



REMARKS
BY
THE HONORABLE JEFFREY L. LLOYD
MINISTER OF EDUCATION

BACK TO SCHOOL ADDRESS 2020

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

MONDAY, 31st AUGUST 2020
3:00 P.M.

Good afternoon,

Another year has passed, and we are once again planning the return of over 55,000 students, from throughout our country, to the classrooms. Yet, this year is different, it is unprecedented and without a doubt, one that has brought about seismic changes.

I believe that a country's health and prosperity is underpinned by education. It is therefore my desire to give you an outline of the measures the Ministry of Education has taken to enhance education in The Bahamas, and the Ministry's instructional delivery plans for the 2020 -2021 academic year.

My fellow Bahamians, for the past three years I have had the privilege of serving as your Minister of Education. At that time, the Ministry embarked on five major initiatives to enhance and transform the educational enterprise of this country. They were:

- a. **the complete digitization of the education system, such that every school and ministry building will have full wi-fi and internet capability.**

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Virtual Learning Platform is embedded in the Digital Evolution. Earlier, I said that the Digital Evolution is one of The Ministry of Education's (MOE) 5 priority areas, to improve the quality of education in the Bahamas.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in order for our remote classes to operate effectively, we must expand our Wi-Fi connectivity to all public schools. Our target is to have 100 percent of our schools equipped with fiber and Wi Fi connectivity.

As of June 2020, 75 percent of the infrastructure in public schools, throughout the Bahamas, have been upgraded to accommodate high speed internet services. The technology upgrades are even more significant and timely, considering the need to shift to online learning due to COVID19.

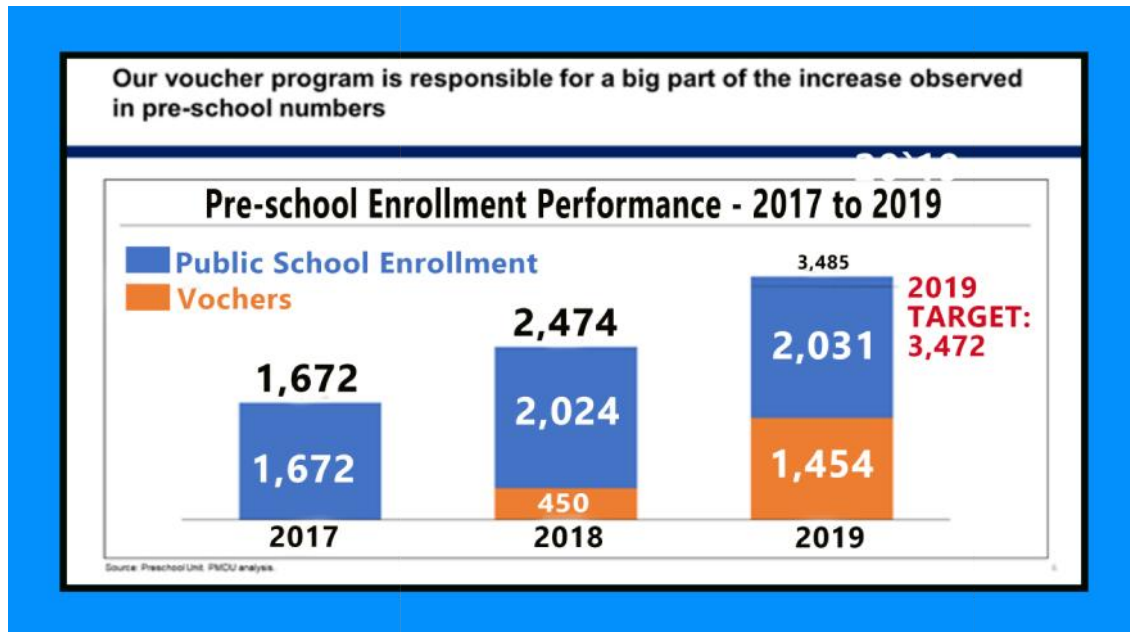
A Technology Task Force has been commissioned and charged with the responsibility of the implementation of a comprehensive EMIS (Education Management Information System) and LMS (Learning Management System).

The EMIS (Education Management Information System) is very effective in monitoring the performance of an education system and managing the distribution and allocation of educational resources and services. It includes data collection, data processing, data analysis, and data reporting.

The LMS (Learning Management System) is a software application we are using for the administration, documentation, tracking, reporting, automation, and delivery of educational courses, training programs, learning and development programs. Teachers are currently using the Learning Management System to teach and upload instructional resources and it allows students to participate in live lessons or on demand lessons.

