

Government of Bermuda
Ministry of Education

To the House of Assembly

By

The Hon. Diallo Rabain, JP, MP
Minister of Education

Ministerial Statement

The Bermuda Public Schools Update

Friday, June 5th, 2020

Mr. Speaker,

This morning I rise to provide my Honourable colleagues with an update on the Bermuda Public School System, and more specifically school reopening this school year in light of the impact of COVID19.

Mr. Speaker,

Just yesterday, our Premier announced that Phase 3 of the Reopening of Bermuda will commence on Thursday, June 11th 2020. Prior to his announcement, it was the expectation of the general public that all schools, both public and private would reopen during Phase 3. Let me say that the end of the school term for our students was scheduled for Monday, June 29th which is 15 school days from today. However, with Phase 3 of the expanded business operations starting so close to the end of the school year, I have decided that our public schools will not reopen for the remainder of this academic year.

I further decided that the school term will end five days earlier for public school students, to allow for the execution of end of year closing activities, and additional school staff training prior to school reopening in September for the new 20/21 academic year.

Mr. Speaker,

This means that the last day of school for all public school students is Friday, June 19th instead of Monday, June 29th, 2020. During the remainder of the school year, our students will continue with their remote learning programme which commenced on March 23rd. As I shared previously with my Honourable colleagues, the remote learning programme includes online teaching, learning and services using a variety of applications and platforms; plus the provision of learning packets for students without devices. Continuing with the remote learning programme will enable our students to maximize the remaining learning days during the month of June. All pre, Primary, Middle and Senior school students will be engaged in remote learning programmes.

Mr. Speaker,

The last day of the school term for our school staff will remain as Tuesday, June 30th 2020. After providing the online learning experiences and learning packets for students up to June 19th, all school staff will then commence the execution of end of year duties, participate in training, and carry out other essential tasks in preparation for the reopening of schools in September.

Mr. Speaker,

We all know that this time of year is usually a special time for our students who are transitioning from pre to primary, or to 'big school' we would say to our younger ones; a transitioning from primary to middle school; from middle to senior school; and from senior to college/university or to enter the world of work. During these transitions there are always celebratory activities to recognize what our children have achieved, and how they progressed during the year. Despite the limitations that COVID 19 presents to us in that schools will not be having the usual graduation ceremonies, I am very pleased to share that our school leaders are being very creative in organizing drive through graduation activities to recognize our graduating students at the different school levels. Information

about the celebration activities will be communicated directly to our parents. All graduation activities will follow safety and health protocols as stipulated by the Department of Health and the Ministry of National Security.

Mr. Speaker,

My Honourable colleagues are aware that the Department of Education is currently operating an Educational Support Programme at the CedarBridge Academy for children of those parents who returned to work during phase 2. This programme will now be expanded to accept children of parents who return to work during Phase 3. The expanded programme at the CedarBridge Academy will start for these children on Tuesday, June 16th (as June 15th is a public holiday), and it will end on Friday, June 19th, the last day of school for students.

As the Programme is growing in numbers, we urge that only those parents returning to work during Phase 3 who have absolutely no home support at all for their children, and who are interested, to contact their child's school Principal no later than Tuesday, June 9th. This will provide our Officers who are running the operation of the Education Support Programme with the numbers of children so that they can plan effectively.

Mr. Speaker,

We are aware that our parents and the general public want to know more details about our plans for the upcoming school year. Rest assured, these plans are being worked on. During the past two months the Department of Education Officers have been engaged in intensive preparation developing safety and health protocols for schools. This has been in collaboration with the Department of Health. These protocols also had the input from school staff and union stakeholders. Once finalized, the Department plans to share the protocols with our parents so they are aware of what safety and health measures will be implemented and, if needed have the opportunity to provide further input. The Commissioner of Education will be writing directly to our parents regarding this.

Mr. Speaker,

The summer break will soon be here for our students. The Department of Education will be having summer course offerings for our S1, S2, S3 and S4 students. A plan is being developed to have on line learning services that will align with the education needs of our students, and more specifically offer courses that will allow them to make up any loss in school work, and earn credits towards their Bermuda School Diploma. It is important to keep our senior school students on track with their course work as they prepare for graduation, college/university plans, and the world of work. The Department will also be assessing our primary and middle school children at the start of the next school year to identify learning gaps with the intention of immediately putting in place any needed interventions.

Mr. Speaker,

In closing, let me say that this has been an experience for all of us that no one could have ever been able to predict. I am very much thankful to all of our school staff and the team at the Department of Education under the leadership of the Commissioner of Education, for their diligence in rising to the occasion and remaining committed to the education of our children. Often times staff were called upon on short notice to map out a plan for implementation, and they have worked evenings and weekends to deliver. We should be proud of the Department of Education Team and our school staff. This has been a journey, and we continue to press on for the future of children.

Thank You, **Mr. Speaker.**