

# Sint Maarten

post-hurricane  
Irma assessment

Education sector

# CONTENTS

<b>Acronyms</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Background</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Scope and methodology</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Assessment Framework</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Education situation overview</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Observations</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Annex 1 Sector Assessment Report, Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>Annex 2 School visits report by UNICEF</b> .....	<b>14</b>

# ACRONYMS

DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EMIS	Education Management Information System'
GBV	Gender based violence
IASC	Interagency Standing Committee
INEE	Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies
LSBE	Life Skills Based Education
MECYS	Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport
MHPSS	Mental health and psychosocial support
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SECDA	Sint Maarten Early Childcare Development Association
SSP	School Safety Plan
SSSD	Student Support Services Division
TVET	Technical Vocational Training and Education'
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VSA	Ministry of Public Health, Social Development and Labor
VROMI	Ministry of Public Housing, Spatial Planning, Environment and Infrastructure

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

UNICEF is sincerely grateful to the honorable Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, Silveria Jacobs, and her team for all the support provided which enabled us to conduct the assessment. UNICEF is also sincerely grateful to all informants who contributed to the assessment. We give a special thanks to Shermina Powell Richardson, Head of the Youth Department and team, for arranging the field visits and meetings with stakeholders, as well as Jorien Wuite, Secretary General of MECYS for inviting us to cooperate with her excellent team in developing the Mid Term Resilience Plan, and Olga Mussington, Head Student Support Services Division for sharing her insights and experiences.

# BACKGROUND

Hurricane Irma, the heaviest hurricane ever - category 5 with winds up to 185 to 220 miles per hour - hit Sint Maarten on 6 September 2017 and left the island devastated with immense destruction of homes, businesses and infrastructure, including basic services. During the immediate aftermath the population demonstrated an enormous capacity and resilience cleaning-up their houses, arranging for quick repairs and trying to resume their regular daily life. Some people however took advantage of the climate of generalized insecurity on the island and were involved in looting and vandalism.

The impact of Hurricane Irma, followed by Hurricane Jose and Maria, affected the population as a whole and in particular vulnerable groups, among them children and youth (total affected population: 42,083, of which 12,813 children and youth from 0-24 years of age). Basic needs as food, water, electricity and telecommunications resumed slowly. However, shelter remains a challenge for many affected people whose houses are completely destroyed.

Schools and other basic services such as day care centers, community and youth centers as well as sports facilities and cultural heritage sites suffered damage, ranging from minor and moderate to severe, requiring repair, rehabilitation and (re)construction of infrastructure, replacement of damaged equipment and materials.

The Government of Sint Maarten is focusing in the disaster response during the relief and recovery periods on enhancing the resilience of communities and strengthening of facilities using a "Build Back Better" strategy.

UNICEF commends the ministry's efforts re-opening all schools shortly after the harrowing impact hurricane Irma left on the country. In line with one of UNICEF's most essential principles in humanitarian action 'Education Cannot Wait', the ministry positioned children's education as an immediate priority and secured safe spaces for children to continue to develop and learn despite current adverse societal circumstances resulting from the natural disaster.

UNICEF is committed to continue to contribute to MECYS vision and mandate to *"support the people of Sint Maarten to become self-confident, resilient, lifelong learners, creative and critical thinkers"* (MECYS Strategic Plan 2016 - 2026).

# SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

On 15 September 2017, the Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport sent a request for international assistance from UNICEF to the United Nations Resident Coordinator in the region, Richard Blewitt. MECYS asked for UNICEF's support to conduct a needs assessment in the education sector including psychosocial support as well provide necessary assistance following hurricane Irma.

The UNICEF team comprised three persons: Bart Vrolijk - education in emergencies advisor, Malia Robinson – child protection in emergencies advisor and La-Toya Charles – child rights in the Caribbean specialist. The assessments were conducted between 22 September and 29 October 2017. The UNICEF team visited twelve primary schools, five secondary schools and the two institutes for tertiary education.

The UNICEF team received all support required from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport (MECYS) to conduct a needs assessment and was invited to participate in the Task Force for the development of the Mid-term Resilience Plan. UNICEF's needs assessment, facilitated by the Department of Youth, consisted of field visits to primary and secondary schools, day care centers, and church and community after-school programs. During the school and day-care centers visits, UNICEF staff interacted with school managers, teachers, and students and inquired about their experiences and sense of well-being in preparation of, during, and after the hurricane (see Annex 2).

# ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

- i. Request from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport (see above)
- ii. UNICEF’s Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action<sup>1</sup> (as relevant – see below)

Education - Priority Core Commitments and Benchmarks	
<p><b>Commitment 1:</b> Effective leadership is established for education cluster/ inter-agency coordination (with co-lead agency), with links to other cluster/sector coordination mechanisms on critical intersectoral issues.</p>	<p><b>Benchmark 1:</b> Coordination mechanism provides guidance to all partners on common standards, strategies and approaches, ensuring that all critical education gaps and vulnerabilities are identified, and provides information on roles, responsibilities and accountability to address all gaps without duplication.</p>
<p><b>Commitment 2:</b> Children, including preschool-age children, girls and other excluded children, access quality education opportunities.</p>	<p><b>Benchmark 2:</b> Schools are reopened, and child- and adolescent-friendly emergency non-formal programs, including play and early learning for young children, are established for affected communities.</p>
<p><b>Commitment 3:</b> Safe and secure learning environments that promote the protection and well-being of students are established.</p>	<p><b>Benchmark 3:</b> Schools are safe and free from violence, and children, including girls, can safely move between home and school.</p>
<p><b>Commitment 4:</b> Psychosocial and health services for children and teachers are integrated in educational response.</p>	<p><b>Benchmark 4:</b> All education-related humanitarian response integrates appropriate psychosocial, health and nutritional interventions.</p>
<p><b>Commitment 5:</b> Adolescents, young children and caregivers access appropriate life skills programs and information about the emergency, and those who have missed out on schooling, especially adolescents, receive information on educational options.</p>	<p><b>Benchmark 5:</b> Relevant education programs are implemented, including for adolescents and young children.</p>

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/CCC\\_042010.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/CCC_042010.pdf)

# EDUCATION SITUATION OVERVIEW

The education sector in Sint Maarten comprises 17 primary schools, 6 secondary schools, including vocational training schools, two tertiary education institutes ('National Institute for Professional Advancement' and 'University of Sint Maarten'), one special education school, 37 day-care centers for 0 – 4 (up to and including three years of age) years old children and an estimated 20 schools/ community centers offering after-school activities for primary school age children and adolescents.

