



Bishop Anstey High  
School East and Trinity  
College East

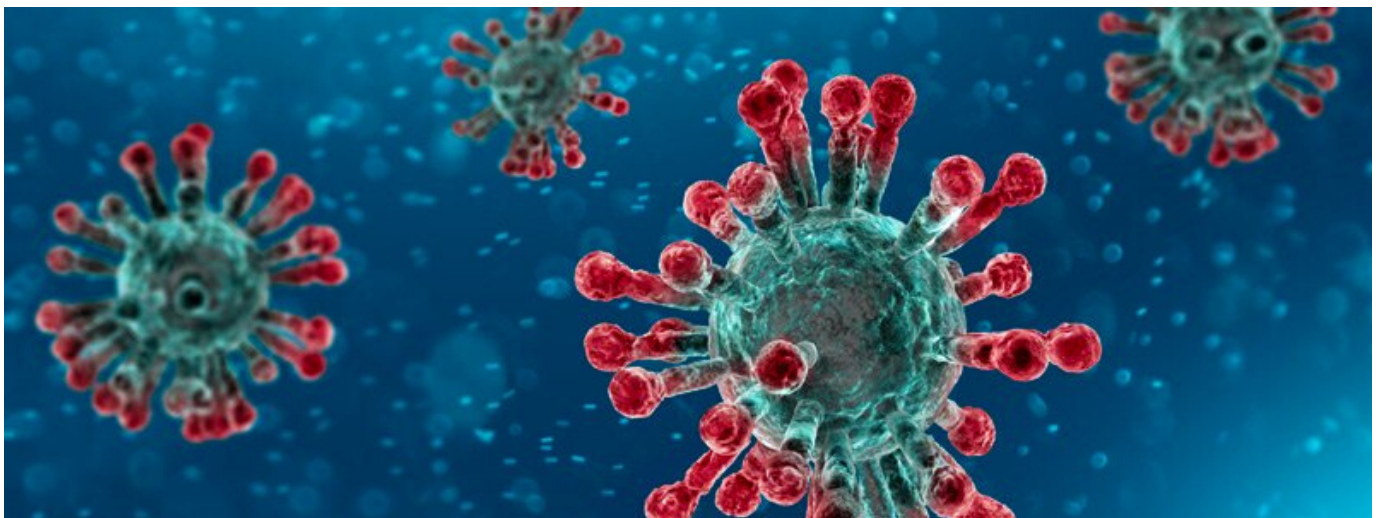


Selflessly Serving  
Our Community



# BATCE STAR

Official Newsletter of Bshop Anstey High School East and Trinity College East



## THIS SPECIAL EDITION FOCUSES ON COVID-19:

---

- **THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE EDUCATION SYSTEM :**

