



OECS Secretariat, Castries, St. Lucia, September 9th, 2010. A new and harmonized Common Entrance Examination for 6 graders in the OECS is to be discussed at the 21st

meeting of OECS Ministers for Education to be held in the British Virgin Islands from September 14th to 17th 2010.

If endorsed by the OECS Ministers for Education, the Common Assessment Mechanism for Grade 6 students will reflect a transition from the traditional qualification system for promoting primary school students secondary schools in each OECS Member State.

Head of the OECS Education Reform Unit Marcellus Albertin says the OECS Secretariat and the Caribbean Examinations Council CXC are looking at developing the new assessment mechanism at that level and the OECS Ministers for Education will discuss the proposed approach with a view towards recommending the way forward when they meet next week: “***The development of a Common Assessment for the end of primary school is important for the region. At this time we only have one standardized system of assessment for the region and that is being done by CXC at the end of secondary school. This is the CSEC Examination which is administered by CXC. We believe that for purposes of comparison and efficiency, and generally for raising the standards, the region needs to institute one examination at the end of the primary level. We know that each country undertakes a very expensive system of developing items, storing items and preparing exams on a yearly basis and we believe that there could be greater efficiency gains if it is done by***

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CXC for the entire region. It will also present the opportunity to compare performances between the different countries as well as establish a standard of assessment for the region at that level as to how our children are performing at the end of primary school.”

The harmonized Common Entrance Examination for 6 graders in the OECS is also among the strategic joint approaches for consideration by OECS Member States as they move towards the full implementation of an OECS Economic Union by January 2011. The Head of the OERU sees the common assessment mechanism as a follow up from other initiatives in the OECS education sector such as the harmonizing of curriculum across the region, the use of ICT in education, a code of ethics for teachers in the OECS, common teacher training standards and movements towards a common policy in early childhood education : ***“The move towards a common regional assessment for grade 6 in the OECS is really tied to the longer term vision of a harmonized education system for the region and also to the move by the OECS to form an economic union with the free movement of persons, including the movement of teachers and students. There is need for harmonized approaches in exams, teaching methodology, teacher recruitment etc.”***

Albertin is optimistic that a good case will be made at the 21st meeting of OECS Ministers for Education, for endorsing the proposed harmonized Common Assessment Mechanism for Primary School leavers.

Access to tertiary education programmes is also a key issue for the OECS Ministers for Education. Albertin says challenges include tuition cost, the quality of education provided and the enrollment of students at that level. He says online distance learning and the use of open education resources can help attract more Eastern Caribbean students to tertiary level institutions thereby increasing access.

The 21st OECS Ministers for Education meeting will also look at approaches that will help to strengthen relationships with regional institutions such as the University of the West Indies and accredited external institutions.

Male under achievement, discipline including alternative forms of correction by teachers, are also on the agenda for the 21st OECS Ministers for Education meeting.

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In light of the new school year 2010-2011, the Head of the OECS Education Reform Unit is extending best wishes to students and all who work in the education sector. He says while there are many opportunities to advance the status of education in the OECS there are also several challenges.

The OERU has also welcomed the news that there are many more children accessing education at the early childhood and secondary school levels. He says efforts by OECS governments have helped to realize a 70 percent net enrollment rate at the early childhood level. However, he adds that the OECS Ministers for Education are concerned about how the 30 percent non-enrollment at the early childhood level can be addressed.

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