

Ministry Looking at Extending the School Year

The Ministry of Education is looking at extending the academic year beyond the existing 190 days, as part of efforts to prevent a regression of students during the summer break.

Portfolio Minister, Rev. the Hon. Ronald Thwaites, in responding to questions posed during the Rotary Club of New Kingston's breakfast meeting held at Chaser's Cafe on Friday, March 1, stated that studies show that the long summer break, of some eight weeks, leads to some loss of learnt skills. "You can regress as much as one grade during that time of idleness and therefore, the old tradition that set the school year to suit the expatriate teacher, who had two weeks on the banana boat to go back to England...and then the return trip...needs to be revamped," he stated. The Education Minister said the "engagement of the mind and the continuity of education is most important" for Jamaicans. He noted also that many students fall prey to "social deficits" when they are out of school for an extended period. He assured, however, that before any decision is taken, all the relevant stakeholders will be consulted. "This demands careful negotiations with our teachers and our administrators and all I can say is you can be assured that we are engaging them in this and hope that we can deal with some of these fundamental problems," he stated. In the meantime, the Minister said a collaborative approach is needed to improve numeracy and literacy levels, and enhance student performance and output. March is being observed as Literacy Month by Rotarians. In 1985, Rotary declared basic literacy to be a pre-condition to the development of peace. JIS