The Constitution of Sint Maarten states that "Every child has the right to obtain basic education" (Article 11.2) and "the Government shall provide care directed to the protection of children and youth and the advancement of their education, welfare, cultural involvement and leisure (Article 18.1).

Purpose and position of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport (MECYS) is as follows:

*"We meet demands and support the people of Sint Maarten to become self-confident, resilient, lifelong learners, creative and critical thinkers who will thrive in 2026.*

*Our youth will thrive and reach their full potential to become active citizens with a sense of shared responsibility.*

*We will ensure that there are ample opportunities for the people of Sint Maarten to be life-long learners.*

*We will safeguard our cultural identity by protecting and promoting our tangible and intangible heritage.*

*We, our citizens, will actively participate in sports and other physical activities."*  
*(MECYS Strategic Plan 2016 - 2026)*

The Constitution guarantees compulsory education and 99 per cent of children and adolescents have access to primary and secondary education. The education sector receives 27 per cent of the total state budget and the state provides funding for both public and private schools of various religious denominations managed by school boards. Equal access to quality education remains a challenge with affluent parents preferring to send their children to subsidised schools. Due to limited after-school activities many children and adolescents grow up without adult supervision as their parents work long hours to make ends meet (especially single and migrant parents) and cannot take care of the children (Sint Maarten situation analysis, UNICEF 2012).

UNICEF's post-hurricane Irma assessment revealed that primary and secondary schools, day-care centers, youth and sports facilities, and tertiary education institutes, sustained damage. It ranges from minimal, moderate to severe, as well as loss of equipment and teaching and learning materials (see annex 1. 'MECYS Sector assessment report' and annex 2. 'UNICEF team report of conducted school visits'). The education authorities, school staff and boards received support from the Netherlands Urban Search and Rescue team and military who were involved in clearing the debris in schools and carrying out emergency repairs of damaged buildings (e.g. blown-out windows, doors, roofs). The MECYS was aware of the importance of resuming the education services as soon as possible ("Education Cannot Wait") leading to the re-opening of most classes in schools on October 2nd. On October 16th all classes resumed, except for those schools that could not reopen due to the severity of sustained damage and looting.

The students expressed their happiness to be back in school and shared their experiences during and in the aftermath of the hurricane. MECYS' 'Student Support Services Division' (SSSD) conducted assessments of the well-being of students and school staff and individual counseling sessions with teachers and students were arranged. Teachers organized psychosocial support activities where students shared their experiences (e.g. drawings, compositions, songs). Based on our observations and discussions with school care staff, teachers and students most children and adolescents had overcome the stressful situation encountered during and in the aftermath of the hurricane showing a remarkable high level of resili-

ence. However, close monitoring continues to be important and referrals made for those children and adolescents requiring individual support from specialists.

The well-being of teachers is also critical as they are in direct interaction with students and responsible for creating a welcoming and protective learning environment. Many have suffered damages to their houses with 50 teachers whose homes were completely destroyed and are staying with relatives or friends ('Sector Assessment Report', MECYS, September 2017). They are worried and preoccupied with caring for their families. Most teachers have returned to work despite the difficulties they are facing relating to their housing situation. Many teachers feel that no one looked out for their needs and that many decisions and changes were taken without considering them (e.g. changes in school hours schedule). Teachers want to be included in social support programs improving their housing conditions which will have a positive impact on their well-being and capacity to teach. Some teachers, including those who were affected by hurricane - Luis - in 1995, might need further specialized support.

Out of 37 day-care centers 30 were assessed by MECYS Youth department revealing that five had sustained major damage and 11 moderate damage. 14 day-care centers have re-opened; however, two of the five severely damaged centers will not be reconstructed. The umbrella organization 'Sint Maarten Early Childcare Development Association' (SECDA) indicated various needs per centre, varying from material supplies to staff support. Many staff had not received their September salary as parents could not afford to pay as they needed to spend money on the repair of their houses. There is an urgent need to open more day-care centers and implement parenting programs to ensure the protection of infants.

Various groups of youngsters and adults were involved in looting and vandalism in the immediate aftermath of the hurricane. Unfortunately several schools were also affected with people breaking into classrooms destroying materials, writing obscene graffiti on the walls and stealing equipment. Teachers interviewed in one of the primary schools which was looted were emotionally drained and more affected by this looting and vandalism than by the hurricane. They mentioned the importance of dialogue with parents, students, youth, community councils, and faith groups to discuss prevention of violence and lawlessness as well as school - community linkages to foster a sense of ownership and shared responsibility of facilities in the community. 'Life Skills Based Education' and 'Citizenship education' can be considered as way forward to address the issue of violence and be included in the curricula to focus on norms and values and good citizenship.

Several of the interviewed principals and teachers mentioned ways how they tried to avoid damage to teaching and learning materials and equipment; i.e. storage in safe and secure rooms at their schools. These measures are good examples of emergency preparedness actions which can be part of comprehensive 'School Safety Plans'. Some schools visited had lessons where children learnt about hurricanes. Emergency preparedness and response and disaster risk reduction measures were mentioned as important subjects to be included in the curricula of primary and secondary schools.

Special attention is required for 'Technical Vocational Training and Education' (TVET) programs at secondary and tertiary education levels. The hospitality sector was severely hit by the hurricane and affected the livelihood of many workers. To diversify the labour market and provide new job opportunities hospitality workers need to be (re)trained in other sectors such as construction (e.g. masonry, carpentry, plumbing, electricity). The programs offered in TVET institutes need to follow a competency based curriculum allowing students to rapidly gain skills and knowledge at working places during internships.



# OBSERVATIONS

Most schools welcomed back all students on October 2nd and on October 16th almost all schools had reopened, apart from the ones that were too damaged. The damage of the schools visited ranged from minor and moderate to severe. Major debris has been cleared from most schools and daycare facilities, quick-fix repairs have been carried out and joint inspection of schools and daycare facilities executed (Inspectors of MECYS, VSA, VROMI). All operational schools and daycare centres have electricity and water. School directors, teachers and students expressed their appreciation of the work done by the Netherlands Urban Search and Rescue team and military clearing debris and repairing school buildings which sustained minor or moderate damage in close co-operation with the education authorities.

All schools employed some basic form of disaster preparedness; e.g. securing lessons books, computers and other teaching & learning materials placing them in the center of the classroom or storing in secure 'bunker' type space. Developing 'School Safety Plans' and inclusion of emergency preparedness and response / disaster risk reduction in curricula were seen as good measures to be better prepared for future disasters.

