

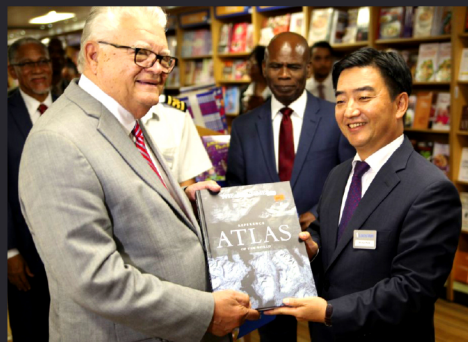


Ministry of Education
Youth and Information



Honourable
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Ministry of Education, Youth and Information

Theme | **Overcoming Unprecedented Challenges**



Gordon House: July 28, 2020



Minister of Education, Youth and Information



SECTORAL PRESENTATION 2020

By Honourable Karl Samuda, CD, MP
Minister of Education, Youth and Information

HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

July 28, 2020

THEME:

Overcoming Unprecedented Challenges

Introduction

Mr. Speaker,

I rise today to make my contribution to the Sectoral Debate of the 2020/2021 Financial Year.

This marks the 40th consecutive year I have served in this Honourable House. I consider it a great honour and privilege to have been given the opportunity to serve the people of Jamaica as a Member of Parliament. I wish to thank them most sincerely for their continued support.

In particular I would like to thank the Prime Minister, the Most Honourable Andrew Holness for allowing me the opportunity to continue working as Minister of Education, Youth and Information.

Since assuming oversight responsibility of the Ministry, I have developed a deeper appreciation of the tremendous challenges confronting the education sector as well as the opportunities for making significant changes in the circumstances of the lives of children across the island.

Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to thank the Ministry's staff led by Dr. Grace McLean, Acting Permanent Secretary, Acting Chief Education Officer, Dr. Kasan Troupe and other members of the Executive Management team and related agencies for putting in long hours of hard work to implement the Government's policies and programmes. Very special thanks to my support staff in the Ministry who continue to give me their full support at all times.

Special thanks also to the thousands of school administrators and teachers who continue to serve our children under challenging circumstances at times. The successes that we have achieved so far are in no small measure due to their level of commitment and dedication to service.

COVID – 19

This year, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted the Ministry's work in a big way by causing major adjustments in school operations. Face-to-face teaching was suspended and the Ministry's budget had to be re-aligned. The national and exit exam schedules had to be postponed and new protocols and practices were introduced for remote teaching and learning as well as interaction on school campuses.

Amid all this disruption, the Ministry's team, our principals, teachers, and parents rose to the challenge and responded in creative ways to allow for the continuing education of our 578,312 students. The measures that we were forced to adopt, would have been considered unthinkable six months ago.

Our students are to be found in the 1878 private institutions (to include 1673 basic schools) and over 1000 public institutions (including private and public tertiary institutions) across the island.

Mr. Speaker, today I will provide an update on the pandemic's impact on our schools, the Ministry's response to date as well as the plans moving forward for the upcoming school year. I will also bring members up to date on new initiatives undertaken by the Ministry during the past year.

Emergency in Education Plan

In early March, the Ministry drafted and shared with schools an Emergency in Education Plan, which among other things called for:

- Collaboration with school administrators through our Regional offices to organize training for teachers to help with remote teaching and learning through the use of online platforms;
- The provision of printed material and distribution where access to internet service was limited or non-existent;
- The establishment of partnerships with internet service providers for lower data fees or zero-rated data to allow for greater access;
- Working with private providers of educational material for the development of online lessons and
- Producing material for radio and television educational broadcasts.

Primary Exit Profile

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry took the decision to cancel the PEP 6 Performance Tasks and the Curriculum Based Test this year due to COVID-19. As a result, a hybrid approach was used to place the students.

All 38,918 students who sat the exams were placed in high schools and 80% or 31,017 of the students were placed in one of their seven choices. Sixteen per cent or 6,148 of the students were placed in secondary level schools that are in close proximity to the schools that they attended and 4% (1,606) were placed manually in secondary level schools in proximity to the address they submitted at registration.

An online parent portal was developed and implemented. This allowed parents to access detailed reports regarding the performance of their children. Over 30,000 parents logged on to the portal.

Limited Reopening of Schools

Mr. Speaker, with the extension of the school closure, we recognised that we needed to provide opportunities for refresher face-to-face instruction for students within the parameters of the Covid-19 physical distancing and other protocols.

