



Government of Bermuda
Ministerial Statement

To The Senate

By

Senator H. Anthony Richardson, JP

**COVID 19 - Entry and Exit Safety & Health Protocols
for the Public School System**

Wednesday, July 22nd, 2020

Madam President,

This morning I rise to provide my Senate colleagues with an update on the COVID 19 - Entry and Exit Safety & Health Protocols that have been developed for our public schools, and which are now ready for implementation at the start of the upcoming school year.

Madam President,

Children are at the forefront of everything that we do in the Department of Education. The COVID-19 pandemic has made the safety of students and staff even more paramount. When our public schools reopen in September 2020, the safety, health and well-being of all students and staff will remain our priority. Often times, it is not known the extent of work required for developing new systems, processes and procedures. So this morning I plan to share with my Senate Colleagues and the general public, the detailed work and careful attention that was given when developing the entry and exit protocols for our public school buildings.

Madam President,

During the Shelter in Place quarantine back in April this year, the Commissioner of Education reached out to Technical Officers in the Department of Health to seek their lead with developing safety and health protocols for all of our public schools. Specifically, there was a request for protocols for each aspect of a student's participation in a school day.

Madam President,

The intent was for the Department of Education to know what safety and health procedures would be required from the time a student arrives on the school premises, enters the school building, walks to their classroom, participates in class lessons, visits the bathroom, goes to lunch, to leaving at the end of the school day. In essence,

Madam President, a student's movement on a typical day was tracked and then a protocol was designed around that movement. Also, the aim was to develop an Entry to Exit Safety and Health Protocol for each school level – preschool, primary, middle, senior, and also our special school, Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy (DAME).

Madam President,

During the Shelter in Place quarantine, Principals from each school level worked together with their staff and were tasked to provide information in response to the following questions due to COVID 19:

1. What are the risks associated with being inside of school buildings?
2. How can these risks be mitigated?
3. What would be required for schools to operate using physical distancing?

Detailed information was received for all school levels and shared with the technical officer in the Department of Health who used the information to develop and frame the safety and health protocols. It is important to note that current research, the input from school staff, and the input from Health professionals were all key factors and information considered.

Madam President,

In May, the first draft version of Entry to Exit Protocols had been developed for each public school level. The draft protocols were shared with all school leaders for their initial input and subsequent feedback from their school's COVID-19 Response Team. Several iterations were developed reflecting a high degree of thoroughness and diligence to obtain a sound framework of school safety and health protocols.

Madam President,

The protocols were pre-tested for each school level to determine feasibility, practicality and to get additional feedback on what revisions were needed. A pre-testing schedule was established for one full week in May, and teams were asked to do the walkthrough of the protocols at our largest schools at each level. The walkthroughs were held at Warwick Preschool, West Pembroke Primary School, Dellwood Middle School, and our special school DAME. The pre-testing teams comprised Department of Education office staff, Department of Health representatives, Custodians, School Principals, and representatives from all three Unions.

Madam President,

The development of the safety and health protocols for the senior school level was delayed at that time as the senior schools were continuing with remote learning for all students. However, the feedback obtained from the pre-testing exercise was meaningful and supported the refining of the safety and health school protocol documents. Once the Entry to Exit Safety and Health protocols were finalized, each

school Principal was provided a copy to customize for their respective school building. This process was completed in June 2020 prior to the end of the school term.

Madam President,

Several Department of Education technical officers such as school psychologists, curriculum officers, IT technicians, mentor teachers and student services officers visit our schools on a daily basis to serve both teachers and students. As such, the Department of Health Officer is currently working to finalize specific safety and health protocols for Department of Education technical officers which will ensure that we cover all bases in ensuring safe school buildings.

Madam President,

The Entry to Exit Safety and Health Protocols are comprehensive documents that reflect the current research, the input of school staff, union representatives and the technical expertise of staff from the Department of Health. The detailed guidance constitutes an appropriate mix of rigour and realism for the educational setting. The protocols aim to:

- provide safety and health guidelines for school operations,
- keep sick students and staff out of school buildings, and
- ensure an adequate response when someone is found to be ill on the school premises

Madam President,

I will now share a few highlights of the entry to exit protocols that were developed.

- i. Upon arrival at the schools in the morning, a screening will take place to ensure children are free of symptoms of COVID-19 or any other illness.
- ii. This screening includes temperature checks, a three-point questionnaire and appropriate follow up measures.
- iii. Parents will be required to wear face coverings when on the school premises; and will not be allowed into school buildings to ensure a healthy and safe “bubble.”
- iv. A key feature of our safety plan is the use of ‘bubbles’ consisting of the same group of children. Children will remain in their bubbles and observe appropriate physical distances.
- v. Preschoolers, Primary and Middle School students will not be required to wear masks at this time.

Madam President,

Senior school students will be required to wear face masks while on school premises. However, students at all school levels who become ill during the school day would

be required to wear a mask, if tolerated, and isolated and supervised until they are collected by a parent or guardian. School staff at all levels will be required to wear face masks throughout the day, while they are on the premises and in the building, including when they are in close contact with children or their colleagues.

Madam President,

Other protocols include:

- The installation of signs and floor markings as reminders for the now well-known preventative practices – hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene and physical distancing.
- School staff will supervise outside play in ‘bubbles’ consisting of the same group of children who will be asked to engage in contactless play and observe appropriate physical distances.
- All equipment used by children and staff will be sanitized before and after use, and children will not share equipment and supplies.
- Staff will be subject to similar restrictions with movement around the school building, and leaving the school facility during the day for appointments will be discouraged.

Madam President,

As shared earlier in this Statement, the Entry to Exit Safety and Health protocols were developed for every school level – preschools, primary, middle, senior, and our special school DAME. These protocols will be posted on the Department of Education’s Website at www.moed.bm for access by parents, guardians and the general public. Individual schools will be asked to post the customized protocols on their respective school websites. Developing these protocols was a mammoth task.

The Ministry and Department of Education extend our deepest gratitude to Nurse Lynn Jackson and Healthy Schools Coordinator, Ms. Marie Beach from the Department of Health for their diligence and the countless hours spent developing the protocols and working with the Commissioner of Education. I also must extend my thanks to Department of Education Staff, Principals, school staff and Union stakeholders for their contributions to the development of these comprehensive safety and health protocols for our schools for the protection of staff and students.

Madam President,

We encourage our Educational Family to continue to use the BPSS Family Feedback form to send in their questions, concerns and kudos about the work taking place in our schools and at the Department of Education. Lastly, we encourage our parents and the general public to visit www.moed.bm to review the COVID 19 Entry to Exit Safety and Health Protocols developed in preparation for the reopening of all public schools in September 2020. Thank You, **Madam President.**

