



Government of Bermuda
Ministerial Statement

To The Senate

By

Senator H. Anthony Richardson, JP

Ministerial Statement

The Bermuda Public Schools Update

Wednesday June 24th, 2020

Madam President,

This morning I am pleased to provide my Senate colleagues with an update on the Bermuda Public School System, and more specifically the end of the 2019/2020 school year given the impact of COVID19.

Madam President,

Bermuda ‘celebrated’ Phase 3 of the Reopening of Bermuda on Thursday, June 11th 2020. Prior to June 11, it was the expectation of the general public that all schools, both public and private would reopen during Phase 3. The end of the school term for our students was scheduled for Monday, June 29th. However, with Phase 3 of the expanded business operations starting so close to the end of the school year, the Minister decided that our public schools will not reopen for the remainder of this academic year.

The Minister further decided that the school term would 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.

Madam President,

This means that the last day of school for all public school students was Friday, June 19th instead of Monday, June 29th, 2020. During the remainder of the school year, students continued with their remote learning programme which commenced on March 23rd. As I shared previously with my Senate 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. Continued remote learning enabled our students to maximize the remaining learning days during the month of June. All pre, Primary, Middle and Senior school students were engaged in remote learning programmes.

Madam President,

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

Madam President,

We all know that this time of year is usually a special time for our students to enjoy school leaving ceremonies as they transition from pre school to primary (or to ‘big school’ for our younger ones); from primary to middle school; from middle to senior school; and graduating from senior school to college/university or to enter the world of work.

During these times 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 presented to us which limited the usual end of year ceremonies, I am very pleased to share that our school leaders were very creative in organizing a significant variety of activities to recognize our students at each level. Information about the celebration activities were communicated directly to our parents. I was pleased to see that the activities followed safety and health protocols as stipulated by the Department of Health and the Ministry of National Security.

Madam President,

My Senate colleagues are aware that the Department of Education operated an Educational Support Programme at the CedarBridge Academy for children of those parents who returned to work during phase 2. The programme was expanded to accept children of parents who returned to work during Phase 3. The program was a notable success. Enrolment was effected by interested parents contacting their respective School Principal.

Madam President,

We are aware that our parents and the general public want to know more details about plans for the 2020/2021 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 preparations, developing safety and health protocols for schools. The preparations have 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 safety protocols.

Madam President,

The summer school break is upon us but learning continues. The Department of Education is offering summer courses for our S1, S2, S3 and S4 students. A plan was developed to have on line learning services that will align with the education needs of our students. The emphasis is on courses that will allow students to make up any loss in school work and earn credits toward 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. The intention is to establish any needed interventions on an urgent basis.

Madam President,

In closing, let me say that this has been an unexpected experience for all of us. No one could have ever predicted such a significant interruption to the school year. Notwithstanding, I join all Bermuda residents in saluting everyone that is in anyway connected to Education in Bermuda. I am very 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 educating our children. Often times staff were called upon on short notice to map out a plan for implementation, and they 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, **Madam President.**