

COMMUNICATION

House of Assembly
The Hon. Jeffrey L. Lloyd
Minister of Education
Wednesday, March 18, 2018

COMMUNIQUE ON MOE's RESPONSE IN WAKE OF COVID-19

MR. SPEAKER:

On Sunday night, past, March 15th, the MOE issued a Press Statement in light of the recently confirmed case of the corona virus in The Bahamas, announcing the immediate closure of all schools and educational institutions, both public and private, until Tuesday, April 14th, 2020.

In that statement, the Ministry advised that Teachers and students were not to report to School. However, all administrators, support staff, and security personnel were asked to report for duty beginning Monday, March 16th, 2020, and to await further instructions. Meantime, all Staff of the Ministry of Education Headquarters and various satellite offices are to report to work as usual.

Today, for the benefit of the General Public, All Persons connected to education- that is, Educational Leaders, Supts, Principals, Administrators, Teachers, Students, Other Staff, Parents, Stakeholders, I bring the following update as we negotiate the most treacherous pandemic in living memory.

The reality is that we are in a Natl Public Health Crisis, evolving as we speak. The Bahamas has never been here before. Each day, the Science Community is learning more and more about the Corona Virus, which means that each day our response will have to adjust to conform to the new realities.

This is a frontier experience for the World, including the Bahamas, so everybody must participate consciously and with patience, but with keen alertness, to the ever changing demands that may be placed upon each of us.

The educational sector is no different. That is why regular and frequent updates will be given and to which the ministry asks each of its stakeholders to pay very close attention.

Im grateful to our stakeholders who have exhibited understanding, wisdom, patience and cooperation. Our Leadership cares deeply for every member of our Team, appreciates your value and honours the inestimable contribution that you continue to make.

Whatever decision is made recognizes that honour. In this vein, MOE staff members are strongly cautioned to observe the protocols provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO); as they are critical to the safety, health, and well-being of all. What the science and best practices have made abundantly clear is that aggressive action, coupled with insistent social distancing have proven to be the most effective deterrents to the spread of this virus. Countries who have not heeded these vital responses are now faced with a public health crisis.

That is why the decision was taken to close schools immediately, to effect the necessary protocols in the fight of the global scourge.

Parents and Guardians are encouraged to adhere rigorously to the hygienic guidelines outlined by the World Health Organization, and ensure that their children and those in their care do the same. These protocols include....

- a) Regularly and thoroughly washing your hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, and where that is not possible, using a 60% alcohol-based sanitizer;
- b) Maintain at least 3ft distance between yourself and others, especially anyone who is coughing or sneezing.
- c) Avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth
- d) Avoid hand-shaking and hugging
- e) Practice respiratory hygiene, which includes covering your mouth and nose with your bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Then dispose of the used tissue immediately.

- f) Stay at home if you feel unwell, even with mild symptoms such as headache and slight runny nose, until you recover.
- g) Stay informed and follow advice given by your healthcare provider.
- h) Persons who have known medical conditions and are high risk are asked to stay at home.

As was announced in the Press Statement, Today, I provide additional details on upcoming examinations, The recently launched Virtual School, the lunch programs, and other special needs areas.

Some Colleagues were concerned that the reason for school closure is not clear and ask that I bring clarity to the matter.

School closure means the suspension of face to face instruction. This would clarify that students and teachers, although not required to come to the campus, are expected to be engaged in the teaching and learning process using alternative methods such as virtual and distance learning methods, which will be outlined here momentarily.

Other Colleagues wanted to know why teachers and students were allowed to stay away from the campus, but others are being asked to report.

Student and teachers constitute the bulk of persons on a campus. Removing them from the schools reduces the number of people and therefore ensures that the social spacing issue is addressed. The few remaining, i.e. administrators, support staff and security officers, will not create a potentially unsafe environment because of crowding. Also, as for other government establishments, the work of government must continue. Assessment of schools for summer repairs, work to school buildings, registration of students, record keeping, lunch distribution to indigent children among other tasks must still carry on.

Now that a few days have passed since the closing of schools, Principals to reduce staff to a skeleton crew, and alternating staff so that the business of Govt can continue, to maintain security on campus, so that no staff is disadvantaged, and to ensure that social

distancing regime is maintained. However, as indicated, the school's campus still must be maintained. The Director of Education will give further specifics as necessary.

Support Staff

Likewise, for Janitorial and Clerical Staff a rotation system is to be put in place. The janitorial staff is to thoroughly clean all campuses using the protective equipment that will be provided.

Security Officers

All security officer are to report to work each day for their entire shift.

Security Officers that have large amounts of vacation time and or holiday days that they may have accumulated are advised to apply to take those days at this time.

INSTRUCTIONS

Though Teachers and students are away from Campus, this does not mean that they are away from their learning and teaching responsibilities. The school system has already lost precious instructional and learning time due to Hurricane Dorian. We cannot afford a single day further in lost educational time. Therefore, the following must be observed:

Teachers are to continue to engage students through the media they have established. Where that has not been done, they are directed to attend school, maintaining social distance, and secure the register of their students, while also utilizing sources for educational materials.