In consultations with stakeholders across the island, we decided to reopen schools for the period June 8 to July 3 to facilitate preparations for students registered to sit CSEC, CAPE and other examinations.

Preparations

Mr. Speaker, we prepared a manual for schools to guide their preparations for students returning to the classroom. School leaders participated in a rigorous virtual training exercise with the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

The Ministry provided the necessary personal protective gear and support to enable schools to sanitize ahead of the reopening. Inspections were carried out by the local health authorities to ensure schools were adhering to the protocols.

By and large, the limited reopening of schools went very well. Students and teachers wore their masks. Persons entering school campuses had their temperatures checked. Schools installed hand washing stations. Desks and chairs were spaced to adhere to the physical distancing required in classrooms. Markers were placed on floors to guide students. Signs were also posted across schools reminding students and teachers to practice good hand hygiene, about proper mask etiquette and about the need for physical distancing.

Attendance

Mr. Speaker, during the review period, attendance varied daily according to the approach adopted by school leaders in treating with their students.

Approximately 32% of our schools offered only one subject each day in intensive sessions to address identified gaps, while 50% offered three hours of classes for three subjects each day. Other schools organized consultations based on selected topics in each subject to include virtual experiences.

Mr. Speaker, the exams administered by the Caribbean Examinations Council are now underway. The NCTVET exams have also commenced and the City and Guilds process for the use of calculated grades is almost complete.

So far, the reports indicate that the arrangements put in place are working well. We wish all our students who are taking exams all the best.

Preparations for the start of the new School Year

Mr. Speaker, we are now in the final stages of preparation for the upcoming academic year. The Ministry has done the research and collected the data on the needs of schools and we have started to identify additional spaces for our students to allow for continued social distancing.

We have been in dialogue with a number of churches to use their halls and other available spaces and we want to thank our church leaders for responding to this national need. Across the seven regions, more than 52 churches so far have made their halls available at request. We are negotiating with others.

Mr. Speaker, nearly 30% of our schools function under capacity and can therefore operate with the existing spaces they have, while others have opted to use tents.

The Ministry has also entered into partnership agreements with 39 private institutions so far to accommodate some students.

Schools are developing their individual plans for re-opening in September and school administrators have been guided to:

- Rearrange the seating in all classrooms in keeping with the social/physical distancing guidelines
- Modify the timetable to ensure that teachers are appropriately deployed to attend to the students.

Mr. Speaker, psychosocial sessions must also be on the timetable for all students to help them cope with the changes imposed on them as a result of the pandemic. All schools will have a psychosocial programme in place supported by the Guidance Counsellors, Deans of Discipline, School Nurses, HFLE Teachers and Officers in the Regions as well as Social Workers. Students will be immersed in this programme for the first month of school. The programme will continue until the end of the school year.

Mr. Speaker, special consideration will be given to staff and students with co-morbidities or underlying health conditions.

Schools are to develop plans for the use and distribution of basic equipment and materials needed for sanitization purposes such as temperature check devices, hand-washing solutions/stations, masks, alcohol, sanitizers, and other personal protective equipment (PPE). Staff will be deployed to clean and sanitize school buildings, classrooms and other facilities prior to the resumption of school and according to a daily routine while school is in operation.

Staff and students will receive training on the importance of social/physical distancing and other precautionary/hygiene practices to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Over 13,000 members of staff in our schools have already been trained. Each school will also develop a monitoring mechanism to ensure that precautionary measures are never compromised.

Mr. Speaker, each school has been provided with between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000 to commence the preparation for September. Secondary institutions are provided with \$600,000 each to procure furniture, while the Ministry has commenced the procurement of furniture for primary schools. This provision is in addition to the regular grants provided to schools in April and June, which amount to over \$2.8 billion.

Schools are being encouraged to contact their Regional Offices if there are further needs identified.

Mr. Speaker, the assessments to be administered in September are being prepared and curriculum modification has commenced.

A phased approach will be utilized for the reopening commencing September 7 to allow for full care of all students and to prevent the likelihood of any spread of the virus. Tertiary institutions will determine their own schedule.

Mr. Speaker, this afternoon I tabled a Ministry Paper in this House, which outlines in greater detail the plans being made for the beginning of the upcoming school year.

