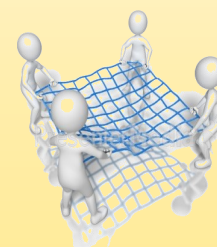
### Child Development

- The physical school environment encourages learning, playing, sharing, and communicating with peers. This environment provides the opportunity for friendships and a place of acceptance outside the home/family setting.
- Students continue to grow in their self-awareness and develop social awareness outside the home. School interactions shape students' character from their early school years until graduation.
- One of the major benefits of physical school is the opportunity to connect and experience lasting relationships with peers and teachers. This is good for students overall mental and emotional health, helping reduce isolation and anxiety.



### School Safety Net

- Schools are structured institutions governed by the school code of ethics, school discipline matrix and children's rights laws, all geared towards the equality, rights, and the benefit of all students.
- Schools provide meals (breakfast and lunches) for students. They also provide career resources, hard and soft skills, and counselling interventions from SSSD personnel.
- Schools provide supervision, as some students live in high-risk communities. They help shield students from the negative influences within these communities by giving them a better option through education.



### In-person Learning is Better

- Students, especially at a young age, grasp academic concepts better through in-person learning.
- For children, the physical presence of a teacher is important to connecting with what is being taught.
- Students listen more attentively because they need to carry out instruction in the teacher's presence.
- Children also have the benefit of engaging their teachers more privately than in a virtual classroom, and they can express themselves better in fun group work.



### Life Skills

- Life skills are values that impact the development of children; those skills are used throughout their lives.
- Physical school helps students develop essential life skills, like discipline, accountability, responsibility, and punctuality.
- In-person class assignments promote responsibility and accountability. Physical schooling denies parents the opportunity to do assignments on behalf of their children.
- Physical school teaches students to be disciplined in their preparation for school.





## Preventing and Lowering Absenteeism in Schools

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the SSSD actively kept track of the number of students absent at both the primary and secondary school levels.

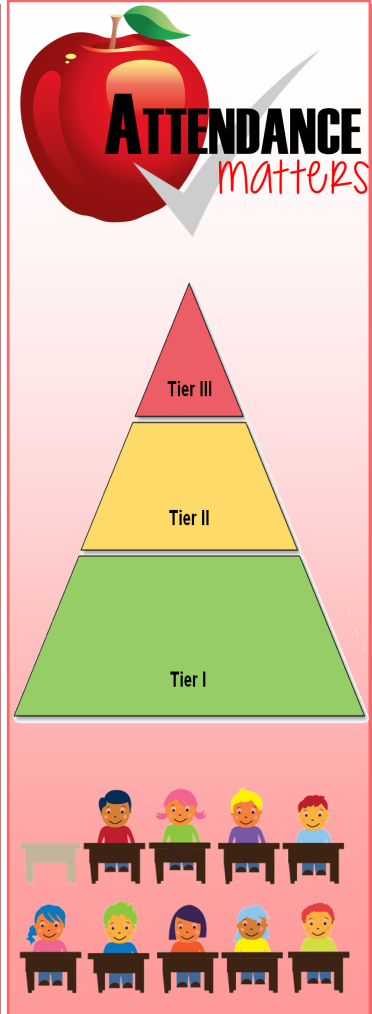
The Ministry's intervention for absenteeism is recorded in the referrals done for these students, along with the number of home visits completed by the Social Work Unit. From this intervention, several students have returned to school and will be back out in full at the start of Term III of the academic year 2021/2022.



### Measures to Reduce Absenteeism

- **Tier 1** efforts contribute to the establishment of norms, expectations, and initial supports to assist students in attending regularly.
  - ◊ Parent Teachers Association (PTA) can get involved in lowering student absenteeism by using their parenting networks that are linked to the community.
  - ◊ Teachers/Principals should regularly notify parents if their child/children are not in attendance, and attempt to work with established resources (e.g., PTA) to support students and families, where possible.
  - ◊ Collaborating and networking can aide in addressing absenteeism A community approach can be considered in lowering absenteeism since communities have multiple schools and share similar issues.
- **Tier 2** targeted interventions support a smaller population of students, parents, and community as well as individual students presenting with chronic absenteeism (referral and MDT process).
- **Tier 3** is intensive, and requires further specialized individual work, such as:
  - ◊ Individual counselling
  - ◊ External referrals to the Police Service, National Family Services, etc.
  - ◊ Additional academic support in school

For more information on the referral and MDT process, see SSSD Insider Volume 1 Issue 2: [Newsletter-2701-ADJUSTED.pdf \(moe.gov.tt\)](#)



Interventions to reduce absenteeism at the primary and secondary school levels include:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home visits assessment</li> <li>• Principal and teacher consultations</li> <li>• Students' consultation</li> <li>• Family psychotherapeutic intervention</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group work</li> <li>• Parenting in education</li> <li>• External referrals</li> <li>• Care and protection</li> </ul> |
|--|---|



## Poems: Students' Views on COVID-19 and School

### Miracle Ministries High School

#### *Online School 2020 - Jahsenym*

The first few months of 2020 went pretty well,  
Then COVID-19 struck and the economy fell,  
Schools and all businesses were closed up tight,  
Not even airports could conduct any flights.

Thus, online classes were born,  
I found it uncomfortable like a prickly thorn,  
I really just wanted to leave my work undone,  
But I needed to do it to 'become' someone.

The classes to me were harder than I expected,  
It's a challenge to grasp the work when we're not  
as connected,

The teachers and classes were emotionally  
draining,

To the point where it felt like my interest was  
fading.