1. **INTERNATIONALLY**
2. **REGIONALLY**
3. **LOCALLY**
4. **ON BATCE STAFF AND STUDENTS**

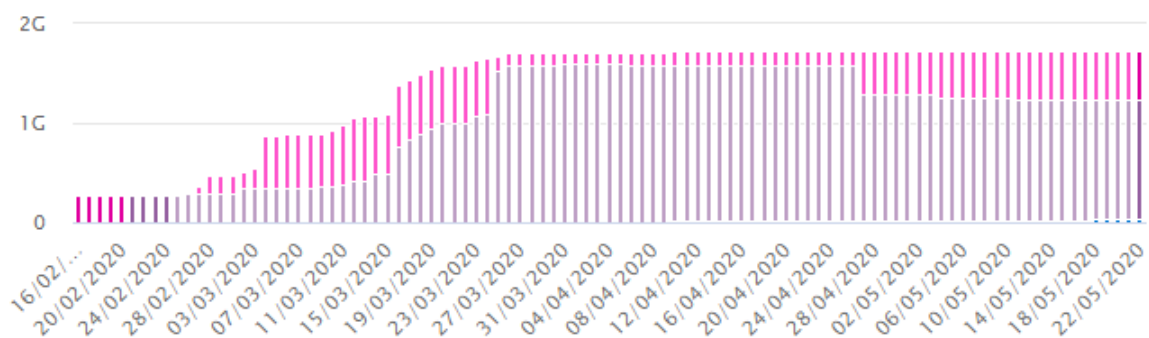
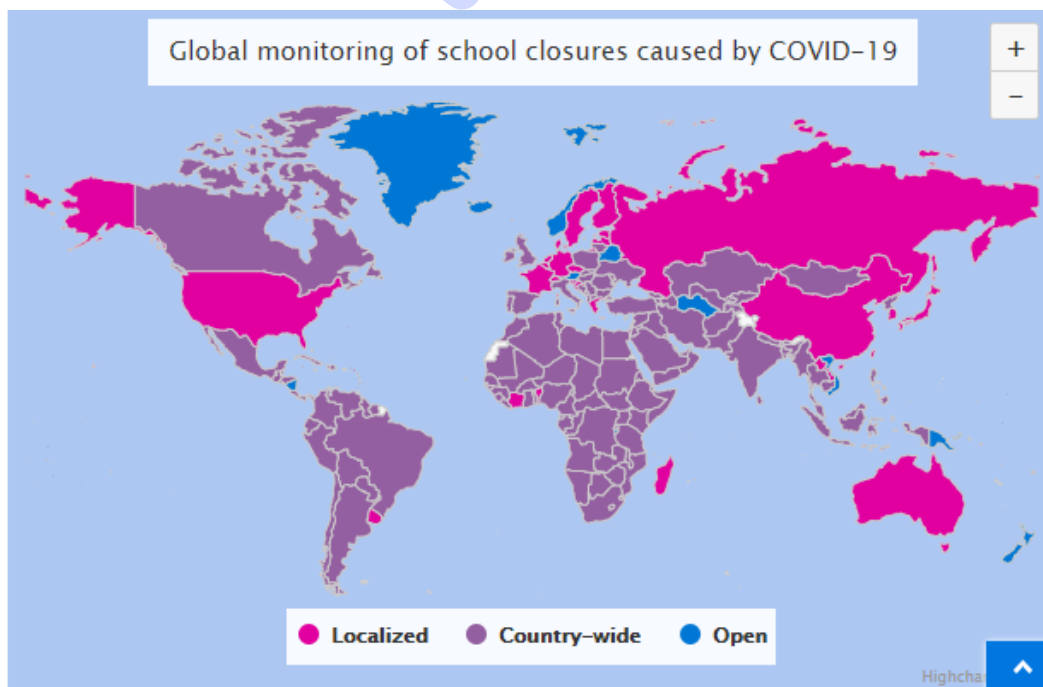
- **THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MENTAL HEALTH**

# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

*Krystin Henry*

## INTERNATIONALLY

Due to the global pandemic, most governments around the world have temporarily closed all educational institutions (primary, secondary and tertiary). As a result of the global closure of schools, almost 70% of the world's student population is being affected according to UNESCO.



**1,198,530,172** affected learners  
**68.5%** of total enrolled learners  
**153** country-wide closures

Due to the closure of schools, teaching has widely been affected and interrupted. This has therefore caused most educational institutions to turn to methods of distance learning to continue teaching. This, however, does not come without challenges. Most challenges faced by students, parents and teachers are internationally felt and include: interrupted learning, poor nutrition, confusion and stress for teachers, parents' unpreparedness for distance and homeschooling, challenges creating, maintaining and improving distance learning, gaps in childcare, economic disparities and many more.

*(source: <https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/consequences>)*

However, this period also coincides with a critical examination and assessment period worldwide. Most universities and tertiary institutions have resorted to making internal assessments online.

In the UK, all exams for the main public qualifications, namely GCSEs and A levels have been cancelled and no online alternative for taking the exams will be issued. Two potential alternatives for the cancellation of these exams have been looked at, for example, the use of predicted grades and the replacement of blind exams with teacher assessments.

In the US, the CollegeBoard has announced that the SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) exams which were scheduled for March, May and June have been cancelled and that from August the exams will be administered every month until the end of the year. However, the Collegeboard has continued with the administration of the AP (Advanced Placement) exams online.

