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In The Caribbean, Leaders Grapple With Reopening of Schools Due To Covid-19

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CASTRIES, St. Lucia, CMC – The St. Lucia government says it will announce Monday when schools on the island will reopen for the new academic term following the closure in March as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Education Minister Dr. Gale Rigobert said she is aware there has been much anxiety by parents and the wider public regarding the pending announcement.

“However, with the circumstances that exist, given the fact that we are still dealing with COVID-19, we had to ensure that discussions were held with all of our major stakeholders and partners, ahead of any such pronouncements.

“It is also prudent for us too, that whatever measures and protocols that we adopt, will ensure that the safety of our students, the staff, caretakers and others is of paramount importance at all times as we continue to minimize the negative impact of COVID-19 as a country,” she added.

Rigobert will on Monday meet with the Chief Education Officer Mrs. Fiona Mayer, the Permanent Secretary Michelle Charles and the Chief Medical Officer Dr. Sharon Belmar George and will later inform parents and the general public as to what the proposed format for the new school year.

““As Minister for Education, next week I will also be making an address to the nation on the new school term as well as a number of other pertinent developments regarding the education sector here in St. Lucia,” Rigobert said.

St. Lucia is not the only Caribbean country dealing with the situation regarding the reopening of schools in the wake of the virus.

Barbados Minister of Education, Technological and Vocational Training, Santia Bradshaw, is to meet with teachers next week to get their input on the safe reopening of schools.

The meetings will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday, and Bradshaw said that he is aware of the anxiety over the reopening of schools in September.

She said over the past few weeks, education officials have been engaged in discussions with various stakeholders, including the trade unions.

Additionally, Bradshaw said that the Ministry had also been receiving input from principals and ministry officials “at the level of various subcommittees, and those discussions are ongoing.

“I believe that they, too, have to be given the opportunity to directly express their concerns, and to make recommendations as we try to navigate together these uncharted waters, which have been presented by the COVID-19 pandemic,” she said with regards to the pending meeting with the teachers.

“After all, they are the ones who have to interface directly with our students. And, while we continue to engage with the unions, I think they also deserve the opportunity to have a forum to speak directly to me as well.”

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Health in Jamaica says given the spike in COVID-19 cases, it has now become necessary to delay the reopening of schools.

“We have consulted with the Ministry of Health and Wellness and barring any unforeseen challenges, schools will reopen on a phased basis beginning Monday, October 5, 2020.’ The Ministry said the re-engagement is based on a blended approach, which includes Face-to-Face teaching and learning, online and offline Computer Aided Learning, televised learning and printed learning kits among other approaches.

“During the period between now and September, the Ministry will finalize the distribution of tablets to teachers and students at the primary level and to finalize the procurement of laptops for students on the Programme of Advancement through Health and Education at Grades 10 -13. The Ministry will also activate the Google Suite Learning Management System for all schools and training will be provided on the use of the system.”

The authorities said that psychosocial support and empowerment sessions will be provided for students, teachers and parents and printed learning kits will be distributed to students. Educational support programmes will also be extended and new partnerships will be forged to support distance/remote learning, “the Ministry of Health said.

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