Blended Education Approach

Mr. Speaker, based on extensive research, we believe that quality education can be provided for all students in the new school year, using an appropriate Blended Education Approach. The model adopted will allow for all students to benefit from meaningful and appropriate learning experiences. We intend to reach students by providing them with diverse learning opportunities and resources using a mix of:

- Online instruction
- Interactive television programmes provided through the E-Homeschool Network provided by Ready-TV, the Public Broadcasting Corporation of Jamaica (PBCJ) and the Jamaica Education Television.
- Printed Learning packages or kits
- Face to Face instruction

Over 20,000 of our teachers have already received training on virtual instruction through the Jamaica Teaching Council.

The blended approach will ease some of the demand for additional teachers and classrooms given the physical distancing requirements. Schools will be able to craft the approach that best suits their needs, however this will be guided by parameters set out by the Ministry.

Scheduling will be informed by:

- Enrolment
- Size of the school/number of classrooms, labs etc.
- Social Distancing requirement

Tablets

Mr. Speaker, as we make our preparations for the reopening of schools, one thing is clear. We will have to rely more heavily on technology. Our schools are now requiring that students have access to a dedicated tablet or a laptop for computer-based learning.

As a Government, we recognize that not all children will have access to these devices. That is why we are in the process of procuring over 100,000 laptops and tablets for our most vulnerable students. We have commenced the procurement for 77,000 tablets for students up to Grade 9 and 25,000 laptops for students from Grades 10 to 13. These devices will be distributed on a phased basis beginning in late August. Students on the Programme of Advancement Through Health and Education (PATH) will receive devices.

The Bring Your Own Device Policy (BYOD) has been approved and will be sent to schools during this week. This will allow parents to purchase computers based on provided specifications. Students will also have access to the Ministry's textbooks and additional content through these devices. E-Learning Jamaica continues to deliver 25,000 tablets to our teachers.

New Learning Management System

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Information in partnership with existing providers will procure and fully establish a National Learning Management System. This will allow schools to continue to use systems they already have and for the Ministry officers to be able to track and monitor the activities of the system and to obtain data to inform interventions.

The National Learning Management System will allow teachers to create, deliver and manage lessons, and other training materials for students and teachers. School leaders will be able to use it to set and track assignments, track performance, post video clips, pictures and animations. They will also be able to generate discussions around those focus areas.

Mr. Speaker, teachers who have comorbidities can use the LMS to deliver their lessons and children who are home-schooled because of comorbidities can also access the LMS during our transition period.

Elimination of Shift System

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to our plans to eliminate the shift system. In an effort to meet the demand for school places, the Ministry prepared a Strategic Infrastructure Development Plan, which outlines the plan for the elimination of the shift system and relieve overcrowding.

There are currently 36 schools on shift, including 15 primary schools, one All-age school and 20 high schools. Since 2007, these strategies have facilitated the elimination of the shift system in 88 schools.

The procurement has started for Cedric Titus High, Muschett High, Albert Town High, Old Harbour High and Friendship Primary using funds in the 2019/2020 budget. The timetable has been affected by the COVID-19 crisis, but the Ministry plans to eliminate the shift system entirely by 2024.

Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Speaker, this is an opportune time to provide Members with an update on plans for infrastructure projects for 2020-2021. An allocation of one billion, four hundred and twenty-four million, seven hundred and seventeen thousand dollars (\$1,424,717,000.00) was made for 2020/2021 Capital Projects.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Jamaica had to recast the budget to deal with this crisis. Therefore, the budget for Capital Projects was reduced by approximately 60% or by eight hundred and fifty-seven million, five hundred and thirty- seven thousand dollars (\$857,537,000.00).

The reduced allocation of five hundred and sixty seven million, one hundred and eighty thousand dollars (\$567,180,000.00) will be used to carry out pre-contract activities for nine (9) expansion projects and electrical upgrading to eight (8) schools.

It will also be used to construct security fencing in three (3) schools, complete the upgrading of the Ministry's facilities, to make outstanding payments for projects carried forward and to commence works in three (3) schools.

2020/2021 Critical Recurrent Maintenance Projects

An allocation of four hundred and twenty-five million, one hundred and thirteen thousand, and five hundred and thirty-seven dollars (\$425,113,537.80) will be used to carry out repairs at 156 schools under the 2020/2021 Critical Maintenance Programme. The funds are being used for critical repairs to sanitary facilities; termite treatment; repairs to roofs; electrical repairs; repairs to the sewage disposal system and any critical matters.