All school principals mentioned the implementation of MECYS Student Support Services Division (SSSD) psychosocial activities for the well-being of students and teachers: debriefing of school care teams, debriefing teachers, assessments students, and individual support for students and teachers as needed. Continuing psychosocial support for teachers and students was considered important.

Looting and vandalism in schools during the aftermath of the hurricane was mentioned as an additional stress factor by school principals and teachers requiring special attention. Enhancing school - community linkages creating a sense of community ownership of schools was mentioned as mitigating and preventive action, as well as including citizenship / life skills based education in the curriculum focusing on ethics, social norms and values and good citizenship. The MECYS has provided good leadership, as well as established a functional coordination and consultation mechanism with all education, culture, youth and sport sector stakeholders resulting in the timely resumption of services. This participatory approach has also been applied in the development of MECYS' Resilient / Recovery Plan, using the Resilience and "Build Back Better" strategic framework leading to resilient communities and strengthened facilities.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Protection / prevention

- Implement a long-term Psycho-Social Support ('PSS') program benefitting children, youth, families of students, teachers, non-teaching staff, school directors, and MECYS staff using the Student Support Services Division ('SSSD') and other competent institutions/organizations.
- Arrange a teacher well-being support program, including making available safe housing for teaching staff at affordable rates.
- Support Early Childhood Care and Education ('ECCE') programs in Day Care Centers and Early Stimulation sections of elementary schools, including psycho-social activities for children below 6 years of age and building capacities of parents and other caregivers to identify and support children in distress ('Parenting program').
- Promote and practice inclusive education for all children, including migrant children and children with special needs.
- Provide psychosocial support for children and youth who participated in looting and vandalism themselves or those who witnessed their parents or older siblings taking part in this (community restorative justice program).
- Develop and implement a program to enhance school - community linkages and a sense of community ownership of schools aimed at prevention of looting and vandalism in the aftermath of a disaster (Prevention of violence, including conflict mediation and resolution, be part of 'Life Skills Based Education' (LSBE) / Citizenship Education programs).

## Preparedness

- Develop and implement 'School Safety Plans' (SSPs) involving students, youth, teachers, school directors, parents and community members, including hazards/vulnerabilities and (community) resources mapping.
- Include Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and emergency preparedness & response in curricula linked with environmental education (impact of global warming; health hazards; water, sanitation and hygiene).
- Capacity building of teachers, non-teaching staff, directors, school boards and students on inclusive education, psychosocial support, INEE Minimum Standards education in emergencies and recovery, emergency preparedness & response/Disaster Risk Reduction, including development of School Safety Plans ('SSPs'), and Life Skills Based Education.
- Provide school supplies including stationary, teaching & learning materials - computers, tablets, digital boards.
- Rehabilitation and reconstruction of damaged education, culture, youth and sport facilities, including Day Care Centers, meeting international building standard (disaster / hurricane resistant).
- Arrange alternative safe and protected education locations including temporary learning centers and public / private buildings with can serve as multi-functional community learning centers that can offer formal and non-formal/alternative education programs (i.e. after-school programs, Disaster Risk Reduction / Emergency preparedness and Life Skills Based Education).



## Participation / promotion

- Identify and support initiatives from NGOs, faith-based organizations, charities and private sector who play an important role in ensuring continuing learning opportunities such as 'after-school' classes, second chance alternative pathway education, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), Life Skills Based Education (LSBE) for adolescents and youth, including psychosocial support programs.
- Promote inclusion of accredited, lifelong (adult) learner programs in tertiary education.
- Implement teacher career/human capital program with retainer policy and plan in place (accredited education, alternative lifelong education career paths).
- (Re)train hospitality workers and others in construction (e.g. masonry, carpentry, welding, plumbing, electricity) and agricultural sectors. Introduce and implement competency based curriculum.

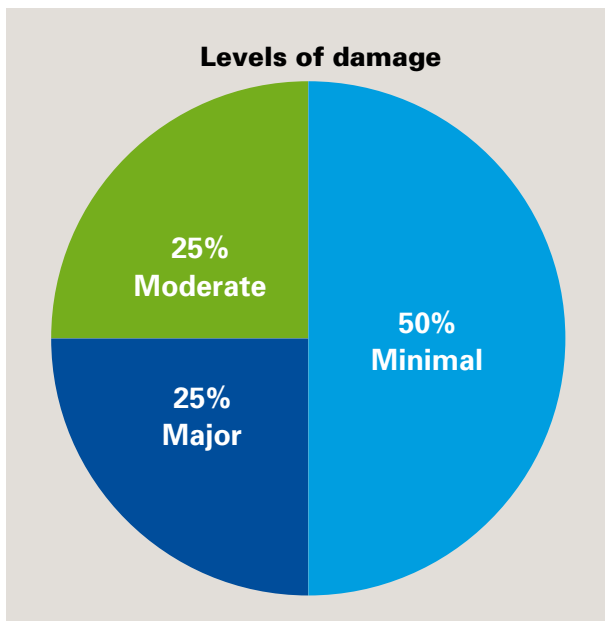
## Communication, information, networking

- Use media (TV, radio, newspapers, social media) to disseminate key messages on importance of continuing learning of children affected by the hurricane, as well as on school being a protective learning environment offering psycho-social support.
- Develop and implement education programs using ICT and media for children and youth (digitalized education).
- Strengthen 'Education Management Information System' (EMIS) - tracking/registration of all students, including those who return to Sint Maarten (data collection and analysis of enrollment and attendance rates).
- Raise awareness of school directors, teachers, other educational personnel, students, parents, youth, communities, private sector, government and Sint Maarten society as a whole on MECYS Resilience / Recovery Plan.
- Strengthen capacity of MECYS personnel and other stakeholders for continuing assessment, monitoring and evaluation of education needs to inform the Resilience / Recovery strategy.
- Strengthen coordination of education response, including monitoring and evaluation, information management, communication, advocacy and resource mobilization.



