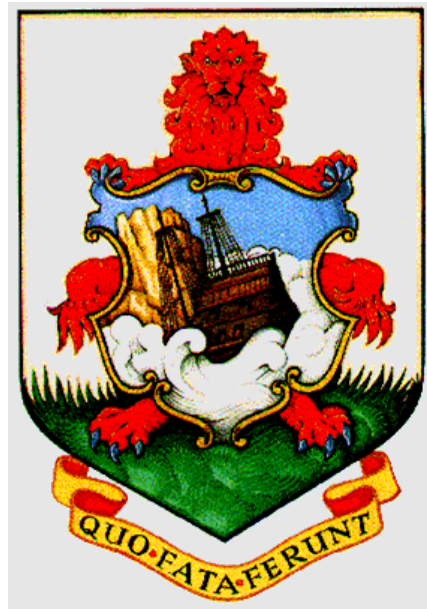


MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

PRIORITIZING MENTAL WELL-BEING FOR A SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL YEAR



Prepared for

The Honourable Kim N. Wilson, JP, MP
Minister of Health

September 12, 2025

Good morning,

Mr. Speaker,

Today I rise to acknowledge the beginning of a new school year, a time of fresh opportunities, new challenges, and the emotional journey our students embark upon. As the days of summer wind down, this week marked the beginning of a new school year, filled with new experiences and opportunities.

Mr. Speaker,

Across Bermuda, students returned to their classrooms, filled with anticipation for another year of learning and growth. The excitement of meeting new teachers, starting new classes, and even walking into new environments is real. But alongside that excitement, it is natural for students to also experience moments of stress and worry as they adjust to a new school year.

Mr. Speaker,

I want to remind parents, guardians, teachers, and students that nurturing good mental health in our youth is the foundation for true success. Academic achievement can only flourish when mental well-being is prioritized, as the two are inseparable.

Each age group of students faces its unique challenges, and each requires tailored support from families, schools, and communities to ensure that the transition back to school is as smooth and positive as possible.

Mr. Speaker,

For our youngest learners in primary school, going to school for the first time or returning after summer can feel overwhelming. These children may experience anxiety about separating from their parents, adjusting to new routines, or making new friends.

Parents and guardians, you have an important role in helping your children navigate these feelings. Take time to ask about their day and truly listen to their responses. Validate their feelings of worry, reassure them that feeling nervous is normal and remind them that they will be okay. You can also help by establishing routines for going to bed and getting ready in the morning that help them feel secure. Your help with homework in a calm and encouraging way can also help to build the confidence children need to feel prepared to succeed.

Teachers also play an important role in creating supportive classrooms where children's feelings are acknowledged and a normal part of everyday conversation. When children feel safe to express themselves, they are better able to focus, learn and thrive.

Mr. Speaker,

Our middle and high school students also need support. They often face a different set of pressures like navigating peer relationships, seeking social acceptance, managing academic performance, and worrying about their future after high school. For some, these pressures may even lead to experiences of anxiety or depression.

Parents and guardians of teenagers should remain attentive to changes in behaviours, moods, or social engagement. Encourage open conversations about the stressors in their

lives, model healthy coping strategies, and help them balance their responsibilities by encouraging rest, exercise and supportive community connections.

Teachers also play a critical role in supporting teenagers. By checking in with students and noticing early signs, such as withdrawal or a decline in academic performance, they can reach out for support and connect students to the care and resources they need. With timely intervention and encouragement, young people can regain their confidence and continue to thrive

Mr. Speaker,

We cannot forget our college aged students. This period of young adulthood is an exciting stage of transition with newfound independence. But it can also come with challenges in managing academic expectations, finances, and building new social networks. For young adults heading to college for the first time, I want to remind you that self-care truly matters. It is okay to ask for help when you need it, and it is best to ask early. Don't wait until you are overwhelmed or in a crisis to seek support. Asking for help is a sign of strength, and there are counselling services, peer support groups, and other wellness programs available to help you succeed both academically and personally.

Mr. Speaker,

Regardless of age, if you are a teacher, parent or guardian, there are simple but effective ways to support the mental health of our young people. Encourage them to get enough sleep, limit their screen time especially before bed, and make time for regular physical activity. These healthy habits go a long way to promote good mental health and wellbeing.

You can also build fun and positive activities into their routines, giving them something fun to look forward to and reduce stress. Most importantly, keep talking! Keep the lines of communication open so that your children always know they have a listening ear and a safe space to share their feelings with you. This can often be the most powerful tool for ensuring youth get the help they need, when they need it.

Mr.Speaker,

To support this vision, the Ministry of Health has a number of initiatives in place that benefit our students and their families. The **Healthy Schools Programme** works with schools to promote nutritious eating, physical activity, and overall wellness, and each year schools that excel are recognized with Healthy Schools Awards.

Our **P1 Health Screening Programme** ensures that every child entering primary school is screened for vision, hearing, motor skills, social well-being, and other key health indicators, so that challenges can be identified early and children can receive the support they need to thrive.

Mr.Speaker,

We are also investing in **Nutrition Services and Health Promotion programmes**, where our teams provide guidance, workshops, and resources to schools, PTAs, and community groups to help individuals and families adopt healthier lifestyles. In addition, our **Community Health Visiting services** support new mothers and young children through home visits and early childhood education in government preschools.

Finally, we continue to invest in the mental health of our young people. Through **community mental health grants**, organizations such as the Family Centre and MASC have expanded access to counselling and support programmes that directly benefit children, teenagers, and their families.

Mr.Speaker,

In closing, as students, teachers, parents, and guardians embark on the new school year, I encourage you all to remain vigilant, compassionate, and supportive. I want every student to know that you are not alone—your families, your schools, your communities, and your Government are here to stand beside you. This school year, let us commit not only to academic achievement, but also to fostering resilience, practicing kindness, and prioritizing mental well-being, so that every child and young person in Bermuda can thrive both in the classroom and in life.

Thank you.