To date:

- Fifty-six (56) schools have been completed
- Eight (8) schools are up to 98% completion.
- Nine (9) schools are up to 80% completion.
- Twenty- two (22) schools are up to 50% completion.
- Nineteen (19) schools are up to 20% completion.

- Forty- two (42) schools are at the tender stage with selection of contractors for works to commence and projected for completion for September 2020.

Mr. Speaker, additional details on these maintenance projects have been provided in the Ministry Paper, which I have tabled in the House today.

Early Childhood Education

Mr. Speaker, I note that from time to time concerns are raised publicly about the support given to early childhood institutions. I take this opportunity to reiterate the Government's total commitment to supporting our children from the earliest stages of their development and entry into the public education system.

The Ministry spends \$20.3B on Early Childhood education, which is used to provide support to infant schools and basic schools. As early childhood refers to the period from birth to age 8, this allocation includes a portion of the funds spent on primary level institutions. It also funds activities of the Early Childhood Commission, which is actively engaged in ensuring that Early Childhood Institutions meet required standards.

Mr. Speaker, we know that private schools including our early childhood institutions are facing challenges as a result of COVID-19. As I have already mentioned in this House, the Government is carrying out assessments to ascertain the number of Early Childhood Institutions that have closed. A sanitization grant will be given to assist ECIs and during the course of this month (July), ECC Field Staff have been providing sensitization and training regarding new protocols.

As a government, we continue to discuss the matter to see if additional support can be given to the sector.

Before I move on, I'd like to note that I've also tabled the Ministry's Whole of Government Report 2019/2020, which provides an overview of our performance in areas that support the Human Capital Development Initiative of the Government. These areas include access to early childhood education, student support, differentiated instruction for effective teaching and learning and youth development and career advancement.

Introducing ISO 9001 Quality Management System into the Education System

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to tell you that we are introducing the ISO 9001 Quality Management System into our education system. The ISO 9001 Quality Management System is an international standard, which assists an organization to produce high quality goods and services, which are demanded by the market.

Implementing this standard means putting in place a system that will focus on the improvement in the quality of outputs from our educational institutions.

Mr. Speaker, under our ISO 9001 programme, we will be focusing on the quality of behaviour and the quality of students' academic performance. We are now implementing the standard and we expect the Ministry to be ISO 9001 certified before December 2021.

In addition to the Ministry, we are implementing the ISO 9001 Standard into:

- The Jamaica Tertiary Education Commission
- The Council of Community Colleges of Jamaica
- The Overseas Examination Commission
- The Excelsior Community College
- The Management Institute for National Development

I must remind you that the University Council of Jamaica is already ISO 9001 certified.

Mr. Speaker, with these key educational institutions becoming ISO 9001 certified, this will usher in a new era in the Jamaican education system where greater focus will be placed on the quality of our graduates at all levels.

New Region

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to advise the House that the Ministry has established another Region – Region 7 within its administrative structure. Cabinet gave approval for the Ministry to establish and commence operations of the new Region comprising the parish of Clarendon only, on March 3, 2020.

Previously, Region 6 included the parishes of Clarendon and St. Catherine. Together they have the largest number of schools (228) and the highest number of student enrolment (115, 846) geographically dispersed in urban rural and remote rural areas.

The size and dispersion of the schools in these two parishes made it difficult for staff at the regional office to serve their constituents as efficiently and effectively as it should. It was decided that for efficient and effective delivery of services we needed to establish a seventh region to serve Clarendon.

I am happy to announce that as of June 1, 2020, the new Region is now operational.

Conclusion

Mr. **Speaker**, as I close my presentation, I must make special mention of the many stakeholder groups that have worked with us in the last several months as we have faced this unprecedented threat.

These include the Jamaica Teachers' Association, the National Parent Teacher Association of Jamaica, the Ecumenical Church Group, the Jamaica Prefects' Association, the Jamaica Independent Schools Association, the National Secondary Students' Council, representatives from our tertiary institutions and other groups.

Through countless consultations and meetings, we have developed a response to the COVID-19 crisis that we believe to be in the best interest of all our students. To our parents and students, I know it has been a difficult time. Thank you for your patience and your commitment to this process.

Notwithstanding the challenges, I can confidently say, we are moving in the right direction.

Thank You.

Notes



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