



Ministerial Statement
To The House of Assembly

By

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Minister of Education

An Update on Remote Learning Readiness in the Public School System

Friday, November 27th, 2020

Mr. Speaker,

This morning I rise to give my Honourable Colleagues an update on how the Department of Education is progressing with the distribution of laptops to our students and teaching staff in the public school system. I will also share about the steps that will be undertaken by the Department of Education should the need for remote learning arise as we continue to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Speaker,

The intrusion of COVID-19 in March 2020 caused educational institutions globally to make a monumental shift in their delivery of teaching and learning. This shift involves a more extensive use of computers, laptops or tablets; the need for more frequent access to the internet; a greater demand for on-line educational resources and materials; and, the adoption of various virtual learning environments to connect students directly to their teachers.

Therefore, **Mr. Speaker**, in providing my update this morning I will share how the Department of Education has progressed in providing mobile devices to our public school students and teachers; and, I will give an overview of the plan that will be executed should a class, year level or school have to transition to remote learning.

Mr. Speaker,

First, let me share about the Department of Education's vision for providing mobile devices for each school level in the Bermuda Public School System. At the preschool level there are approximately 310 students with 36 teachers and/or

Administrators. **Mr. Speaker**, all Preschool Administrators and teachers have received Laptops which are being used for accessing the Creative Curriculum. The Creative Curriculum software allows for the preparation of digital lesson plans; digital student assessments; and grading on a daily basis and during remote learning.

The Hatch iPads which we plan to issue to our preschool students is a mobile device used by 99% of all Preschool Systems around the world, as tablet use encourages good hand and eye coordination for kindergarten age students. The Hatch software is an internet based tool for parents to use as they work with students at home. Now that the decision has been made for preschoolers to use Hatch iPads, we will be looking to secure donor funds for the purchase of these tablets.

Mr. Speaker,

At the primary and middle school levels, students will receive Chromebooks while their teachers will be equipped with laptops. Chromebooks are ideal for use in a school system. They are widely popular in the US School Systems and gaining acceptance worldwide due to the robust student user experience and the ease of managing the devices. There are an estimated 3,100 primary and middle school students who will receive Chromebooks. All Paraeducators and Educational Therapist Assistants will also receive Chromebooks.

At this point, 44 devices have been distributed to students with the majority of these devices being used to Pilot a Hybrid Learning Programme at two of our Primary Schools – P6 at Somerset Primary and P4 at Gilbert Institute.

Mr. Speaker, we are still awaiting the arrival of an overseas order placed for Chromebooks of which I will speak to later on in this Statement.

Mr. Speaker,

At this juncture, a total of 350 Primary and Middle School teachers who teach the core curriculum (Math, English, Science, and Social Studies) have been provided with laptops. The next batch of laptops purchased will be given to the teachers who teach encore subjects.

Mr. Speaker,

At the senior school level, it will be the responsibility of the two Boards of Governors at each of the two senior schools to equip their teachers with laptops. However, the Department of Education will now step in to ensure that all 1,100 senior school students have Chromebooks for use as students were previously required to purchase their own mobile device. The donor organization 'Lighthouse Connect' has already committed to providing 100 Chromebooks for senior schools. We invite further donations to fund the purchase of Chromebooks for all students.

Mr. Speaker,

The provision of Chromebooks for students at the primary, middle and senior levels and laptops for teachers at these levels will enable both teachers and students to have increased access to use PowerSchool, Schoology, Google Classroom and other online platforms; and if necessary, to engage in remote learning. Additionally, our teachers will use the laptops for the development of digital resources and lesson plans; and digital grading.

Mr. Speaker,

The Department of Education is using Schoology, G Suite and PowerSchool as its key enterprise applications for the public school system. Without going into detail about these IT platforms, let me briefly share about the merits of the platform Schoology which is a web-based learning management system (LMS) that allows schools to administer educational courses and training programs; and to track the progress of its users.

Schoology was acquired by PowerSchool, the company that provides the Department of Education with our current student information system. Teachers can use Schoology to assign work to students electronically; collect and grade work from students; and return that work to students for quick, high-quality feedback. Schoology allows teachers to quickly create lessons and to differentiate instruction for each student, when necessary.

Mr. Speaker,

Schoology is also a one-stop shop for students to view their courses and complete any assigned class work. Schoology allows for a wide variety of input formats, so that students are not limited to producing traditional word documents, but they can provide audio or video recordings to teachers as evidence of their learning. Once their work has been graded, students can view their grades at any time. Schoology also allows parents to track their child's progress easily and communicate with teachers directly.

Mr. Speaker,

Teachers were introduced to the basics of Schoology in June 2020. They were asked to complete online training for Schoology during the summer and training has continued into this first term. We will continue with training throughout the year and a Schoology Support Team is being mobilized to coach and help teachers maximize the use of Schoology for the benefit of our students.

Mr. Speaker,

The use of Chromebooks in our public school system will provide our teachers with greater access to strategic teaching and on-line learning tools. The integration of technology into the learning process will also enable teachers to be more creative with engaging students in active learning and it will enable our students to acquire and deepen their technological skills as we prepare them to take their places within a highly technical workforce, locally and globally.

