



Ministry of Education

PRESS STATEMENT

Department of Education Updates

The Hon Diallo V. Rabain, J.P., M.P.
Minister of Education

Wednesday, May 20th, 2020

5:30 pm

Good Day,

I will begin my update today by clearing up the misconceptions around schools reopening; as we have received several calls and emails from our stakeholders querying whether schools will remain closed.

On Monday evening the Honorable Premier stated that Phase 2 of the Government's Plan for phased reopening spanned from May 21st to June 30th. Many took that to mean that schools would not reopen before the end of the School Term 3. It is essential to keep in mind that the length of the Phases will vary, depending on how diligent we are to adhering to the Ministry of Health protocols. For clarity, during the Government's very first announcement of a Phased reopening of Bermuda from May 2nd 2020, the reopening of schools was listed in Phase 3 of the reopening process. This remains the same.

The Department of Education updates today, will focus on areas that our stakeholders are anxious to know about regarding our overall Plan for the Public School System.

Since schools closed in March, the Department of Education has engaged in extensive planning for the reopening of schools with the understanding that schools will have to reopen at some time in the future. Therefore, technical officers, school leaders from Preschool to the Senior School level, and

school staff via their Principals were consulted and provided valuable input for the framing of the System's plan for reopening schools.

Additionally, the Ministry has met with our Union Stakeholders inclusive of the BIU, BPSU and BUT Presidents who also had the opportunity to give input and feedback for the System plan.

I will add that the Department of Health Officers have played a pivotal role in providing the Department expert guidance concerning safety and health protocols for the System Plan. Their leadership, commitment and technical support have been exceptional.

The framework of the System Plan for reopening schools has been developed using accreditation standards and indicators of quality as a guide. The Department of Education also incorporated best practices obtained from school reopenings in international school jurisdictions such as the UK, Denmark and Taiwan; and, guidelines outlined by international organizations such as UNESCO, CDC, OSHA and the WHO.

The System Plan comprises four phases:

1. *Planning for reopening* – actions needed to resume school operations;
2. *Preparation of School Buildings* – plans for returning to the building;
3. *Recovery* – transitioning staff and students back into to normalcy; and,
4. *Implementation of a Hybrid Learning Model* – teaching and learning for staff and students who are both in school and at home.

When given the clearance by the Ministry of Health to do so, our public schools will open with the implementation of physical distancing and the use of many safety and health protocols.

I want to now give our parents highlights of the work being done for the first phase of the System Plan - *Planning of Reopening*.

Concern has been expressed about the recent survey asking parents for feedback on sending their children back to school. Collecting preliminary data from the parents is part of the planning process for the eventual reopening of schools. While we do not know when we have to be ready, our quick survey was intended to get a sense of the thoughts, concerns and perceptions of public school families. This data will assist with planning for the number of students who will occupy school buildings. The responses also let us know what information needs to be communicated.

Additionally, the Department needed to assess staffing capacity for when schools reopen. Preliminary data from our teachers were required to obtain a sense of staffing capacity at schools if school staff were deemed vulnerable in alignment with the Ministry of Health guidelines. It should be noted that this process was established by the Head of the Public Service for all Heads of Departments in Government to follow for all public officers.

We intend to open schools adhering to the physical distancing guidelines and the use of safety and health protocols. Based on questions received, the following have been asked:

How are we ensuring the Safety and Health of School Buildings?

The safety, health and wellbeing of our students and staff are of paramount importance. All school facilities have been inspected and deep cleaned using a deep cleaning protocol guide, when schools closed in March. Since then, Custodians have been working in their respective school buildings three times a week to clean and ventilate the facilities. During the week of May 4th, the Custodians undertook a second deep cleaning process of schools, and inspections are presently underway. We are very thankful for the work of the Custodians who play an integral part in ensuring a safe school facility. When we are ready to reopen schools, our custodians will ensure the on-going cleaning and sanitizing throughout the Day of highly used surface areas in schools.

There are many other building protocols the Department will be implementing, some of which include ensuring a current inventory of hygiene supplies at every school, posting of signs throughout school buildings as reminders of physical distancing, student education on regular handwashing; assessing the layout of classroom spaces to determine maximum occupancy of students; and, posting signs to remind students of entry and exit procedures.

What are the Safety and Health Protocols that will be implemented?

Survey results indicated that many parents wanted to know the details of the safety and health protocols. I am pleased to report that the Department of Health has developed draft safety and health protocols for the pre, primary, middle levels; and our school for children with special needs - DAME.

