

July 24th 2020

**CPEA 2020:
Solid Evidence of Successes in the Education Revolution**

Introduction

The results of the recently conducted Caribbean Primary Exit Examination (CPEA) is an excellent indication of the significant improvement this country has made in education, specifically, primary education and the resulting universal access to secondary education, under this ULP administration. What makes the results even more remarkable is the fact that these exams were conducted during a Covid-19 pandemic that rocked the world in ways never before seen, so much so that other countries in this region opted to forego this year's CPEA. There were many challenges leading up to this point including the sudden closure of schools that disrupted the teaching/learning process, causing the Ministry of Education to come up with creative ways to continue the process online in the interim until a more practicable solution could be found. After consultation with all the stakeholders in education and there was eventual return to school by primary and secondary school students preparing for their external examinations, providing weeks of face to face instruction that was critical for their preparation. This decision by the ministry was met by blistering criticism by some who referred to the decision as "madness" and "being reckless", accusing the government and specifically PM Gonsalves of "not caring about peoples' children". Today however, parents, even those who were apprehensive in the beginning, are excited about their children's performances and prospects going forward, but also are grateful in hindsight that Dr Gonsalves provided the leadership required on this specific issue.

CPEA 2020

In the lead up to the CPEA 2020, the Ministry of Education took the bold decision to allow for face to face instruction in the classroom for Grade 6 students. To facilitate this, the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport and Works along with BRAGSA, installed sanitising stations at all schools to ensure that pupils and teachers would be able to properly sanitize before entering the classrooms. In the classroom, seating was arranged to ensure physical distancing and face masks were also worn as an additional measure to protect teacher and students. The Ministry of Education ensured that all protocols put in place with the guidance of the Ministry of Health were strictly adhered to ensure the safety of everyone. It is generally accepted that this additional 6 weeks of face to face instructions for students of Grade 6 went a long way in adequately preparing the students for this year's CPEA.

This year's overall CPEA results saw 1650 of 1915 pupils gaining a passing grade, this represents an 86.16% pass rate, a 1% decrease compared to last year's results. Broken down by gender, females performed better, with 870 females (91%) gaining a passing grade compared to 780 males (81%) passing the CPEA. By any standard, an 86% pass, would be considered an excellent performance and as such, we here in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are no less excited and proud about the performance of our students. The magnificence of these percentages is further appreciated when taken in the context of what pertained pre-2001 under the NDP, when the pass rate bordered around 38%-40%.

Beyond the numbers and percentages presented in the preceding paragraph are the numbers that show the spread of the results, a testament to the success of the education revolution that has seen quality education going beyond Kingstown deep into rural SVG. There were 31 primary schools that gained more than 90% passes among the students who wrote the exams with 18 of those schools having 100% passes among students. The 30 schools with more than 90% pass rate are spread from Sandy Bay, Park Hill in the North East, and Chateaubelair and Rose Hall in the North West to Mayreau in the South. As a matter of fact, only 5 schools of the 31 schools that gained more than 90% are located in Kingstown. Schools all across the country are seeing increased successes in the number of passes every year and its due to a combination of the hard-work, discipline and determination of our students and the dedication of the teachers. One thing is undeniable, there continues to be major successes

in the education revolution that can be seen in the improvement in the results our students achieve in schools across the country. No longer is there a feeling among parents, that their primary school children must attend “town school” to have a chance of performing well at the primary exit exam.

Conclusion

It is pleasing to hear some of the biggest critics of the ULP government’s decision to have face to face instructions for our students under the strictest protocols outlined by the Ministry of Health, Wellness and the Environment, to admit upon reflection, that the Government was right! The insistence of PM Gonsalves that, decisions like these that impact the lives of Vincentians be made in consultation with the experts, using the science and against a bedrock of right reason was definitely the way to go. Imagine for a second, had the knee-jerk advice of Friday and the NDP to close school for the rest of the year been taken, what would have been the methodology used to assign pupils to spaces in secondary schools? The days when only 800 spaces needed to be found for pupils (about 38% of students who wrote the exam) are over and this year, more than 1900 eligible students. Yes, the education revolution in SVG that ensures universal access to secondary education is strong and continues to grow and improve. We are yet to hear Dr. Friday speak to the success of this year’s CPEA, the correctness of the decision and congratulate our students, maybe he is reflecting as he did when this country became the smallest ever to be elected to the United Nations Security Council. But we await! We in the ULP, like most of SVG are happy that we have a wise PM who leads a creative and capable team that understands the gravity of the responsibility entrusted in them. Long live the education revolution!