- b. Offer universal, quality pre-primary education for all 3-4-year olds by 2025. In two and a half years, we have doubled the enrolment of 3-4-year olds in an approved pre-primary program.**

This initiative was launched in 2018 with the goal of increasing the number of 3 and 4-year olds enrolled in a pre-primary programmes. This has indeed been achieved by increasing the number of free spaces available for students in public and private preschools. Through the Public Private Preschool Voucher Programme students who cannot be accommodated in the public preschools in their residential area, are provided with a voucher to pay for the tuition at a Ministry of Education approved private preschool.



The Ministry of Education has provided preschool vouchers to families in need of financial assistance. These vouchers ensure that the child attends a preschool where he or she can develop the literacy, numeracy and social skills necessary for first grade and to build a strong foundation for school success.

Approximately 2,000 vouchers have been provided for students in New Providence, Andros and Grand Bahama to attend one of the 92 private preschool partners.

The target for this component of the priority is the enrollment of 4,612 three and four-year-olds in a government approved pre-primary program by the 2020/2021 school year. As of June 2020, 3,485 three and four-year-olds were enrolled. The Ministry has hired three inspectors to ensure

that our preschool facilities are maintaining appropriate standards, particularly now in light of COVID19.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Ministry has also targeted improving literacy rate, particularly at the 3rd grade level. We believe if we are able to address any literacy deficiencies at this early stage it would allow a solid foundation, that will better equip our students to successfully prepare and pass their national examinations and by extension, increase our high school graduation rate.

The target for this component of the Education Priority is 65 percent of 3rd graders achieving grades A-D on GLAT in Language Arts by 2020/2021 School Year. As of June 2019, we were only two percent away from achieving our goal, as 63 percent of students have now achieved Grades A-D in 3rd Grade Language Arts GLAT.

c. Focused professional development of our educators.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Ministry's is also placing greater emphasis on Curriculum Reform and Professional Development. The Curriculum Division has over the last two and half years, developed and implemented a Policy for Curriculum Reform that seeks to provide a clear, systematic approach to curriculum development and revision, with a wide cross section of stakeholder input ultimately reforming the national curricula. This policy features:

curriculum development cycle which outlines the essential layers of curriculum development. These include:

-) The identification and engagement of education stakeholders to serve on curriculum development teams.
-) Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the revised curricula.
-) Provision of ongoing professional development training for teachers; and
-) Facilitating parental education and involvement.

As a direct result of this policy, there will be an ongoing reform of the National Curriculum to produce updated guides on a consistently ongoing basis.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as the Ministry seeks to deliver inclusive and equitable quality education, we recognize that those responsible for educating our children must remain up to date through professional ongoing training. Technical officers and support staff have been engaging in national, regional and international conclaves, workshop sessions, webinars and technical meetings with international organizations such as UNESCO, CARICOM Secretariat, the OAS, the IDB, Delivery Associates, Cambridge University, US AID, ISRA AID and UNICEF, all in an effort to enhance the overall learning process.

My Ministry realizes that lifelong learning and continued professional development among our educators is key to ensuring that we are capable of producing students who have the life skills to succeed in a 21st century environment.

- d. increased access to tertiary level education, at both the academic and technical levels.**

Since 2018, the Government has granted free tuition to 3030 students to attend the University of The Bahamas and 1,774 to attend the Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute (BTVI), while some 600 students have been receiving scholarships annually, to attend universities abroad.

- e. The reform of our curriculum**

Ladies and Gentlemen, over the past year alone, the Department of Education was tasked with ensuring that thousands of trained educators provided academic instruction to approximately 40,000 public school students across the islands of The Bahamas. Additionally, some 15 million dollars was spent to support the 15,000 students in our nation's private schools.

- e. Ensure that All children, especially those with special needs, will have the opportunity to receive appropriate instructions.*

Our Special Education Students cover the full spectrum of disabilities and as such we give care consideration to them. Education is delivered to them in a myriad of school settings and via multiple modalities. As we are ever mindful of "Safety First, Education Always" in the first instance, we will seek to engage as many of these students in the Face to Face learning Model, with all of the Safety and Health protocols in place. Should the need exist to transition to the remote learning model, resources have been developed to assist parents and caregivers in co-facilitating learning in the virtual environment and in the home. Online support services will be made available, training videos, instructional packages and one on one sessions for psycho-social assistance.

Special Education Teachers and Special Education Officers will constantly monitor and adjust according to conditions in the schools, classrooms and community. Assistive devices, adaptive tools, modified instruction and best practices for this special population will be employed in the teaching and learning process.