*(source: <https://pages.collegeboard.org/sat-covid-19-updates>  
<https://apcoronavirusupdates.collegeboard.org/students/taking-ap-exams/ap-exam-schedule>)*

## REGIONALLY

Within the Caribbean, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected and disrupted the role that the education system plays for over 5 million students and two hundred thousand teachers, across primary, secondary and tertiary education. Though provisions have been made to ensure the continuity of learning throughout this period, students and teachers who face economic hardship or live in remote areas without access to laptops or the internet have been left behind.

Similarly to the UK and the US, the administration of assessments and exams have been at a standstill due to the global pandemic. In an article dated March 26, 2020, the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) issued a statement proposing a “revised examination strategy to yield valid grades and minimize the disruption to the education system during these unprecedented times.” As such, this new procedure entails:

1. Administration of at least one common paper (Multiple Choice)
2. School-Based Assessments (SBAs) and Paper 032s for private candidates
3. Award final grades based on the moderated SBAs and Multiple Choice Papers

*(source: <https://www.cxc.org/may-june-strategy-2020/>)*

Additionally, in an article dated May 15, 2020, the Registrar and CEO of CXC, Dr Wayne Wesley, released a statement on the administration of CXC examinations and concluded that the examinations are scheduled for July 2020 with results being released in the first week of September 2020. Furthermore, the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD) has announced that the examinations will be administered via e-Testing for countries that are “equipped with the requisite infrastructure.”

*(source: <https://www.cxc.org/cxc-statement-july-2020/>)*

## LOCALLY

From the onset of COVID-19 in Trinidad and Tobago, the government of Trinidad and Tobago initially decided to close all educational institutions for a week on March 13, 2020. However, as the number of cases increased, schools have remained closed and will not be reopened until September 2020.

On March 13, 2020, Prime Minister Keith Rowley initially announced that all educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago would be closed in an effort to reduce the potential spread of COVID-19. On April 14, Anthony Garcia, the Minister of Education announced in a press conference that schools may be able to physically reopen in September 2020. However, he added that in the meanwhile, the third term of the 2019-2020 school year, which usually runs from September to early July will be suspended, and consequently the 2020-2021 school year will be condensed into two longer terms.

In an attempt to promote online learning and teaching, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Education, Dr Lovell Francis, announced the launch of an online learning management system (LMS) for all education levels. This platform can be accessed at <https://learn.moe.gov.tt/>

However, it is imperative to note that this method of online learning excludes and leaves behind approximately 60,000 students who either do not have internet or lack the resources and technology such as laptops to access this platform. Additionally, parents have expressed their concerns that far too many children are being left behind and internet access is just one measure of inequity. According to Tracy Hutchinson-Wallace, the mother of two children with special needs who spoke with Global Voices by telephone, “all the ministry has managed to do with this LMS is take the existing school system – with all its inequities and dysfunction – online”.

*(source: <https://globalvoices.org/2020/04/16/covid-19-exacerbates-inequalities-in-trinidad-tobagos-education-system/>)*

In a LoopTT news article dated May 18, 2020, it was reported that the Minister of Education, Anthony Garcia, in a virtual meeting with the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers’ Association (TTUTA), indicated that the Secondary Entrance Assessment (SEA) Exam which was scheduled to occur in April 2020, is projected to occur sometime in October 2020.

*(source: <https://www.looptt.com/content/ttuta-against-july-cseccape-exams-sea-projected-occur-october>)*

# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION AT BATCE

## RESPONSES FROM THE PRINCIPALS AND HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

### BATCE SIXTH FORM

(Response from Mrs. Shinelly James)

The school has taken several approaches to ensure the health and safety of students and staff:

#### 1. Mental and Emotional Health:

- The Director has arranged for several online Mental Health sessions for staff with the Centre for Human Development Ltd.
- The School has continued to offer EAP services for one on one counselling for staff.
- The Head of Sixth Form has remained in contact with staff checking in on staff well-being and reminding them of services available.
- Teachers have had online light discussion sessions with students to allow them to share their views on matters that pertain to school closure and the impact of COVID 19 on their schooling.
- The Guidance Officer continued to reach out and work with students amidst school closure.

