



# Minister of Education, Culture, Youth & Sport

**Drs. Rodolphe E. Samuel**

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**To: All Subsidized Schools  
All Private School Boards  
Division of Public Education  
Philipsburg, Sint Maarten**

**DIV Nr.: 10420**

**Philipsburg, August 16, 2020**

**Subject: Commencement of the 2020/2021 Academic Year - COVID-19 (UPDATE)**

Esteemed leaders in Education,

By means of this correspondence, I hereby request your attention for the following, which is in connection with the captioned matter.

Reference is made to my correspondence to you dated July 31, 2020 in which I informed you of a number of pertinent matters in light of the commencement of the academic year and taking the global pandemic COVID-19 into consideration. It would be amiss of Government, and in particular the Minister of Education Culture Youth & Sport (ECYS) if precautionary steps were not taken in order to protect the residents of our island, and in particular the vulnerable ones in our community. It was against that backdrop that the Ministry of ECYS developed the Education Continuity Plan (hereinafter referred to as "ECP"), which stakeholders in the field of education have contributed towards. The Education Continuity Plan was approved on July 30, 2020 and was published in the National Gazette of August 12, 2020.

In being cognizant of the second wave of the COVID-19 on Sint Maarten with the steady increase of active cases, the ECP serves as a guide as to how to continue education while simultaneously ensuring that the health of the students and staff of the various schools on the island are not put at risk and/or compromised.



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It was in light of the afore-going, that I urged and appealed to you to begin the academic year with distance learning, in my correspondence to you of July 31, 2020. It should be noted that at the date of said communiqué the number of active cases was 49.

Taking such into consideration and the prognosis thereof, it was deemed critical that in the interest of public health, schools begin the school year with distance learning for a period of three (3) weeks. It was never the intention of the Minister of ECYS, to close schools. During the aforementioned three (3) week period an assessment would be carried out, as it relates to the spread of COVID-19 on the island. Students who are educationally vulnerable and require a more intensive learning approach, would be identified and the necessary accommodations would be made for them.

It should be noted that since my aforementioned communiqué to you, the number of registered active cases has increased by 144 within a period of just 16 days, to a total of 193 active COVID-19 cases. Taking the public health into consideration and the Government's attempt to contain the spread of COVID-19 on Sint Maarten, it was deemed safest for schools to start with distance learning until further notice. While we believe that the primary responsibility of a school is to provide good education at an accredited standard, we believe it is equally imperative that such is done in a safe environment, and taking the public health situation into consideration, therefore not exposing the students and teachers to a health risk.

I would hope that schools, their staff and parents would agree that this could have far reaching consequences for the general community of Sint Maarten.

Please be informed that in the interest of public health the necessary steps are currently being undertaken to ensure that all schools engage in distance learning until further notice. As we work to provide you with the pertinent documentation, it is my sincere hope that you will adhere to the appeal to temporarily engage in distance learning as outlined in my letter of July 31, 2020.

We are grateful that the majority of schools on the island recognize the serious nature of COVID-19 and therefore have taken the decision to cooperate to contain the spread, by engaging in distance learning. We are also cognizant of the fact that such was done given the fact that they underscored the seriousness of the matter, and the current high number of active cases on the



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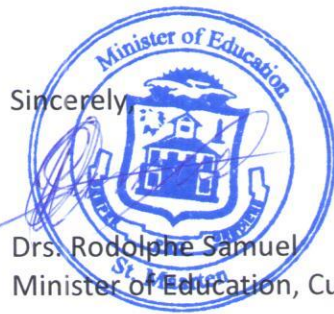
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island, which cannot be ignored. We trust that those schools that are contemplating opening their doors tomorrow for in person, contact learning reconsider such. Doing so would be in the best interest of the students, staff and ultimately Sint Maarten in general.

I trust that as a community, taking the interest of others into consideration, we will be able to flatten the curve, at which time we will be able to resume regular classroom instruction.



Sincerely,

Drs. Rodolphe Samuel  
Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport

Cc: Acting Secretary General OCJS, Shermina Powell-Richardson  
Head, Department of Education, Sidonia Hodge-Lacorbiniere  
Head, Division of Inspection – OCJS, Dorothee Illis-Laurence  
Acting Chairperson SEMC, Olga Mussington-Service