# ANNEX 1 SECTOR ASSESSMENT REPORT, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, CULTURE, YOUTH AND SPORTS

## School facilities



50% of schools have sustained minimal overall damage: minor damage to structure, rapid repairs possible

25% of schools have moderate damage

25% of schools have major damage: large extent roof and building damage, structural repairs needed, loss of furniture and outdoor equipment. Four schools require complete facilitation in order to begin operations:

1. Charlotte Brookson Academy
2. Sundial
3. Martin Luther King Jr.
4. Sister Marie Laurence

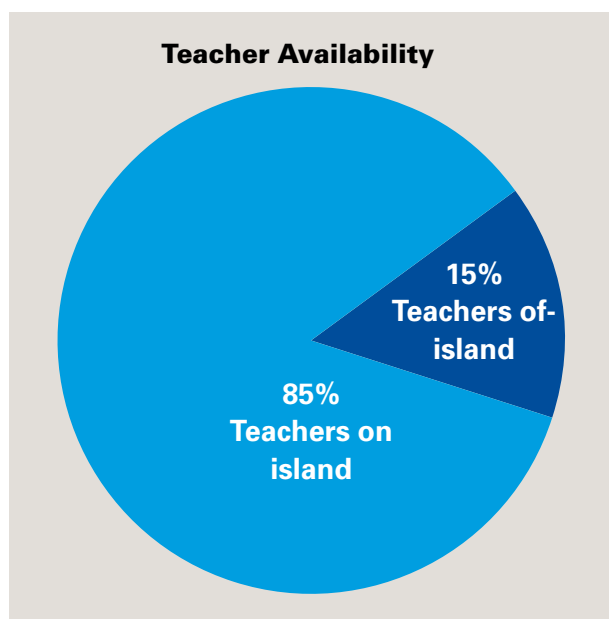
72% of schools have sustained flood damage

70% have lost school materials and equipment

70% electricity and 45% water availability

Major debris has been cleared from most schools and repairs have been conducted.

## Human Resources and Students



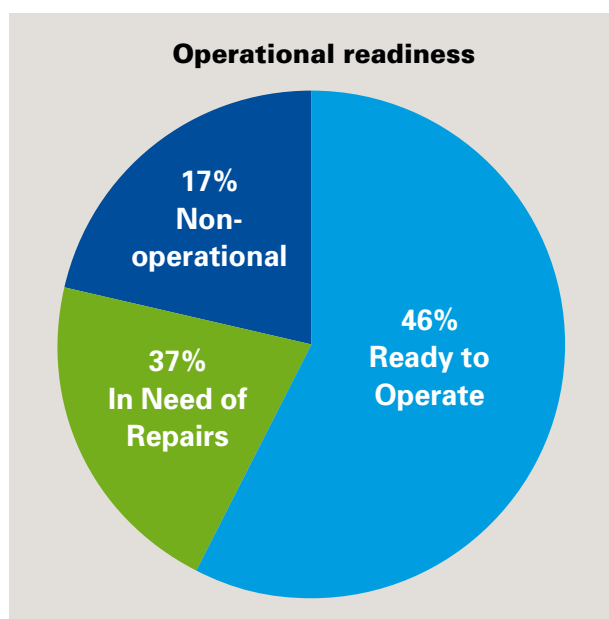
15% of teachers left the island

20% of teachers abroad might return pending improved conditions.

50 teachers require urgent assistance with temporary housing.

An estimated 450 students left the island; as of 23 October 639 have not registered at school.

## Daycare centers



30 Daycare centers were assessed

46% of centers are ready to operate

37% of centers require minor repairs before operating

17% of centers are non-operational (5 completely destroyed)

# ANNEX 2 SCHOOL VISITS REPORT BY UNICEF

The visits were conducted by Bart Vrolijk and La-Toya Charles on behalf of UNICEF accompanied by Department of Youth representatives. They visited primary and secondary schools, day care centers and tertiary education institutes affected by hurricane Irma between 2-24 October 2017.

## **Dr. Maarten Luther King primary school**

**Principal - Stuart Johnson**

At the time of the visit, all staff had reported back to school, however many had mixed feelings about school having restarting that soon. They were disappointed to read in the paper that school days would be extended from 7:30 – 12:45 to 8:00 to 14:00 having later received the confirmation of the change from the minister.

Students however were happy to be back and reunite with teachers and classmates. About 40% of students from the three pre-exam and exam classes had returned to school (30 out of roughly 72 registered students). Some parents of absent children called to inform the school that their child was still off island for different reasons including awaiting return flights. Children from other classes who showed up were not turned away. The principal expected to have more clarity about how many of his 210 students were on the island by end of that week.

The airport canteen breakfast boxes were distributed and a system was in place to avoid waste. The principal was aware that lunches would be provided by the government (Red Cross in collaboration with MECYS).

The school care team and teachers were conducting assessments with teachers and students and would process the info gathered by the end of that week. It was planned for there to be a relaxed program for the first two weeks until October 16th. Students were not allowed in damaged rooms. The principal had requested temporary learning spaces to be used while damaged classrooms were being reconstructed. Two buses for the school are not operative; parents had to make transport arrangements for their children. The school had received new registration requests from children recently having migrated to the island. By law, schools have to reserve spots for children who have not officially unregistered for up to three months. Some children might also be trying to register who are currently attending unrecognized schools. The principal's emergency preparedness actions are best-practices that could be employed by other schools; i.e. using a type of 'bunker' room to store valuable supplies.



## Prince Willem Alexander (PWAS) primary school

Principal - Ms. Anna Labega

PWAS is a special education school where students are eligible for enrollment at age 7 following MECYS Student Support Services Division (SSSD) assessment and referral. Teachers of 4 till 6 years old children with special needs are trained in Foundation Based Education, as well as Early stimulation teachers (pre-pre-school programming for 3 year old children). Children with severe disabilities are enrolled at the Sister Basilia Center which includes care for adults with special needs.

17 students attended on October 2nd, 11 on October 3rd. 48 children are registered at the school where the individual needs of students are addressed in small classroom setting. On the first days of school, student attendance was affected due to difficulties in communicating the bus transportation schedule to parents. The school sustained some damage in several classrooms; e.g. windows blew out and some parts of roofs; including the gym/auditorium. Vandalism by neighborhood children who had entered the school after the storm was also mentioned. Music, arts, and hospitality service classes are a strong component of the curriculum. The music teacher (for all public schools whose passion lies with special education) was already recovering all instruments with the help of students and arts classes had also resumed. Music and art classes play an important role in the psychosocial recovery process of children affected by the hurricane. The school was selected for the IStep pilot project which involves the exclusive use of IPADS for learning processes; digitalizing education can support disaster preparedness (i.e. mitigating the risk of losing teaching and learning materials).



## **Genevieve DeWeever Elementary School**

Principal - Ms. Anna Grantham-Halley



280 students according to MECYS and 312 students according to the school management are registered at the school. 53 pre-exam and exam students plus others returned on October 2nd when the school re-opened. Communication with parents is difficult as many cannot stay at their damaged home and have no possibilities to contact the school. Many parents have notified the school that their children are abroad and awaiting flights to return.