#### 2. Moral and Spiritual Health:

- The Sixth Form Department hopes to have its annual prayer service online for students and parents before students proceed on CAPE examinations.
- The Head of Sixth Form and staff have continued to offer moral support to students through online messages and direct phone calls.
- The Head of Sixth Form and staff continue to offer prayer on behalf of the staff, students, and institution.

#### 3. Physical Health:

- Sixth Form teaching staff donated ten food hampers for students and their families in need.

#### 4. Safety:

- Support Agencies contact numbers were shared on our social media pages and during our online assembly students were made aware where they could find these numbers.

- The Director has implemented a system to ensure the Social Distancing is maintained and that all guidelines as recommended by the Ministry of Health are followed whenever anyone visits the school compound.

Upon the announcement of school closure, the Head of Sixth Form collaborated with staff to determine the approach to continued teaching and learning. A structured approach was devised including timetabling and identification of online platforms that could be used for synchronous teaching and learning. Parents and students were informed of the approach through, emails, Whatsapp groups and our social media pages. Sixth form successfully had Mock Examinations online, as well as, timetabled revision classes. Students were also able to receive feedback on their SBA submissions.

The Administration shared online teaching and learning strategies to ensure quality online delivery of classes. Heads of Department sat in on online classes to offer further support and identify training needs.

According to Ms. James, the major challenge faced by this new mode of teaching was student attendance in some instances. Students' home situations were not always conducive to online classes, additionally some students were demotivated by the changes and uncertainty of CAPE examinations.

To combat these challenges the Head of Sixth Form, Guidance Officer, Deans and teachers, made personal calls to students who did not show up to classes and reached out to parents as well for additional support. We also made laptops available to students through a loan agreement.

Lastly, Ms. James stated that parents expressed concern over the uncertainties of the CAPE examinations. She said that the school remains committed to providing timely information on exams and support to students so that they are adequately prepared for exams.

## **BISHOP ANSTEY HIGH SCHOOL EAST**

### **(Response from Mr. Brian Wickham)**

According to Mr. Wickham, BAHSE has implemented several measures to ensure the health and safety of staff and students during the onset of the Covid19 pandemic.

On Monday, March 02, 2020, the OSH team met to discuss the adoption of a procedure for treating communicable or infectious diseases. This is because schools constitute a significant environment for the spread of communicable disease outbreaks. This procedure was circulated to all stakeholders; staff, students, and parents and mechanisms were immediately activated to ensure its compliance.

Online teaching and learning are being conducted utilizing applications such as Zoom, Skype, and Edmodo and the school sent all communication via email, class WhatsApp chats, and Facebook. There is consistent communication between the school and homes. BAHSE is committed to monitoring the success of these new strategies and the tools used for monitoring may include, but are not limited to:

- Data on student engagement from digital learning platforms – Edmodo, Google Classroom, etc. - to provide tremendous data on student engagement.
- Feedback from students, parents, and teachers to help understand how the plan is impacting student, family and teacher experiences, and to provide data on what improvements the school might make going forward.
- Review of postings as a form of data collection to support teachers and students in aligning learning to the Distance Learning Plan.

Thus far, the school's greatest challenge has been bandwidth and connectivity issues both for staff and students. Also, the transitioning from classroom-based teaching and learning to online distance has contributed to levels of demotivation amongst students.

Mr. Wickham recognizes teachers' great contribution to combating these challenges. Through staff members such as Ms. Nicholls, Ms. Mahabir, Mrs. La Croix, and Mrs. Jagan-Spicer, the school was able to assist students with devices to ensure a higher level of equity in learning. BAHSE continues chatting with students and parents and has received support from the Guidance Officer, Social Worker, Dr. Asha Pemberton, and other professionals in meeting the psychological and emotional needs of students.

He also stated that the staff is aware that there would be a difficulty for some parents in supervising students engaged in distance online learning. He asked that they continue working with the school in improving student engagement.