The protocols define each step of a student's journey from the time they arrive on the school premises until they depart at the end of the Day. More specifically, the safety and health actions start when students and staff arrive on the premises. These protocols will govern how to drop off students, how they walk up to the entrance and prepare to enter the building. The protocols will continue as students and staff move along hallways, engage in learning in their classrooms, use school bathrooms, eat

snacks and lunch; and play outdoors. These safety and health protocols, although prepared by the Department of Health, have been vetted by school principals and their school Safety & Health Committees or COVID-19 Response Teams.

These protocols were pre-tested on Monday this week and today, at a preschool, primary, middle school and DAME. The teams who pre-tested the safety and health protocols comprised the following key stakeholders:

- Department of Education Facilities Manager,
- The Safety, Health and Transport Officer,
- School Principals for the selected schools,
- School Custodians and the BIU School Custodians Representative,
- Department of Health, Healthy Schools Officer,
- Department of Education, Assistant Directors,
- Department of Health, School Nurses, and
- Bermuda Union of Teachers (BUT) Safety and Health Committee Representatives

Now that we have the input of key stakeholders, the safety and health protocols will be finalized; and later customized for each school. The Department will undertake safety audits before any school reopens to ensure that all of the safety measures and protocols are to ensure schools are safe for students and staff for reopening.

What other planning is taking place for Public School Reopening?

In summary, other protocols being implemented include IT Services; Student and Staff Well-Being; and, Communication. I will now briefly summarize:

1. IT Technicians have been working in schools since the week of May 4th, ensuring IT devices other equipment are functional and operational.
2. The Department has partnered with EAP, who gave webinars for Department Education leaders, school principals and deputy principals this week; and will offer webinars to school staff next week. I want to reiterate that staff and student wellness are of vital importance.

3. Communication sent to staff and parents on key educational matters will continue. Once a decision is made for school reopening, a comprehensive communication plan will be followed.

How is the delivery of Teaching, Learning and Services progressing?

Our stakeholders are aware that the current remote learning model includes online teaching, learning and services using a variety of applications and platforms; plus the provision of learning packets for students without devices.

Teachers at the primary and middle school levels are following the essential curriculum to be taught and will focus on teaching students the relevant curriculum standards. As schools move forward with new teaching and learning, it is critical for parents to ensure students are available for online instruction and complete the learner activities. Parents should also check that the work is completed for those students who receive learning packets in the mail.

The senior schools are continuing with the delivery of the curriculum and programmes remotely. For those students who were due to sit IGCSE examinations in May and June, the senior schools are presently following Cambridge's guidelines for awarding students assessed grades. We wish our senior students well as they prepare for their end of year assessments. We applaud our teachers for their dedicated efforts to sustain teaching and learning remotely, and for preparing learning packets over the past seven weeks.

At this point, I would like to share an email I received under the signature of 'a grateful parent' that is a testament of the commitment from teachers:

"I would like to share a note with you on my experience with the remote learning instruction being given to my daughter by Northlands Primary School P4 teacher

During her daily Zoom sessions, The Teacher covers English, Mathematics, Science and or Social Studies. The Teacher designs her lessons and assignments to be interactive and engages with her students through the use of various digital manipulatives and resources such as video storybooks, digital libraries, and STEAM experiments.

What was specifically impressive was the Teacher's use of Google Classroom. Her Google Classroom is tailored to fit the needs of her students and she has taught her students how to navigate and utilize this platform on their own. The Teacher capitalizes on the capabilities of Google Classroom to assign individual assignments to her students as well as communicate with parents. Her Google Classroom is outfitted with assignments from both core and non-core subjects (Music, PE, Art) for her students to complete and submit on a weekly basis.

I am thoroughly impressed with The Teacher's approach to remote learning and her use of digital resources in order to effectively provide instruction to her students. As a parent, your concern lies with the quality of education being provided to your student. The Teacher is a great example of the commitment and adaptiveness of our public school teachers during these unprecedented times."

Let me close by saying that, on Monday, the Honorable Premier stated that the Department will organize an Education Support Programme for the children of parents who must return to work during Phase 2. This programme will enable students to continue with their remote learning at a venue outside of their homes while their parents return to work. The programme will commence on Monday, May 25th at the CedarBridge Academy for Primary and Middle School children only. The Programme will open to Preschool children on Wednesday, May 27th.

I must emphasize that the Educational Support Programme is only for children whose parents must return to work during Phase 2. Only these parents should contact their child's school principal. If you are not returning to work during Phase 2, please do not contact your child's school principal. Lastly, we want to assure our parents that physical distancing will be practised as well as the implementation of safety and health protocols stipulated by the Ministry of Health. More details about the Educational Support Camp will be shared later this week.

We encourage our Educational Family to continue to use the BPSS Family Feedback form to send in your questions, concerns, complaints and kudos about the work taking place in our schools and at the Department of Education.

Thank You.