All staff were trying their best to start school but some were very stressed from severe losses and harrowing experiences during the storm. Many had no house insurance. The principal is trying to address needs and involved with the well-being and recovery of her staff. SSSD and the school care team have organized a psychosocial session with all staff. The teachers questioned what the follow-up of the sessions would be; some would need to be referred for individual support from a psychologist via a referral letter from their doctor and insurance. One teacher complained about trouble sleeping and expressed a wariness about the return of her students but hoped they would also be a source of motivation. Teachers did one-on-one assessments with students; situations differ and an overview would be made and shared with SSSD. Children were expected to need counseling but also revised programming. The principal is in favor of classes being held from 8:00 am - 2:00 pm; this would add 45 minutes to a teacher's day. After-school activities at the school would be from 2:00 - 5:00 pm with a focus on arts, sports, and music and lead by youth leaders. This schedule would ensure safety for students with parents who have two jobs.

The school feeding program from the airport was running; for the time being meals were also provided to staff by the school. Water and electricity in most areas of the school is available but no internet. The school had structural damage and flooding; material loss was minor due to preparations, e.g. bunker room. Vandalism resulted in some material damage; list of needs was prepared based on a pre-existing inventory and sent to MECYS.

The school currently has both English and Dutch streams in early grades; Spanish speaking parents often choose for the Dutch stream and their children tend to perform better than children originating from Sint Maarten. Undocumented children pending registration are welcome at the school; by law, they can only attend if they do not have a visa. If they have a visa, they must return to their country based on the dated terms of the visa. It was suspected that among the reasons children remain undocumented was due to uninformed parents and/or neglect.



## Oranje Elementary School

Principal - Sonia Parotte-Warner



326 - 340 students were enrolled; 50 students from pre-exam and 60 from exam classes returned at re-opening. 20 parents indicated that their children were off island. A list of children who lost their homes has been compiled which will be updated when all students return on October 16th.

Total staff was 35 including youth leaders, of which 22 are teachers. Five teachers were off island, four teachers lost everything, three teachers' houses had a lot of damage. Teachers were dealing with a lot but trying their best. This principal did not have an overview of which teachers had insurance on their homes but the school was assisting where possible. A list was sent to the ministry to request assistance for teachers; e.g. bed sheets, bins, curtains, etc.

Students appeared happy to be back with friends and share their stories. Some students were able to indicate which students had left the island. The psychosocial support for teachers led by SSSD was useful, including sessions on coping strategies, but was viewed as not enough. The care team will have smaller sessions with students.

Water and breakfast boxes were being provided for all students. The principal was uncertain about the arrangement from October 16th onwards and did not know about the extended school feeding program arranged by MECYS supported by the Red Cross. The school did not have running water on the day of the visit but had water before.

The school did not suffer much material damage as the teachers had stored materials in a safe area and no looting took place. The principal was not sure how more structural repairs would be arranged as the building is a national monument. The after school program would resume on October 10th.

## **MAC – Browlia Maillard Elementary School**

**Principal - Mrs. Tessa Davis**

360 students had returned out of a total enrollment of 412. Between 20 to 40 students were pending return during or at the beginning of the next school year. All teachers had returned; some teachers lost everything while other's houses were severely damaged. The school resumed with all classes on October 2nd. The school did not sustain that much damage and students were happy to be back.

## **St. Maarten Academy Secondary School**

**Principal - Tallulah Baly - Vanterpool**

231 students had returned out of a total of 517 enrolled. All 75 auxiliary and teaching staff members returned except 2 who were on medical leave.

The principal knew of tarpaulin shipped to the island but could not secure any for her staff who had lost everything or whose houses were partially damaged. Some students and teachers' houses were still without electricity and water.

The student care team has 3 teachers. A meeting was held with parents and students before the school re-opened. Based on the student assessment forms, the majority of students are displaced, living in a house with a lot of damage, or with parents who lost their jobs.

Meals are being offered to all students and prepared by the canteen. This principal knew about the discussions between the MECYS and the Red Cross about extended school feeding program. The organization Tzu Chi donates bread daily in collaboration with the Cake House Bakery. Tzu Chi also donated school packages with binders, pens, pencils, rulers and books. Supplies have also been requested from MECYS.

The school sustained significant damage and need to be relocated temporarily during reconstruction. Many trees on the school compound fell down. Maintenance staff and Dutch military collaborated to repair damages and students participated in the clean-up. The focus has been on teachers and students regaining normalcy before addressing the infrastructural needs.

## St. Dominic Primary School

Principal - Janice Mussington

254 students returned out of 326 enrolled (including early stimulation section). 12 class teachers; two Dutch teachers permanently left the island, one gym teacher will return. Most teachers are fine; three had their houses damaged, one had to leave her house. Some teachers are distressed about their housing situation.

Early stimulation section is currently housed at Sr. Magda Primary School due to damaged classrooms. Students are glad to be back to share experiences and stories. Dr. Jay Enterprises provides psychosocial support for catholic school and contributed to the psychosocial sessions planning with SSSD. Support to rebuild infrastructure and provision of materials is required.



## **St. Dominic High School**

**Principal - Gianne Wilson-de Weever**

Around 70% of 353 enrolled students had returned. One additional full-time teacher is needed. Some teachers are very emotional about their experiences. Classroom psychosocial support includes writing exercises. Guidance counseling classes are now given by counselors.

The school caretaker, Mr. Singh, who lives nearby, secured the school from looters. He also did most of the quick repairs without additional assistance; students helped where necessary.

Students participated in and assisted teachers with preparing for the storm. Tarpaulins are stored in each classroom during the hurricane season.

The school will use PE time to make up for missed classes if necessary, but the principal did not foresee this being an issue.

## **Milton Peters College (Dutch secondary school)**

**Director of the SVOBE board - Wim de Visser (also for Sundial)**

MPC includes VWO, HAVO, and VSBO technical school in construction, carpentry, and electrical. Sundial covers VSBO hospitality. MPC is Dutch, Sundial is English. Future plans include housing all VSBO in one building and offering all programming in English and academic programming in another building offering both Dutch and English streams.

The school is in the process of implementing full digital learning.

Significant infrastructure damage; the school was used as lodging for the marines who also did repair work. Sundial school was completely destroyed. Nagico insurance inspection is pending and government officials have made brief visits to the school.

The care team will prepare care plans for affected students in collaboration with SSSD. These will be discussed with teachers who will prepare lesson plans accordingly.