## **TRINITY COLLEGE EAST**

### **(Response from Mr. Derek West)**

According to Mr. West, TCE teachers were asked to abide by the instructions of the MOE and to conduct all teaching and learning via distance learning to ensure the safety and health of the staff and students. Visits to the school have been made by appointment to avoid congregation on the campus and only if absolutely necessary.

Since a level of blended learning was taking place across the school before Covid19, It was only a matter of coordinating a strategic approach for the entire school during the quarantine period. Teachers were asked initially to only engage during their schedule timetable slot to avoid clashes with different classes. However, the times were eventually reduced from the allocated 40 minutes to 20 minutes per period. Classes are engaged once per week, using the Zoom platform.

Thus far, the major challenge has been reaching and engaging all students. Some are without the devices that will allow them to participate in online teaching and learning and some are without internet service.

One the other hand, some, due to the virtual nature of the engagement and the novelty of the process, have not been taking these efforts seriously. The school has had two parents meeting for form 3 parents to deal with the issue of promotion to form 4 and the associated subject assignment.

To combat these issues, the school has been making efforts to assist those without but these efforts have not had much success. As Principal, Mr. West has addressed all parents via YouTube Live to engage them in working with the school to keep their sons motivated and engaged. Besides the general concerns that come out of these uncertain times, the issue of no formal or summative assessment has been a major concern for the parents.

# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON EDUCATION AT BATCE

## RESPONSES FROM BATCE TEACHERS

During the quarantine period, BATCE teachers have been utilizing several online platforms for online teaching. These include:

- Edmodo, Google Classroom and Whatsapp Messenger for classroom management, communication and dissemination of material.
- Weebly, Zoom and Google Meet for live teaching sessions and one on one consultations.
- Some teachers have even coupled Google Meet with the use of Microsoft Whiteboard for presentation purposes. This acts as a digital whiteboard for teaching visual learners.
- Some teachers have also introduced Weebly and Quizalize to their sessions.

### How are students responding to the switch?

Some students have been resilient and are willing to participate in online discussions and consultations. Some have said that they are able to do more work at home and therefore they have benefitted from the switch.

However, several of students have indicated that being home has “thrown them off their game” completely and it has been difficult for them to adjust. Students (mainly from the lower school) continue to indicate that they miss the physical classroom and are looking forward to returning to a physical school.

BATCE teachers have encountered several challenges with the switch to online teaching. For example, some teachers have noticed a lack of participation and engagement by students, especially at the upper school levels. In order to overcome this challenge, parents of said students were then contacted a direct line of communication between teachers and the home was sparked. Teachers are now able to maintain communication with parents to ensure students attend classes. Teachers have also spoken to their students and developed a collective agreement as to when would be the best time for them. As a result, students have shown a greater sense of accountability and in many cases, their productivity and participation have improved.

Another major issue was students' inability to access the respective online platforms. This was due to a lack of internet access or unavailability of devices. Fortunately, arrangements have been made with these students to receive devices from the school on loan during this time.

In addition, teachers also stated that sticking to the time limit on free Zoom presented a problem during online classes. This has pushed some teachers to employ other means of online teaching besides Zoom. On the other hand, one teacher stated that she went to the extent of purchasing a zoom account to allow for continuity and consistency in online platforms.

Some teachers have also noticed that some students were initially struggling to grasp topics. This may have been due to their lack of physical learning resources such as textbooks. To overcome this issue, teachers have started uploading online resources like past paper questions and documents covered/to be covered in class.

Lastly, some teachers were faced with issues of slow internet connection and computer problems which started to affect their online sessions. To solve this problem, they continue to ensure that they have a backup device. Also, some teachers upload their presentations to Weebly and Google Classroom prior to the session so students can still have access to the material if these issues arise.

### **How are teachers dealing with the switch?**

According to some teachers, balancing work and personal lives continues to be a challenge. This form of teaching requires greater and more time-consuming preparation. Additionally, expectations of feedback and submission of assignments/SBAs also require keen management on the part of parents and students. Form teacher duties have also increased exponentially.