We have been working to upgrade, repair and modernize all of our campuses, and tens of millions of dollars have been expended in this area, particularly our schools in Abaco which were damaged in Hurricane Dorian. Work has been carried out on all of the public schools in Abaco. Our post Dorian repairs in Abaco incurred 12.6 million dollars, while 5.2 million dollars was spent on repairs in Grand Bahama.



We are pleased to report that Central Abaco Primary School repairs should be completed during the 2020 fall term, while the Patrick Bethel High School should see the completion of 12 classes during this fall term, while the remainder of the school's repairs should be completed in early 2021.

The Ministry's has spent 12 million dollars on New Providence alone, repairing 49 primary and high schools along with 11 libraries during the 2019 summer repairs programme. Meanwhile our 2020 summer repairs are projected to cost 27 million dollars.

Our plan is to make sure that our schools can reopen, with all of the necessary health protocols in place, to ensure a safe and healthy environment for all of our stakeholders.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we believe that a critical factor in ensuring a responsible reopening of school is for all stakeholders to feel invested. To that end, The Ministry has engaged with more than twenty key internal and external stakeholder groups including the National Advisory Council on Education, Bahamas Union of Teachers, Bahamas Educators Managerial Union, Bahamas Public Services Union, Bahamas Association of Independent Schools and Bahamas Scholastic Association and many other influencers including parents and students, involving more than 3,500 individuals during the period July 14 to the present.

Earlier today, we held the opening ceremony for our annual Public-School Administrator's Conference. This two-day event is focused on providing our administrators with training on the management of schools, with emphasis on its varied components, inclusive of security, discipline, curriculum development and teaching in the online environment.

We believe that these sessions will inspire all of our stakeholders to embrace the new social realities, that will allow us to mitigate the spread of this virus and ensure that we are equipped to function in all of the

instructional modalities. Additionally, psychosocial and emotional support is available for all of our stakeholders.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our policies and plans for the reopening of schools have been developed by following best practices, as outlined by the Ministry of Health, World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In particular, I wish to acknowledge the importance and contributions of the Environmental Monitoring and Risk Assessment Division(EMRAD) of the Department of Environmental Health Services, particularly the Public Analyst Mr. Anthony Ryan, who has developed two policy documents with respect to the proper cleaning and sanitization of the all ministry of education facilities. This is critical in this new era, where the safety and well-being of our students and staff are paramount.

Mr. Ryan and EMRAD has been superb and the Ministry owes a debt of immense gratitude for their vision and leadership in this challenging environment.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Ministry has also targeted improving literacy rate, particularly at the 3rd grade level. We believe if we are able to address any literacy deficiencies at this early stage it would allow a solid foundation, that will better equip our students to successfully prepare and pass their national examinations and by extension, increase our high school graduation rate.

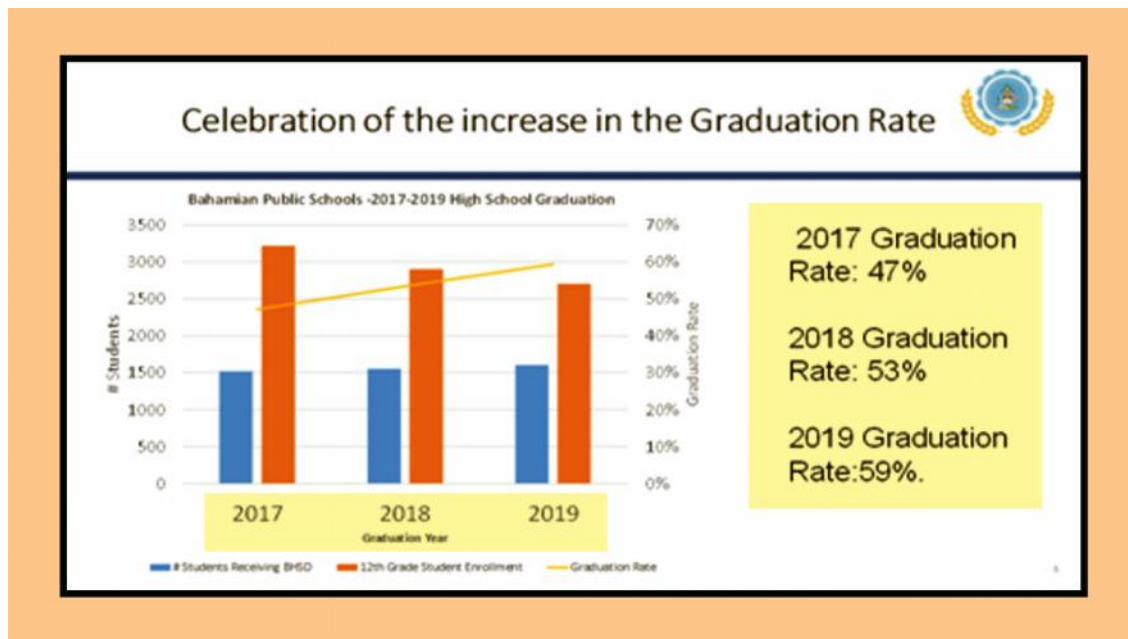
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School Year. As of June 2019, we were only two percent away from achieving our goal, as 63 percent of students have now achieved Grades A-D in 3rd Grade Language Arts GLAT.