The school has 130 teachers including MPC and Sundial. Many teachers do not have water and electricity. Many teachers left the island without justification. The principal sees pregnancy and having children as justifiable reasons.



Students involved in damage assessment of their school.

## Sundial Secondary Vocational School

Visit led by adjunct director and school care coordinator

The school followed the October 2nd and October 16th school opening scheme. 300 students were registered; 30 left the island of which some are returning. The school reached out to contact students and confirm. Most students went to Aruba, the Dominican Republic, or the U.S. Many students have sustained damage at their homes. There are 45 staff members total and some are shared with MPC; all returned. Seven of the teachers lost their roofs and most of their materials. Most are using tarpaulins at their homes and others have been forced to relocate staying with friends or families. Some staff members are also hosting family and friends.

The school sustained significant damage. The hospitality classes have been relocated to NIPA. The Red Cross is repairing the school kitchen for the School Feeding Program. The gym was the most destroyed; students are doing more outdoor activities weather permitting.



Psychosocial support debriefing sessions were done with all staff supported by SSSD, then teachers had sessions with students; students are referred for one-on-one care if needed. This care will be ongoing, teachers are also dealing with a lot at home and the care for students is an additional activity.

Preparedness measures were applied as the school was flooded in previous hurricanes, such as lifting equipment and teaching and learning materials from the floor; teachers were informed and students assisted. Computers and furniture were covered and moved to the center of the classrooms away from the windows which were boarded up with plywood (rather than rolling system). Sandbags were placed in front of the doors. It was unclear whether these procedures are documented anywhere, maybe in the Faculty Book; these steps are also taken before the summer vacation. New staff were instructed on how to prepare with a form and check list that a colleague found online in preparing for the hurricane.

The staff mentioned that it is important for students to have more knowledge about hurricanes and other types of disasters. Students should also know how to behave before, during, and after a disaster in private and public spaces and that looting and vandalism is inappropriate; implications, impacts on communities, values. Some students came forward indicating that they or their classmates looted; these students are referred to the care team by teachers.

The school uniform based on classes helps to identify students who cause problems in the community; it has proven to be the 1st formers who need extra attention with developing appropriate social behaviors.

## **Sister Regina Elementary School**

**Principal - Ms. Samantha Beaton**

Several classrooms had roof and material damages with one classroom completely unusable. The Dutch marines made roof repairs and fixed the playground and fences. They also created a new classroom for group 1 and 2 students. The students were happy to have returned to school.



## **Leonard Conner Primary School**

90 students returned out of 264 registered. The hurricane and aftermath, dealing with damaged or completely destroyed houses, had its toll on all staff. One eleven years old student, said the hurricane was the first time he felt fear and that shelters should be open during the storm, not only after.

## Sister Marie Laurence primary school

Principal - Ms. Karen Wattley

None of the 212 registered students had returned during the time of the visit (October 6th). Staff included 24 teachers including youth leaders for after school programs. The school was heavily damaged by the hurricane and its aftermath when looting and vandalism took place. Resuming of classes was planned later than other schools on October 10th from 8:00 am – 5:00 pm. Classes would be held in different areas of the school until October 23rd when most moderately damaged classrooms should be ready. Some classes would be hosted at other schools.

Teachers were emotionally drained by the looting and vandalism; including obscene graffiti throughout the school and people breaking into spaces to use electricity to charge their phones. Staff are actively trying to reclaim materials taken by people in the community. The school gym could not be used as shelter as the door flew open early during the storm so people had to run elsewhere.

Students were welcomed back for pre-sessions with parents who shared harrowing stories of their hurricane experiences. Most of the students attending the school live in the neighborhood and come from lower-socioeconomic households. Most students attending the school have socio-emotional challenges and behavioral problems and will need even more care upon return. This specialized individual care is already integrated into the school's processes; e.g. 'cool down' corners for emotional control where children can withdraw to when they need a break or 'buddy' classrooms they can go to when they prefer to remove themselves from the classroom to take a break.

The school does have a basic emergency / disaster preparedness plan.

The language of instruction is currently in Dutch but will transition entirely to English. SML functions as a 'home away from home' for teachers with staff supporting each other. A WhatsApp group was used during the storm for the team to encourage and advise each other.

Teachers are at school every day and being counseled by the social worker individually as desired. The principal is eager to initiate a program which would enhance the sense of community ownership of and connection to schools to mitigate future looting and vandalism.



## **Sister Basilia Center (SBC - not within regular school list)**

**Bregje Boetekees, Operations Manager of the White and Yellow Cross Care Foundation, and Mimi Hodge, Department Manager Sister Basilia Center.**

SBC is a part of the White and Yellow Cross (WYC) care service branches in addition to the St. Martin's Home for the elderly and District Nursing. SBC's educational daycare facility has 45 registered clients. The activities are provided from 8.00 am till 4 pm. Client age ranges between 6/7 to 55 years. The clients are separated into groups based on their development and disabilities from moderate to severe; a variety of disorders are represented ranging from the autism spectrum to Down syndrome. There are 20 clients receiving residential care, transportation is arranged for the other students living at home. 12 clients live in guided living facilities in their own apartments and have jobs. Some clients working for private companies lost their jobs after Irma which affected their regular routines. The clients are sometimes paid below the minimum wage at their jobs. Sint Maarten does not have a social workplace. SBC clients have mixed national and ethnic backgrounds. The younger clients were less affected during the initial aftermath of the storm because they could return to their homes and families at the end of the day. The older clients remaining at the facility were more affected as communication issues prevented contact with families. The SBC has a full time psychologist, who is also a member of APAP, who monitors the well-being of clients and staff. The psychologist held information sessions with all departments to indicate what is a normal reaction to stressful events and when to get help. EMDR treatment with light and sound is also being provided to clients when necessary. There is an external colleague available to do counseling for staff who prefer consult with someone else for privacy reasons. Staff are currently functioning under great distress due to damage of their homes. The focus is currently on staff recovery which will inevitably have a positive impact on client care.

The housing facility did not sustain any damage, however, the activities center did. One of the Dutch marines was at the building which assured the clients that everything would be fine. The building was restored by the center's own maintenance team. WYC has a total of 140 staff members; 60 were severely affected by the storm. 15 of the 35 SBC staff have damaged homes; some lost everything and are residing in BSC upstairs classrooms with their families. SBC is also participating in fundraising efforts. The center is in communication with the ministry of VSA about social housing possibilities. SBC employs a basic fire drill and 'buddy - system' as a part of their disaster preparedness procedures.