Some teachers were finding it difficult to engage their students online with the content they had developed or sourced for their subject area. To combat this, they have researched the best ways to develop the online content and this has even forced some of them to completely redo old material that was applicable in the classroom setting.

On the other hand, some teachers have also stated that the switch to virtual teaching has improved their lives. The time that would usually be spent on the road commuting to and from school can now be spent with family. They are able to do personal work during the morning period and meet with students in the afternoon when they are more receptive to interactions.

However, it is clear that some interactions just cannot be substituted virtually.

# IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MENTAL HEALTH

Though the COVID-19 pandemic is a disease that affects the human respiratory system, it does not only affect the physical body; the human psyche and mental wellbeing have also been compromised. The new research was done which assessed the health implications of COVID-19 has shown a heightened prevalence of moderate-to-severe self-reported depressive and anxious symptomatology among the general public (Wang et al., 2020).

## Impact on students

As a result of COVID-19 and social distancing measures that have been put in place, as of April 8, 2020, schools have been shut down in over 188 countries worldwide, according to UNESCO. Hence teachers and students have turned to a new method of teaching and learning via online platforms, and this change is having adverse effects on both students and teachers. Additionally, with the closure of schools, there is now reduced accessibility to resources provided by schools for students that already suffer from mental health issues, such as counselling. In a survey conducted by the UK mental health charity YoungMinds, which included 2111 participants up to age 25 years with a mental illness history in the UK:

- 83% said the pandemic had made their conditions worse
- 26% said they were unable to access mental health support due to peer support groups and face-to-face services being cancelled, and support by phone or online can be challenging for some young people.

Furthermore, with the suspending of schools, the daily lives and routines of students have been drastically shifted and this change is enough to cause mental and emotional turmoil for students. With the switch to online-based learning and teaching, academic stressors for students have been widely exacerbated. Based on research (Wickens, 2011) which sought to examine the impact of academic disruptions on students, it is safe to infer that due to the changed caused by the pandemic, students may experience:

- Lack of motivation toward academics
- Increased pressures to learn independently
- Potential higher rates of dropout or desire to dropout

(source: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0020764020925108#>)

Currently, there is one published study which explores the impact of COVID-19 on student education and well-being (Cao et al., 2020) which states that approximately 25% of their sample reported experiencing anxiety symptoms, which were positively correlated with increased concerns about academic delays, economic effects of the pandemic, and impacts on daily life.

# IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MENTAL HEALTH

## 3.1. Levels of anxiety among college students during the epidemic

Table 1 shows how the mental health of college students was affected to varying degrees during the outbreak. Of the 7143 college students, about three-quarters (75.1%) had no symptoms of anxiety, whereas the proportions of students with mild, moderate, and severe anxiety were 21.3%, 2.7%, and 0.9%, respectively.

Table 1. Number of students with different anxiety level ( $n = 7143$ ).

Anxiety Level	Number	Ratio (%)
Normal	5367	75.1
Mild	1518	21.3
Moderate	196	2.7
Severe	62	0.9

(source: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0165178120305400?via%3Dihub>)

Another stressor as a result of COVID-19 which has heavily impacted students is the postponement of examinations and uncertainty surrounding it. Students already experience high levels of stress where examinations are concerned however with the onset of the pandemic, and a cloud of uncertainty looming over students concerning what is going to happen during the new examination period, these levels of stress have been amplified. Not only this, but students also face a disruption in their regular mode of learning and have to adapt to online learning. This transition is difficult for students to deal with, especially those who are slow learners and may need the security of face-to-face teaching interactions.