Mr. Speaker,

The Ministry is appreciative of all businesses and organizations that have donated laptops or provided funding for the purchase of mobile devices. We recognize the generous donations from Athene Bermuda, One Communications, PwC, the Bank of Bermuda Foundation, Lighthouse Connect, the Hasso Platner Foundation, the Sandy's Parish Council, and the Northlands PTA. All have generously contributed to help us make progress toward achieving the vision for all public school students and teachers to have mobile devices in hand.

Mr. Speaker,

I stated earlier that I would provide an update on the Chromebooks that were ordered for our students. In August of this year the IT Section in the Department of Education, using the \$580,000 grant received from the Hasso Plattner Foundation, ordered 1,600 Chromebooks with an expected delivery date in October 2020. Unfortunately, the local supplier has advised us that the August order has been delayed with an estimated arrival time of late December. The order is in a waiting line with other Chromebook orders from larger school districts in the USA, one of which includes an order of 500,000 Chromebooks. The world's three largest computer companies have advised these larger school districts that the delay has been exacerbated by the Trump administration's sanctions on Chinese suppliers. So we wait patiently for our devices to arrive on Island.

Mr. Speaker,

Once we receive the shipment of mobile devices, the Department of Education has mapped out a plan for distributing the devices to students. The devices will be provided to P4 to P6 students and M1 students. Devices will be provided to other year levels as additional mobile devices are acquired.

Mr. Speaker,

As previously mentioned, the Department is undertaking a remote hybrid learning pilot at two primary schools. It is planned that these current P4 and P6 students who are engaged in this pilot will carry the momentum forward of using mobile devices for learning as they transition to P5 and M1 next year. Also, their teachers would be expected to maintain the momentum as well as they receive former P3 and P5 students. This concentration with the use of devices for these levels will remain in play until there are sufficient mobile devices purchased for more students and the strategy for distribution is expanded to include other grade levels.

Mr. Speaker,

Let me now shift to remote learning readiness for our public schools. The Bermuda Public School System is adapting to teaching and learning in the "new normal" COVID-19 imposed upon the educational environment. And, **Mr. Speaker,**

I pause at this time to give accolades to all of our school staff for their tireless efforts to ensure quality teaching, learning and services within an environment of necessary heightened safety and health measures.

Mr. Speaker,

Guiding principles and components of a revised remote learning strategy are being finalized by the Department of Education to facilitate the continuance of teaching, learning and services in the event a classroom, year level or school has to transition to remote learning.

The remote learning strategy will continue to include the platforms that I shared in March when all schools transitioned to remote learning. As a reminder, they are:

1. Using the PowerSchool platform for all school levels to post assignments and notices. Therefore, it is imperative for all parents to have a parent portal account. At last check we were at 79% of our parents having a portal account. Our goal is for all parents to have a parent portal account when we run our next report in December.
2. Using the Teaching Strategies Gold online platform for posting activities at the Preschool level; and parents can use ReadyRosie as they work with their preschoolers at home.
3. At the Senior level, using online platforms such as FROG or Google Classroom for creating distributing, collecting and grading assignments and to facilitate interactive lessons.
4. Using Zoom at all school levels for online teaching and learning; and **Mr. Speaker**, the Department has provided zoom accounts for school staff.
5. Using other online learning applications such as DreamBox, Achieve 3000 and Accelerated Reader at the Primary school levels.
6. Using individual school websites to post activities and information for students and parents.
7. Communicating with parents and students via email, phone calls and apps such as ClassDojo.
8. Providing non-digital home learning packets via the regular mail system.

Mr. Speaker,

The Schoology platform has been added to the remote learning strategy, along with guiding principles for remote learning and a revised remote learning plan which includes a schedule and expectations for each school level of the Bermuda Public School System.

At present, remote teaching and learning are available for staff and students who are deemed extremely clinically vulnerable based on the criteria set out by the Department of Health. Remote learning is also taking place at our senior schools.

Mr. Speaker,

Should a class, year level or school have to quarantine as a result of COVID-19 and transition to remote learning, the following steps will be executed:

1. Staff and parents at the affected school will be notified and instructions will be provided.
2. Students will be provided with a two-day digital and / or non-digital learning packet.
3. Affected school staff will prepare for the launching of remote learning during the two transition days while students complete their assigned learning tasks.
4. Additionally, during the two transition days, mobile devices will be provided for students, with priority being given to students who do not currently have a device. We will need to use this approach while we await the arrival of approximately 1600 Chromebooks.
5. Affected teachers and students will follow the remote learning plan and learning schedule for their year level the third day.
6. The Schoology Support Team will provide coaching and assistance to teachers.
7. Parents will be provided with updates and instructions for the return to school.

Mr. Speaker,

The onset of the Global Pandemic caused by COVID19 has forced us to accelerate the part of Education Reform that involves the use of mobile technology for teaching. This acceleration was not budgeted for and thanks to the generous donations, we have been able to mostly fill in the gaps related to adequate devices. However, there is still a ways to go and we will continue to advocate and encourage donors to give for our children's education needs.

The Ministry and Department of Education are committed to our vision for the provision of mobile devices for our staff and students and we are keenly aware of the role these devices play in remote learning, but more importantly in the everyday learning experiences of our students.

Again, I thank our donors and I also thank the Department of Education staff. Their combined efforts are enabling to progress towards achieving the vision for providing mobile devices for the Bermuda Public School System.

Thank You, **Mr. Speaker**