WYC exists for 45 years and is supervised by an unpaid voluntary board. In total, the WYC has 325 clients across its three care departments. The total annual budget is 14 million guilders. Fees of clients whose parents work on the Dutch side are covered by the EVBZ insurance; 90% of client fees are paid by this insurance company. The WYC real estate income enables independence in growing and expanding but the foundation expects government to commit to financing quality care within buildings.

The BSC has recently initiated a 'home guidance project' sponsored by the 'Samenwerkende Fondsen' to address the long waiting list for the day-care center for children aged up to 5 years. This project enables the 15 clients on the waiting list to participate in programs at home and in the regular external social activities organized by the center. The BSC intends to expand to allow room for 20 extra clients in the daycare program.

SBC staff receive training twice a year to upgrade their knowledge on the care for clients, including on sexuality to ensure client safety, how-to set boundaries, and how to give clients information.



## **ACE Foundation (All Children Education)**

**Director - Claire Elshot; also the main representative of the teachers' union.**

The school was founded 15 years ago but is not recognized by MECYS. It abides by the laws of compulsory education. Formerly they welcomed a lot of undocumented children but that has become less common. Currently, the school functions as more of a transitional school for children moving to the island who need support to transition into the regular education system.

The school accepts children from 3.5 to 17 years old. Transitioning children to primary schools has not been a problem; only St. Maarten Academy and PSVE have proven most willing among secondary schools to accept students. Students at the primary school do standardized government exams according to assessment quality regulations.

Around 30 out of 50+ registered students have returned; there are 6 teachers and 5 classes. The school has students with diverse backgrounds: those born on St. Maarten with a Dutch passport; those born abroad and joining parents who had moved to the island earlier; plus other nationalities. Most parents are minimum wage workers. The school lost all zinc and wood from some areas. It was unclear what support was being provided.

From a teachers' union perspective, Ms. Elshot listed the following challenges:

Extended school hours; e.g. less time to address own matters, care for teachers' own children will become an extra cost.

Inconsistent communication: on date of return of some versus all students and school hours; management unwilling to communicate concerns to ministry because of the ministry's indifference.

Teachers expected more preparations.

Less time for exam preparations.

Teachers feel that no one looked out for their needs; all they got were tarpaulins which they considered not to be enough.

When relief is being distributed, they are expected to be in school and left out.

Busses are not organized, children are dropped off at school too early and left unsupervised.

Teachers prefer to be at school instead of remaining at home, but they do not appreciate the sudden changes and decisions that are made without considering them.

Many children had their own issues before the storm, now they will need extra psychosocial care.

Flies and mosquitos are rampant.

Teacher displacement.

## **Sint Maarten Vocational School (SVC)**

**School manager Rita Bourne-Gumbs and Student Care Coordinator.**

SVC is a technical vocational education school with forms 1 to 4 preparing students for the labor market or higher vocational education. The school offers training in welding, automotive, carpentry, business, cooking, future textiles, and cosmetology. Some students go to the 'National Institute for Professional Advancement' (NIPA) to continue their education but the transition should be smoother. 17 year olds tend to drop out of SVC without a diploma and go to NIPA and pay for tuition to avoid truancy; this is discouraged. Some students also go to GED. School hours are from 7.30 am till 2:45 pm; theory in the morning and skills classes in the afternoon.

140 students had returned by October 10th out of 242 registered students (80% of the total school population are boys 13 - 19 years and 20% girls); students' ethnic and national backgrounds vary from Dominican Republic, Jamaican, and Guyanese students or parents. Most of the students are second generation nationals. A minority of the students are of Sint Maarten or Antillean decent. The multicultural differences often lead to misunderstandings and conflicts among the students. Among the students are those with special needs coming from the Prins Willem Alexander school.

It is unclear who left the island, one student notified the school of their departure. The October 2nd start date was preceded by a soft opening for students and their parents. Students are sharing individual stories and have room to express themselves. 5-10 students have lost everything; this is evident by the students not wearing their uniform.

This school enacted a grace period until parents are more economically secure. Teachers received SSSD debriefing on how to address the needs of the students. They have also used assessment forms provided by SSSD. A company is donating bread, sandwiches and juice which staff uses to prepare meals for everyone, staff included. Later the meals will be provided on a needs basis. The ministry is expected to donate lunches. Water is also being rationed. The school sustained minimal storm damage, e.g. to doors. Looting was the bigger issue; tools, kitchen supplies, 25 new computers and one projector.

SVC students love to work; some students are currently in school and some are receiving training in companies. Students are required to do 192 hours of 'on-the-job' training per year. Some companies who provided this type of training have closed; however, the students are still welcome to be present at school and eat the meals provided rather than do nothing on the streets. Schools offering vocational training and technical education become particularly important in the recovery period. However, the situation of students need to be closely monitored as they can easily become exploited and exposed to health hazards in the companies they are trained. Labor laws and other regulations such as liability insurance have to be enforced, especially among contractors. It proves difficult to place students in the labor market. Job training companies are limited; they often tend to prefer high performing students making it difficult to place SVC students in the business field. Sometimes schools also want to place students at the same place at the same time and compete. The students' limited social skills also makes it difficult to place them; they often do not know a lot of things they should do due to lack of parenting as a result of parents having to work two or even three jobs. Some students also use drugs and are often under the influence at the start of the school day. The director mentioned that her students are talented and demonstrate this in school. It is important that they learn not to be influenced by negative behavior of others outside of school. A 'Life Skills Based Education' program to teach social values and norms would be helpful to address these issues.

## **Adventist Primary school**

**Principal - Clara George**

180 students were enrolled in Cycle 1 (KG and grade 1 & 2); 140 students returned out of 160 enrolled in cycle 2 (grade 3-6). There were 16 classroom teachers, five assistant teachers, two remedial teachers, one social worker, two student care coordinators, principal and assistant principal, seven community school leaders (after school program). 30 % of staff had their houses every damaged.

Several teachers lost everything and have sleeping problems; need for counseling by psychologist. Students are coping relatively well; a classroom session was observed where children read out compositions on their experiences during hurricane Irma. The principal mentioned the need for training of staff and students on emergency preparedness and response.



Roofs were damaged of two of the school buildings and repaired with plywood and tarpaulin.