Ladies and Gentlemen, back in 1998, the Ministry introduced the concept of a Bahamas High School Diploma, to ensure students throughout the country were meeting standardized requirements for graduation. Students are required to, over a three year period, demonstrate an ability to maintain a minimum 2.0 cumulative grade point average, have passed at least four BJC subjects including Mathematics and English Language, maintained a 90% punctuality and attendance record, as well as complete community service and job readiness training.

The Ministry is pleased to report that it has been steadily increasing the number of students who are able to achieve the Bahamas High School Diploma.

In 2017, only 47 percent of high school leavers graduated; In June 2019, 59% graduated, a 25% increase.



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My fellow Bahamians, as you may recall, back in September 2019 the Ministry of Education established a virtual school – the first of its kind in the Caribbean - to address teacher shortages in the remote islands. When Hurricane Dorian shuttered some of our schools in Abaco and Grand Bahama, many of our students in Abaco were able to quickly return to classrooms, via accessing lessons through the Virtual School.

I want to commend our team of educators on Abaco, led by District Superintendent Dominique Russell, who went beyond the call of duty to ensure our children were accommodated in appropriate facilities to allow remote learning to occur.

We are also pleased with the progress of the Virtual School, led by our Principal Lamont Gray, Samantha Wilson and their respective teams of Teachers and dedicated cadre of professionals. The school has set a precedent in the development of online resources, which has formed a

valuable blueprint for our expansion of online learning throughout The Bahamas.

It is this same precedent that we are following, which is allowing us to formulate our distance learning which became necessary when our schools closed nationwide back on March 13, 2020.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we recognize that the onset of COVID19 has brought additional financial burdens on many families. With this in mind, the Ministry is committed to assisting our students, who are already enrolled in the National School Lunch Programme, with obtaining devices to enable their online instruction.

The Ministry has already distributed 9,000 tablets to students in grades K – 3 and seeks to assist more students in the lower primary level. Digital devices such as tablets, laptops and projectors have been distributed to pre-school and lower primary schools on New Providence, Eleuthera, Exuma, Long Island, Cat Island, South Andros, Acklins, San Salvador, Mayaguana and East Grand Bahama.

As Parents would have purchased books and other instructional materials for their children in the past, this year, we encourage them to this school year to purchase a device instead, as a priority. The Ministry has partnered with local service providers and vendors to ensure that parents are able to purchase devices at a reasonable cost.

Parents are able to access recommended device specifications on the Ministry's website and Face Book Page.



Approximately 500 school administrators have received devices in the form of tablets, due to the Ministry’s partnership with BTC. Additionally, all teachers have access to a device along with high speed internet connectivity on their school’s campus.

My Fellow Bahamians, in my presentation to the House of Assembly and the Bahamian people on Wednesday July 22, I stated that in all our considerations, we are and will continue to be Guided by the advice from public health officials and education stakeholders, and what is in the best interests of our Staff and students. I affirmed that the priority is to minimize the risk of direct infection of COVID-19 as teaching and learning continue, regardless of the chosen modality of instruction.

My Dear Bahamians, the safety and well-being of all concerned remain our over-riding and fundamental priority.

In that same presentation, I addressed two very important subjects, the National Exams – namely the BJC and the BGCSE -- and the targeted date for the re-opening of school.

At that time, I informed the nation that exams had to be suspended due to the spike in COVID-19 cases locally, and the consequential lockdown of the island of Grand Bahama. I re-iterated that this was a suspension, NOT A CANCELLATION and I advised and encouraged ALL Examination Candidates to continue their preparation for the exams. I also informed Parents, Students and All Others that this suspension was not a time to relax efforts toward exam preparation. These crucial examinations, which serves as substantial credentials for students, will be administered as soon as clearance is given by the Competent Authority.

