

Key Points from Meeting

Since reopening of schools, several schools have been closed due to students' unrest, prompting His Excellency the president to order an investigation into the causes. We don't know what the findings will be, but the Parents Association has a good idea from their recent survey of what some of the causes are. These are broadly categorized as peer pressure; drug and substance abuse; bad management of schools; examinations phobia; bad role modelling by adults; ineffective punishment mechanisms; and incitement of learners by external and/or internal sources.

Stakeholders in the sector are upset by the incidents and the destruction they are occasioning to schools and the community at large. They are responding with anger, which is justified. Some suggest the reintroduction of corporal punishment in schools, others want the students expelled and never admitted into any other school, while others want the suspected students blacklisted so that they carry the burden of their indiscipline for the rest of their lives.

The stakeholders meeting here today have considered this issue and would like to flag 6 issues to consider as we engage in discussions on this issue:

1. Article 26 of the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights to which Kenya is signatory, proclaims the right of every person to education;
2. Articles 28 & 29 of the Convention on the rights of the child to which Kenya is signatory obligates the state to provide education to all children;
3. The Constitution of Kenya makes basic education a constitutional right;
4. The Children's Act 2001 proscribes corporal punishment;
5. The government of Kenya's education policy is to implement free and compulsory basic education – the government has spent billions in making basic education accessible free of charge, but we are still grappling with implementing the compulsory aspect; and
6. Most of the children now at home due to schools closures resulting from unrest are innocent, they are anxious because they losing learning time and angry at their colleagues who may have caused fires and at everyone else who is blaming them.

Taking all these factors into account, we realise that there are three key questions to grapple with:

1. How do we guarantee the fundamental right to education for all children in these difficult times?
2. What are the most viable options for addressing indiscipline among students?
3. How do we adapt teaching and learning to the changing environment?

In an attempt to respond to these questions, we suggest some measures that we think will help to set us on the path to addressing these challenges both in the short term and the long term.

Short term actions

1. Develop & deploy a coherent and empathetic communication strategy to reach parents and children on the actions being taken to ensure urgent resumption of learning in schools that have been affected by cases of unrest, emphasizing the fact that basic education remains compulsory;
2. Double the number of teachers and other staff on duty to heighten surveillance;
3. Fast-track posting of chaplains to schools to promote spiritual nourishment of the children;
4. Create partnerships to invest in and intensify provision of psycho-social support to both students and teachers;
5. Get schools to focus on preparing rather than pressuring the candidates as they approach the examinations. Sleep is important, children must get enough of it examinations or no examinations; and

6. Investigate each school fire and sanction the culprits (student or non-student) accordingly including using the criminal justice system if needed.

Long term

1. Train teachers on modern methods of sanctioning indiscipline;
2. Create alternative schools for children who even after all efforts by the teachers and parents don't comply with school rules, to transition to so that incidents of unrest don't subvert the official policy of free and compulsory basic education. These schools should be structured in such a way that character formation will be a major part of the curriculum even if it means that such children take longer to cover the normal curriculum; and
3. Create a system that cabs promotion of euphoric religion without spirituality and which is in itself part of the problem.

Thank you.