## Day Care Center Middle Region

45 children (0-4 years old) were registered at the day care center; 13 returned on the first day and 16 on the second day. Some children are still abroad with their parents. Some parents have not yet returned to work so their children remain at home with them. No severe damage of the building and playground was observed; damaged rooms were not used for sleeping. The landlord co-operated with repairs. Both water and electricity were functioning again. A few of the children came from families who lost their homes and were now staying with friends and family. Some children were showing signs of distress and would be observed. Parents are responsible for dropping off and picking up their children. There are 5 care-givers; some had sustained severe damage to their homes and were staying elsewhere. The center directors' home was also damaged. There has been an increase in mosquitoes since Irma; no mosquito nets were available at the center. Vaccines are not arranged or monitored by the center but by parents individually. The caregiver Irma who we met at the center has 20 years of experience and was trained on ECD by UNICEF ECA in Dominica in 2001. She also received High Scope training via SECDA and was doing a SPW level 2 training at NIPA.



## Tiny Tots Day-Care Center

80 % of 70 registered children (0-4 years old) have returned to the center. Five staff out of 15 have not returned. The day-care center's building was not affected by the hurricane. One teacher lost the roof of her house. Many children cry when they hear loud noises; teachers try to comfort them. The director mentioned that many parents were not able to pay the USD 270 monthly fee due to their difficult financial situation following the hurricane with money needed to repair their houses.

## **National Institute for Professional Advancement (NIPA)**

**Garfield Sargent, Adjunct Director, and Sherita Peterson, Student Care Coordinator.**

In preparation of the storm, supplies were packed away; additional procedures have proven to be necessary. In the future, personnel will be pre-assigned emergency functions to ensure timely actions and to avoid that everything falls on 1 or 2 people. The hurricane was stronger than expected; impacts from flying debris was unanticipated. In total, three classrooms were damaged of which one skills classroom and lab are not functional as materials and electronics were damaged. The school had assigned a team to prevent looting. The marines did some quick-fix repairs. All equipment was stored in the center of classrooms, that did not help to spare materials in damaged classrooms. The costs to repair the damaged classroom is projected to be about USD 50,000. It was unclear whether MECYS or NIPA had to file the insurance claim but NIPA would be proactive about it in any case.

The school was used as a shelter with 88 people making use of it, however, there were issues registering people. 60 - 70% of the first arrivals were foreigners. A majority were tourists from damaged hotels Great Bay and Maho. With the threat of Maria, more locals registered, by then all foreigners had left. NIPA had internet so tourists benefitted from evacuation flights to Puerto Rico from where they booked flights on to their countries. At the shelter, locals had the opportunity to communicate with their families abroad.

Garfield felt that, in general, the response was better organized after Luis. Immediately after that storm, planes flew in from Aruba, Curacao, and Bonaire with Red Cross volunteers and marines and the distribution of relief supplies was organized swiftly and smoothly. For Irma, logistics proved to be an issue, water was on the island but not distributed. Most tarpaulins distributed were already on the island from Samaritan Purse. The kitchen was open. NIPA's chef provided meals to the people sheltering there and other care teams. Most food was donated; e.g. rice from the fire department. VSA also provided food. Supermarkets donated frozen food that they could no longer store. People were not excited about the marine MRE's but had to eat them when the NIPA meals stopped.



The shelter closed on October 9th and the school re-opened with some classes on October 16th ; full opening was planned for

October 31st. By the time of the visit 123 students out of 232 registered had returned. There are 13 teachers and 5 support staff. It is already known that some students have had to relocate to other islands. Thus far, based on social assessments, most of the students fared well, are residing at their homes, and have utilities. Individual and group debriefing sessions have been organized with support from SSSD. Teachers have been instructed to look out for certain distress related behaviors among students. Care referrals to external agencies have also been arranged. Teachers also have their own personal burdens. MECYS has arranged a financial allowance on loan for all teachers in need which can be paid back over a 1 to 2 year period.

The majority of students in the day program are locals from Sint Maarten while the majority in the evening programs are immigrants and have full-time jobs during the day. Nationalities include Haitian, Dominican Republican, Jamaican, etc.

Programs include (considered a local MBO): hospitality and chef, ICT, Care, Social Pedagogic Worker, Registered Nurse, LPN, automotive, business, educational assistant, and electric. For now, construction is not a part of programming. Arrangements were being made through a 'Mondriaan' program in The Netherlands but translation related quality assurance issues delayed the process. Unless in exceptional circumstances, students are unable to major in two streams because classes tend to overlap.

There have been inquiries about the re-training of unemployed people in the hospitality sector in, for example, construction. The priority for the school for now has been to get the running programs back up.

Students catching up for lost time will be a challenge because Sint Maarten still follows the hour system rather than the Competency Based system. The discussion on making that change to the CB system has started internally and will start externally shortly. They have had a brief informal discussion with the inspectorate. The school is already considering professional external support for the assessments. NIPA does not issue diplomas, only MECYS does.

The school is 100 per cent financed by MECYS/GoS. Advanced Vocational Foundation (AVF, management NIPA) has a contract with the government to run the school. The subsidy is provided per student.

The school recognizes that local capacity building is key in keeping money on the island supporting the local economy. Technical professionals are currently in high demand. Reaching standards requires big investments. Inspection and quality checks are also important to prevent exploitation of especially young workers.

## **University of St. Martin**

**Meeting on October 18th with Francio Guadeloupe (President), Robert Judd (Finance & Operations Manager), Eion Maison (Director of SCELL -short courses), Geneve Philip (Dean of Academics).**

28 day-to-day staff, 55 including part-time. 3 staff are off the island. 300 students; 194 in academic programs and the rest in courses. 30% of students get study financing. USM is a private foundation with aboard.

Preparedness is a part of teacher training. The school building belongs to a separate foundation. Damage was minimal compared to other schools. The marines did quick fix repairs. The rooms were immediately usable. The damage to equipment was still being assessed. The canteen equipment has to be replaced in order to move forward optimally. Classes can resume now but eventually a lot of repairs would be necessary.

Programming: Associate's degrees in Hospitality, Business, and Liberal Arts. Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Education. All accreditations are arranged through foreign universities.

The is now offered through the 'University of the Virgin Islands' to ensure accreditation. The first graduating class was supposed to be in 2018 with 14 to 20 students. The school announced that it had no choice but to close its doors as per the end of October as a result of pre-existing financial issues stemming from the annual government subsidy and the lack of private funding from the private sector after hurricane Irma.



**UNICEF Nederland**

Bezuidenhoutseweg 74  
2594 AW Den Haag  
Nederland

[info@unicef.nl](mailto:info@unicef.nl)  
[www.unicef.nl](http://www.unicef.nl)