I, therefore, wish to inform today that having been given such clearance, the Ministry of Education will resume the administration of National Exams beginning Monday, September 14th, 2020 and ending Friday, October 2nd, 2020.

As was previously arranged, the Ministry of Education will provide private/independent and public schools with private invigilators to assist with the supervision of the examinations.

The Examination and Assessment Division will prepare new general timetables to be issued to schools and unattached candidates. The timetables will be placed in the local print and electronic media, published this week Thursday. No new individual timetables will be printed. Students will be advised to use the general timetables and mark on them the dates and times for their various examinations.

Marking of the examinations already sat will commence as early as Wednesday 2 September and will continue through the end of October.

It is anticipated that the 2020 results can be released by the end of November. This will give EAD the time to entertain queries before the end of the Christmas term and to roll over the exam processing system so that

registration for the 2021 cycle can begin by the second week in January 2021.

The Ministry of Education has spoken often of its moral obligation, provided conditions are suitable as determined by the Competent Authority, to continue the BGCSE and BJC National examinations for students who wish to sit the exams for which they have registered. The MOE has been inundated by requests from students keen to complete these critical exams, and parents as to when they will be resumed. It is the position of the MOE that the exams will provide closure for the 2019/2020 Academic Year, particularly for 12th Graders completing High School, certification for the job market, matriculation into tertiary institutions, and qualification for scholarship applicants. We have also been made aware of matured Bahamians who today regret not having taken their exams when they had the chance to do so. As was previously the case when the exams were commenced initially, all necessary Social Distancing and hygiene protocols will be in place, along with all necessary PPE equipment and thermometers.

I should make it clear, though, that this is the last time we will re-start the administration of the national exams. If for any reason – any reason whatsoever – that the exams are again interrupted, before its completion on Friday, October 2nd, they will be cancelled.

Secondly, in that HOA presentation, I announced plans for the re-opening of school as slated for Monday September 21st, 2020 at the usual time.

I stated that the Ministry will monitor the developments of COVID-19 and will adjust accordingly, and that in the reopening of schools for the 2020/2021 school year, it is quite evident that one size does not fit all.

Cognizant of this fact, the Department of Education, will follow carefully the latest developments on the health front.

The Bahamas is an archipelago – as we all know, with different environments, in different schools, different districts, different islands. Therefore, one size does not fit all. What works best in one scenario may not be best for another.

The ideal arrangement for our children is the FACE-TO-FACE MODEL. Especially those in the pre-primary, the primary and even middle years, This Face-to-Face Model guarantees their most effective social, emotional, intellectual, physical, cultural and spiritual development. It is the least disruptive to the established routine of our students, parents and our instructional leaders. It is easier to monitor and evaluate the instructional process and it provides the comfort of normalcy.

Since that July 22 announcement of the September 21st opening, there has been a substantial increase in the infection rate on New Providence and on other islands and consequently, have forced the Department of Education to engage in more urgent planning and considerations.

Therefore, the targeted opening date of Schools across the Bahamas is Monday, 5th October 2020. This goes for Public and Private Schools.

As I stated before, one size does not fit all. Thus, schools on the islands of New Providence, Abaco and Eleuthera, will open in a completely virtual environment. That is online. While Schools on GB and all other islands will open face to face.

This delay allows the Ministry and Parents/Care-Givers the opportunity to secure the needed devices for the full participation of all involved in the teaching and learning process. There is also a need to complete the

installation of the adequate level of internet service needed for connectivity to the Department's Virtual Platform for thousands of students who will now remain at home in both the public and the private education sectors.

The Ministry of Education has for some time emphasized its commitment to the United Nations goal of providing quality and inclusive education for all. As it is clear that there are some students who will not have access to devices and internet connectivity, including some who have no electricity in their homes.

Therefore, the Ministry will be providing for those students resource instructional packages to be collected from the respective schools by their parents, which will in turn be returned to schools for grading by teachers, on a weekly basis.

The Competent Authority recently relaxed Lockdown restrictions in New Providence, Grand Bahama, and a number of Family Islands. Thus, persons are generally moving about with regularity throughout The Bahamas, in accordance with the health and safety protocols mandated by the Government.

My Dear Bahamians, we recognize that online learning is new for many of our parents and it may provide logistical challenges for some who may be concerned about childcare needs, while both parents work away from home. We recognize that our schools provide critical support services that will allow parents to return to work with a greater peace of mind, knowing that their children are in a safe environment.