(source: <https://medcraveonline.com/MOJAP/MOJAP-07-00289.pdf>)

# IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON MENTAL HEALTH

## Impact on teachers

Amid a global pandemic, teachers still have the responsibility to carry out their duties, which have become exponentially more difficult. Though teaching and learning can be facilitated by the use of online learning platforms, this does not mean that it is easier or the same as face-to-face teaching. This change in the method of teaching not only has put a mental strain on students who are concerned for their future, but it has deeply affected the lives of teachers, globally. Like the rest of the population, teachers are facing stress and anxiety as they are concerned in their personal lives, for their health, and the health of their loved ones. Hence, the disruption in their daily lives and routines of having to adapt to a new way of teaching is an additional stressor that they have to bear with. Furthermore, teachers have been facing difficulty in separating their home environment from their work environment as the two are now intertwined.

In a survey conducted by YouGov, it was found that one-third of teachers are currently stressed and anxious about their mental health and wellbeing. The survey of 820 teachers and senior leaders found that stress levels were higher than normal for the start of the summer term, with 59% of primary school teachers and 49% of secondary school teachers currently experiencing higher levels of stress and anxiety than usual. In total, 49% of respondents said they were experiencing stress and anxiety over fear of themselves or their family catching the coronavirus, while 35% of teachers were experiencing heightened stress and anxiety as a result of preparing work for pupils to complete at home. The charity Education Support which commissioned this research found that the majority of the calls to the charity's helpline were related to the pandemic. The findings of these calls concluded that:

- 34% of teachers were currently stressed and anxious about their mental health and wellbeing as well as that of their families.
- 43% of secondary teachers said “the exam process” was causing stress, compared with 5 per cent in primary schools.
- 31% of primary and 19% of secondary school teachers reported higher levels of stress and anxiety caused by supporting families who might need emotional and/or financial support.
- 44% said they were stressed and anxious by the ongoing uncertainty about what may happen during the summer term and 46% were worried about what may happen in the new school year.

(source: <https://www.tes.com/news/third-teachers-have-covid-19-mental-health-fears>)

# **MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH OF EMPLOYEES, STUDENTS AND PARENTS AT BATCE**

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic downturn have negatively affected the Mental Health of individuals and families creating new stresses and worries. Members of Staff are yet to strike the balance between their professional responsibilities and personal responsibilities. In this unprecedented period of extended remote learning, the mental health and well-being of students has been a concern, from students feeling isolated and dealing with depression to handling social-emotional challenges and experiencing long-term trauma.

Some parents are frontline workers or now became unemployed due to the closure of some businesses. Parents were now faced with the daily routine of teaching their children and monitoring their learning. This, required parents having a clear understanding of the technology learning platforms being used. One parent said she was now reaching breaking point and laments “My twin boys and my daughter are now being home-schooled because of the pandemic, so I try to get them started on academic assignments right after breakfast. It’s not easy though, because the kids aren’t accustomed to working from home and lack the discipline to stay on schedule without my prompting.”

Coupled with these home stressors and the challenges of restructuring work practices. many employees and parents were being challenges all around and these could lead to poor outcomes. BATCE, through the Office of the Director, developed an Action Plan that gives major consideration to the Health and Wellness of employees and students. A Health and Wellness Team comprising internal and external stakeholders was created to assist in providing advice and care for students and staff. Guidance Counsellors, the Schools’ Nurse, Deans and Social Workers were required to provide support emotionally and economically to students, particularly those who are “at- risk”. Improved Communication strategies and BATCE Education Awareness Programme during COVID 19 were heightened. Notices and reminders were sent out to staff on the continuing EAP Services available.

Nine online sessions were held during the month of May for members of BATCE staff, parents and staff of Bishops Centenary College. The topics included Self Care (May 26, 2020): Mental Health and COVID- 19: Managing the psychological Impact in the workplace (May 20)): School Reopening: How can we help students manage and heal (May 22). Each topic was organized at three different time periods on the date scheduled. Sessions were conducted by Mr Hanif Benjamin, Clinical Psychologist and The Centre for Human Development. Staff were invited to participate in webinars and seminars on Mental Health, Mindfulness and Social and Emotional Learning by reputable organizations. These sessions provided staff with additional strategies to manage themselves, their students and the new classroom normal.

As the pandemic continues, mental health and social and emotional learning will be increasingly more of an issue as students and staff try to navigate this unprecedented event. Sessions on Mental Health and social and emotional learning will continue.