

PRESS RELEASE**The MoECST Clarifies Reports of COVID-19 Cases In Schools**

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology, as of January 13, 2022, has approved the transition to hybrid learning for 569 schools or about 94% of all schools nationwide. So far, 343 or 60.3% of all schools approved have physically reopened to accommodate students for hybrid learning. Our Ministry applauds the efforts of the members of our education community for the crucial role they are playing in ensuring a safe return for all our students.

The Ministry takes very seriously the safety of our teachers and students and, therefore, notes with great concern, reports in local media regarding suspected COVID-19 cases among teachers and students who are enrolled in hybrid learning, particularly in schools in the Belize District. We take this opportunity to clarify those reports.

Between January 10th and January 13th, the Ministry has, via our COVID-19 Reporting System, received confirmation of 108 cases of COVID-19 affecting teachers and 125 cases of COVID-19 affecting students, nationwide. Of the 108 cases affecting teachers, only 17 were recorded among teachers who were actively engaging in hybrid learning. When compared to cases among students, out of the 125 cases confirmed, 43 were confirmed among students who were actively engaging in hybrid learning. Between the same time period, 1,626 teachers and 17,198 students were actively engaging in hybrid learning. Therefore, the cases recorded among teachers affected 1.04% of teachers actively engaging in hybrid learning and among students, the rate was even lower, with cases affecting only 0.25% of all students actively engaging in hybrid learning. The responses to these confirmed cases affecting teachers and students actively engaging in hybrid learning were prompt, and all sanitisation and cleaning protocols were applied as per our Guidelines on School Operation.

Our information is indicating that for the most part, these cases are appearing in persons who have recently attended social functions or are close contacts of individuals who have tested positive for COVID-19. Furthermore, considering the time when schools have been open and the usual incubation period for the COVID-19 virus, we can safely say that all cases being recorded are not a result of any school activity. While we welcome this news, we note that schools have reported that students have been coming to school when they

are displaying flu-like symptoms. On that basis, we appeal to parents, legal guardians and caregivers to continue monitoring their children and to follow the guidelines for quarantine that can be accessed from our social media platforms, website and on our Education Data and Information Hub.

The challenges we in the education sector are confronted with as we transition to hybrid learning are not easy, and they will not be immediately resolved. The experts are clear: prolonged, nationwide school closures, limited resources for students, teachers and parents and lack of access to remote learning have wiped out decades of progress in education. We can only begin to rectify the situation when our children have returned safely to school.

Our Ministry reaffirms our commitment to doing everything possible to ensure the safety of our education community as we continue the transition to hybrid learning. We have strengthened our surveillance efforts and will continue to support schools in this process. For the educational, emotional, and psychosocial wellbeing of our students, teachers, and our entire community, let us continue to be vigilant. Get vaccinated and get boosted. Wear your mask, wash your hands and watch your distance. Together we can and must make hybrid learning a success.

Ends.

Contact Information

Communications and Public Relations Unit
The Ministry of Education, Culture, Science and Technology
1900 Constitution Drive, City of Belmopan, Belize.

communications@moe.gov.bz

+501 802-0567