While our schools owe a duty of care to its students and have been carrying that out, we are also aware that that duty of care transfers over to parents once our students have left our campuses. The reality is that, due to

COVID19, parents are now faced with having to oversee the instructional responsibility of their children, and due to persistent health concerns on some islands, duty of care will continue to rest upon the shoulder of our parents for a much greater period of time.

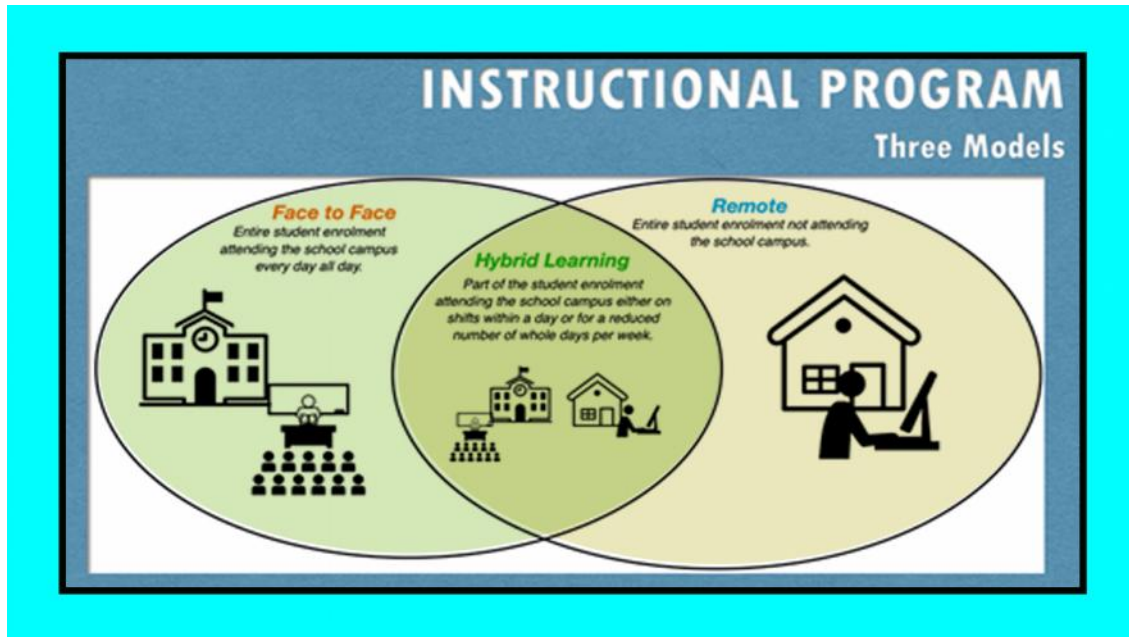
The MOE is committed to doing its part in supporting our parents, by ensuring that our public libraries are equipped with the necessary health and safety protocols, in order to provide an alternative study space, for students to access remote learning.

Additionally, we are collaborating with churches and civic organizations to consider giving aid to parents and provide a safe space for the children of their members and those in there surrounding community, to safely gather and access the online learning platform.

I am pleased that the Department of Social Services has also undertaken to assist in expanding the accessibility of all children to the Virtual School. The Ministry of Social Services will be providing internet access at all Department of Social Services and Urban Renewal Centres, to assist SS' clients as that ministry continues its digitization efforts. The use of these "hotspots" will also be made available for students who require connectivity to the Virtual School. The requirement for accessing this service is to register with SS, via a brief survey.

Please note that I will be giving further details on the opening of school and all matters connected thereto in future addresses, particularly when the House of Assembly meets again on September 9th, next week.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in July 2020, the Ministry of Education advanced three learning modalities when schools reopen - Remote, Hybrid and Face to Face.



Our remote format will encompass a distance learning or online platform. The hybrid or blended modality will allow students to alternate between attending campus on some days and participating in the online classes on other days.

The 3rd format of instruction, which is the most ideal, is the face to face model. Gradually, as the virus abates and conditions improve, we believe our schools will return to a full-time face to face model for all students.

As I mentioned earlier, some of our schools in the family islands may be able to start with the face to face model if they have no or very few COVID19 cases on the island.

My fellow Bahamians, we have opened up the Ministry's virtual platform to allow all students, particularly our home-schooled children to have access to this vital resource. However, parents who opt to home school their children, are reminded that they have taken charge of their children's education and must register with the Ministry of Education Home Schooling Unit. Students who are home schooled may register, log onto and utilize the Ministry of Education's virtual platform; however, parents are responsible for monitoring their children on the Ministry's virtual platform and carrying out any lesson performance evaluations.