Hopefully next year school shall reopen,  
Because this year really felt like a bad omen,  
But for now, I'll have to follow the MOE's rule,  
And log in everyday for online school.

### Miracle Ministries High School

#### *This Pandemic - Ethan*

Online teaching is in need of the hours,  
But can't match conventional teaching powers.

At school, my teachers are present and helpful,  
At home, teacher-student interaction isn't as  
fruitful.

Too much screen time concentration,  
Causes eye and head irritation.

System crashing,  
Concepts misunderstanding,  
And internet failure would leave me hanging.

Online teaching is in need of the hours,  
But could never match conventional teaching  
powers.



### Share your information or success stories with us!

Do you have poems, success stories or a major event that happened in your district? Share it with us by contacting one of the editorial committee members to have your information featured!



## Identifying Students with Special Education Needs (SEN)

Students with physical, learning, emotional, behavioural and other challenges can access special education services (including interventions, modifications, and accommodations), but first, they must be identified. Some challenges are easily detectable (e.g., physical impairments), while others are often overlooked or misidentified (e.g., behavioural and emotional difficulties, ADHD). Children exhibiting certain problematic behaviours are often labelled “rude”, “troublesome” and “lazy” and, as such, are denied the opportunity for assessment and potentially life-changing support.



Standardized assessment instruments help identify learners with special needs; those are administered by qualified professionals within and outside the Ministry of Education. Although indications of learning difficulties differ from person to person, and formal diagnoses are best left up to professionals, families and teachers ought to pay attention to concerning student behaviours. Look out for the following while considering the child’s developmental stage:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent failing grades</li> <li>• Poor mathematics, spelling, handwriting, writing, reading, and comprehension performance</li> <li>• Problems understanding and following directions/instructions</li> <li>• School and schoolwork avoidance</li> <li>• Difficulty with focus and task completion</li> <li>• Poor organizational skills</li> <li>• Frequent losing or misplacing of items</li> <li>• Forgetfulness/poor memory</li> <li>• Poor coordination</li> <li>• Tantrums/meltdowns</li> <li>• Impulsiveness</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fidgeting/restlessness</li> <li>• Repetitive actions</li> <li>• Disruptive behaviours</li> <li>• Excessive talking</li> <li>• Difficulty waiting his/her turn</li> <li>• Strong reactions to routine change</li> <li>• Sensitivity to certain touches, sounds, and textures</li> <li>• Other internalizing behaviours, e.g., crying, sadness, suicidal ideation, chronic worry, self-harm, social withdrawal</li> <li>• Other externalizing behaviours, e.g., aggression, rule-breaking, lying, theft, bullying, damaging property</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

The next step typically includes a referral for a psychoeducational assessment. A psychoeducational assessment uses a variety of tools to examine the ability and achievement of an individual. It includes some aspects of a psychological assessment, such as an evaluation of social-emotional and behavioural functioning.



For more information on the psychoeducational assessment process, see SSSD

Insider Volume 1 Issue 2 for further details: [Newsletter-2701-ADJUSTED.pdf\(moe.gov.tt\)](https://www.moe.gov.tt/Newsletters/2701-ADJUSTED.pdf)

## National Virtual Career Fairs

### What is the Career Fairs?

The National Virtual Career Fairs, an initiative of the Port of Spain and Environs District, is just one of the many ways guidance and counselling personnel provide ongoing career development support to students. This project, which commenced on 6th October 2021, themed “Promoting Your Dream Careers”, comprises a series of weekly presentations and panel discussions by relevant providers across careers. (See topics and dates listed below.)

### When and where does it take place?

Every Wednesday of the school term, between 4pm to 6pm, students of Forms three (3) to six (6) throughout all education districts are given the opportunity to explore available career options. This enables them to formulate their plans to successfully transition into postsecondary education and the world of work.

Follow the link to register and join in! <https://bit.ly/3Bfbw15>

### What is learned at these sessions?

Students are introduced to the offerings of local/international colleges/universities, and they learn how to access scholarships, grants, and bursaries. This ongoing effort also teaches participants about the behaviours and skills necessary for lifelong career success.

DATE	TOPIC	Education District Coordinating
APRIL 2022		
6 <sup>th</sup>	Careers in Social Sciences	Victoria
13 <sup>th</sup>	Careers in Social Sciences	Victoria
20 <sup>th</sup>	Careers in Social Sciences	Victoria
27 <sup>th</sup>	Careers in Social Sciences	Victoria
MAY 2022		
4 <sup>th</sup>	Careers in Language	Caroni
11 <sup>th</sup>	Careers in Law	Caroni
18 <sup>th</sup>	Careers in Media / Journalism	Caroni
25 <sup>th</sup>	Careers post COVID-19	Caroni
JUNE 2022		
8 <sup>th</sup>	Careers in Marine & Environmental Management	St. Patrick
15 <sup>th</sup>	Careers in Cosmetology	St. Patrick
22 <sup>nd</sup>	Careers in Culture	St. Patrick
29 <sup>th</sup>	Careers in Computer/ ICT	St. Patrick





## SSSD Events

On 21st March, the world celebrated World Down Syndrome Day. To show support, the staff at SSSD wore their mismatched, colourful socks. The Ministry of Education also encouraged the staff to support by having an internal competition. The rules required that staff take a creative photo of the members of their department wearing mismatched, brightly-coloured socks and submit it to the Corporate Communications department.

SSSD entered with the following picture and won the large department category!



SSSD also had spontaneous events throughout the term, including:

- Carnival Lime
- Curry Day
- Pizza Day

