

MINISTER OF EDUCATION, CULTURE, YOUTH AND SPORT
Minister van Onderwijs, Cultuur, Jeugd en Sport

To: All School Boards
Sint Maarten

Div#.: 14309-B

Philipsburg, AUG 12 2025

Subject: Follow-up on Hair Discrimination and Upcoming Legislative Amendments

Dear School Board members,

I extend my sincere appreciation to those of you who attended the meeting convened on June 25, 2025, at the Government Administration Building to discuss key issues including the admittance of 4-year-olds into primary education and the matter of grooming policies in schools, particularly as it relates to hair discrimination.

As highlighted during our meeting, and reiterated by the Ministry, concerns surrounding school grooming policies, specifically those that disproportionately impact students of African descent, have been a longstanding source of distress within our community. The feedback from parents, educators, and the broader public underscores that these policies, however well-intentioned, have at times contributed to a sense of exclusion, inequity, and psychological distress among students.

The directive from Parliament, aligned with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, compels the Ministry to act.

In keeping with our commitment to fostering inclusive, rights-based educational environments, I remind all school boards of the following key points agreed upon during the June 25th discussion:

1. The Legislative Amendment

The Ministry of ECYS is in the process of finalising a legislative amendment which will explicitly prohibit hair discrimination in all learning institutions. The law will affirm the right of all students to wear natural hairstyles, including but not limited to afros, locks, twists, braids, cornrows, and other protective hairstyles, provided they are clean (washed), well-maintained, and do not obstruct learning or pose safety risks. Hijabs and other religious head coverings will also be protected.

2. Policy Application to All Schools

While some boards have already adopted more inclusive grooming practices, the upcoming legislation will ensure consistency across the entire education system. This is not a matter of trend, preference, or institutional tradition, it is a matter of equity, legality, and educational

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access. As such, all schools, regardless of denomination or philosophy, will be expected to adhere to the new standards once enacted.

3. Collaborative Implementation

The Ministry values the autonomy and input of school boards and has committed to sharing the draft text of the legislative amendment for your review and feedback. We trust that this partnership will strengthen the clarity and applicability of the eventual guidelines.

4. Public Expectations and the 2025–2026 School Year

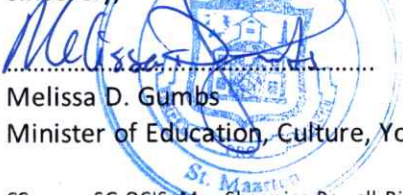
As we prepare for the start of the new academic year on August 20, please be advised that there is heightened public scrutiny on this matter. Parents have already begun inquiring about whether changes will be made to existing policies. While the legislation is still forthcoming, I ask that all school boards exercise restraint and compassion when interpreting grooming policies and avoid punitive measures that may contradict the spirit of the forthcoming law.

The Ministry remains committed to its oversight responsibility to ensure that no student is denied access to education, nor subjected to disciplinary action, based on natural hair texture or culturally significant hairstyles. We are confident that, together, we can transition toward an education system that celebrates diversity and upholds the dignity of every child.

The draft legislative text will be circulated to all school boards for review prior to finalisation and presentation to parliament during the fourth quarter of 2025. In the interim, I ask that you reflect on the agreements reached during our meeting and begin preparing your institutions for the policy shift that lies ahead.

Thank you once again for your continued cooperation and leadership.

Sincerely,



Melissa D. Gumbs
Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport

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