Our online platform will also provide instructional delivery to our students in the Simpson Penn Centre for Boys, the Willie Mae Pratt Centre for Girls and those students in any other alternative state ran institutions. Those teachers who were providing face to face instruction previously, will continue to provide instruction to their students via the online platform. These institutions will become a part of the Virtual School platform, that was previously set up to provide tuition to our students in the family islands, whowere experiencing teacher shortages.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I now turn to the responsibilities of our varied education stakeholders.

Private Schools will re-open on October 5th at the usual time. I ask Parents and Students to contact your private school for more information as it pertains to all matters relating to your childsattendance there.

Please appreciate that whatever model the school uses, this is still school, and students are still being given instructions. Questions have been asked that since the child is NOT sitting in the classroom, whether school fees

should be paid. The answer is, if that child is receiving instructions from a private school then that service must be paid for.

Another matter which has come to the attention of the Ministry is this issue of homeschooling.

All homeschooled students must register with the Ministry of education homeschooling unit.

Secondly, the homeschooling concept is not license for an interested parent or two to establish a school within their homes, and charge other interested parents a fee for their child to attend. That qualifies as being a school, and the law states that person operating a school or intending to do so, must register with and be approved by the MOE.

This is very important for all parents who may be unwitting participants in this. Be sure to verify the registration status of any such school before sending your child thereto.

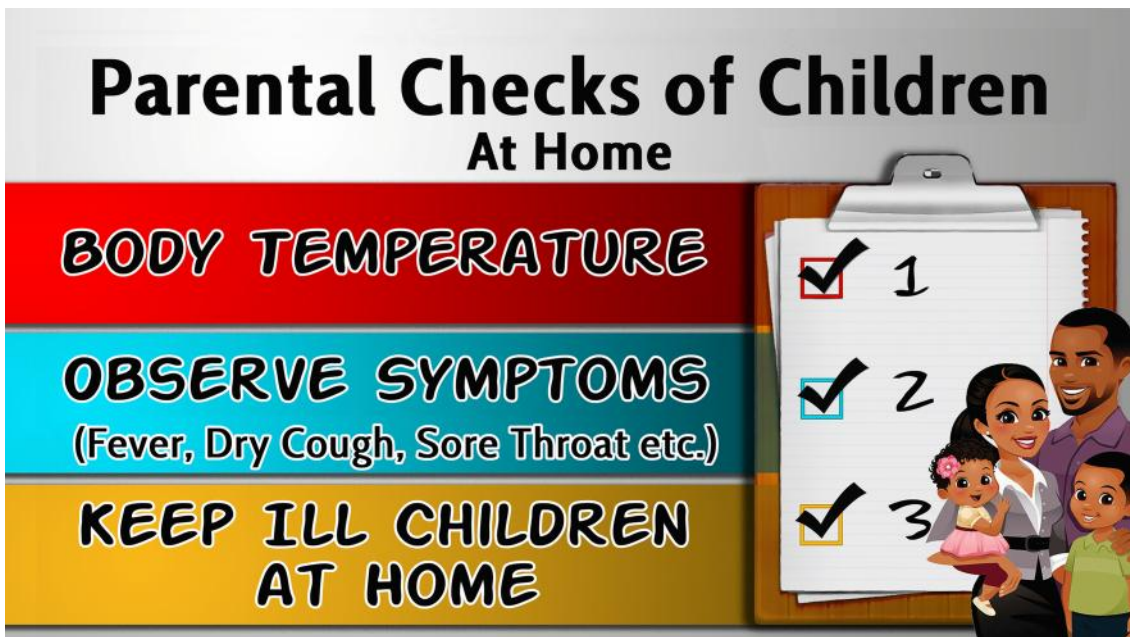
Whether the school is using remote, hybrid or the face to face model, all modalities will include utilizing stringent health and safety protocols. I will seek to point out some to the major changes that our internal and external stakeholders will experience.

Firstly, for many of our students, their first point of contact are the bus and ferry providers. These providers will be required to carry out the following health protocols to ensure a healthy and safe environment for our students. They will be: For Transportation services:



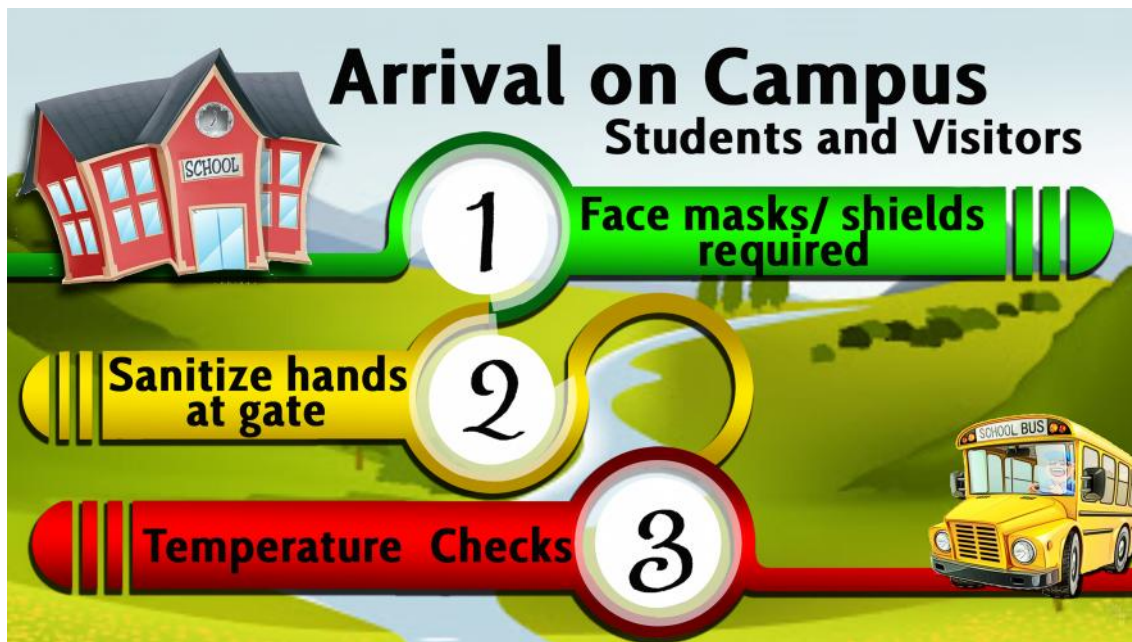
-) All will be required to wear a face mask and ensure all who board wears one as well; Drivers must wash hands before and after trips
-) And other health protocols.

Parents and instructional staff must also make adjustments. Now all parents must check their children, and staff members must engage in self checks prior to arrival on the campus:



If COVID-19 related symptoms are suspected, they are to seek medical assistance.

Our School Administrators must:



All of these safety protocols are listed on the Ministry's web site and social media pages.

Our teachers, in addition to their regular duties, will now also be required to ensure that health and safety protocols are followed in their classrooms.

Teachers must:

Classroom Setup

1 Desks 3 ft apart, facing 1 direction.

2 Capacity based on size.

3 Teachers will monitor student movement.



Our custodial, cleaning and maintenance staff will be increasing the level of sanitization throughout our campuses. These efforts will include:

-) The cleaning and sanitization of all touchable surfaces and high traffic areas, among other important protocols.

)

Ladies and Gentlemen, our lunch vendors have been participating in ongoing training to ensure food handlers health and safety protocols are being followed in the preparation and distribution of lunches in a COVID-19 era. They will be required to wear face masks at all times and to sanitize prior to the handling of food items. Lunch providers will offer only prepackage “grab and go” lunches to encourage social distancing.

Students will maintain social distancing of a minimum of 6 feet while queuing for the lunches. School staff will assist with the supervision of this process. While eating or drinking, students will be advised to take extra precaution not to contaminate or soil their masks.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Ministry of Education is concerned about maintaining the protection, wellbeing and providing social assistance to staff and students. Our Guidance Counsellors will be available to provide vital support and we will continue to offer our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) upon self-referral or referral from the Principal.

Parents, you can be assured of which ever model we engage that, you will receive support in the learning process. This support will include live teacher led daily instruction, personalized lessons using national curriculum pacing guides which will ensure standardization of the teaching of the curriculum, graded assignments, daily attendance tracking and teacher assessment on student progress.

We ask you however to remain cooperative and supportive to your teacher as more is demanded from them. Many of you have now had the experience of tutoring and motivating your own children, remember your child's teacher must do that for sometimes up to 35 children, as well as their own.

Online teaching has been a learning curve for many of our teachers as well, however I am pleased to say, they have risen to the challenge.

I wish to thank those educators who immediately took up the mantle and transformed their instructional delivery to adapt to a novel way of teaching – remotely. All of their efforts have helped to provide our students with a sense of normalcy and stability during this period.

Ladies and Gentlemen, despite the unprecedented trials of the 2019 – 2020 academic year, we can look back at the year with much satisfaction that much was achieved in advancing access to education to more of our students, and much more will be achieved as we seek to provide a quality inclusive education for all.

I wish all of you a successful, safe and productive 2020 – 2021 academic year.