Additionally, based on the plan developed by our technical team over the last 2 days, come 30th March, the "live" instruction will be provided by our teachers. We are proud of the scores of teacher who have come forward to offer their support of and interest in and working with our Virtual learning. We will be able to develop our own educational resources that will give us the internal capacity to deal with this COVID-19 crisis but also any other crisis that may occur in the future. We will be calling upon teachers to

play various roles in this process. Some may present lessons, other work with students in smaller groups in order to cater to individual learning needs of students, other again may focus more on the assessment and evaluation of student performance. We would like teachers to embrace this new reality which presents us opportunities to better support the direct learning needs of all of our students.

The Virtual school Platform is being upgraded, which will be ready Monday, March 23, 2020. Fifty (50) teachers have been trained for this platform. This platform accommodates up to one hundred thousand (100,000) students.

Over 500 devices were given to students and teachers to access this program. Students can access this platform with any device that has internet connectivity such as cell phones, laptops, and tablets, etc.

We have approximately 1800 tablets for teachers and 2500 Amazon Fire 7 for students left to be distributed. We also have approximately 10,000 Amazon Fire 7 tablets that are in schools. The problem with this is if these are sent home we may never recover them.

One on One ONLINE Learning for after school and weekend personalized sessions are also being expanded which will be ready by Monday 23rd. Teachers will be allowed to use their personal devices for instructions or go to the campus and use those available there;

Remote Conferencing capability is now being installed so that MOE Leaders can communicate with all Superintendents and Principals in order to disseminate and receive information remotely

By this Friday, March 20th

- The Home Schooling Unit will be providing tips for parents working with their children at home; Provide list of educational links;

The MOE will publish consistently and frequently Public Service Announcements, send out messages through WhatsApp, Facebook and the Ministry's web site.

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

- Utilize existing resources that currently meet quality standards
- Create instructional resource kits (digital, hard copies, etc.)
- Publish list of topics in sequence by subject and grade level on MOE Website
- Produce specific review package for National Examination candidates

To date, 1650 students have been engaged through our virtual learning platforms.

Additionally, 19,829 Primary school students will participate in a one hour daily live session as parents/guardians will be encouraged to follow the posted learning plans to support their children at home. We will also be airing content via Our Tv, ZNS, and radio. We are discussing options for airing educational TV content. This initiative could be useful to fuel learning of GLAT, BJC and BGCSE related material whilst students are at home.

LUNCH PROGRAM

Provide meal vouchers for two (2) weeks and have parents to collect and confirm the receipt of vouchers for their child/children. Ministry of Education would engage a number of eateries whereby students could be provided a meal.

Guidance Counsellors will be provided with cell phones so that psycho-social support could be given 8 to 4 for non academic and psychiatric support

Security officers are also maintaining vigilance regarding persons accessing the building who are presenting with flu-like symptoms, and bringing such persons to management's attention for further attention. It is anticipated that satellite offices will follow suit in these practices.

The Toll-Free numbers below would be available by this Friday:

1. 300-2320

2. 300-2319

PROPOSED REVISED EXAMINATION DATES

Please note that the considerations are now being made to extend the Examination timetable. Stay tuned for further on this.

Students have already received Individual Timetables, however the large display timetables have not been printed as yet. It is proposed that the new dates if agreed upon will appear on the large/display timetables as well as placed in the media and on social media.

To assist students with final preparations for examinations Administrators, Parents, Guardians and other Caregivers will be advised to:

- Eliminate all non-instructional or non-essential observances in school e.g. Fun Day, field trips, special assemblies, sports days
- Provide opportunities for after-school instruction once students return to campus.

UNIVERSITY OF BAHAMAS

Effective Monday, 16th March, UB campuses, centres and business operations including the Oakes Field Campus, Grosvenor Close Centre, and UB-North operations in Grand Bahama will transition to remote operations until further notice. Additionally, Chapter One Bookstore will be closed until further notice. All events scheduled for the remainder of the Spring 2020 semester are cancelled or postponed until further notice. This includes Spring 2020 Commencement. A further announcement will be made about Commencement at a later date.

REMOTE INSTRUCTION

As a result, remote instruction and communications will commence on Monday, 16th March using online applications including MOODLE and Zoom. Faculty and student

communications on course content will continue via online channels. A decision will be communicated by Friday, 20th March regarding laboratory and practicum classes. Teaching practice, kitchen classes and internships are suspended until further notice. Students and faculty needing assistance with remote instruction should contact the IT Helpdesk at 302-4588 or ithelpdesk@ub.edu.bs.

Academic Affairs faculty and staff will be permitted to access their offices on Monday, 16th March to secure their offices.

RESIDENTIAL LIFE

Further, students who are residing in university dorms are advised to gather their belongings and initiate arrangements to leave the dorms and return home, effective immediately.

Students who are not in a position to do so, should contact the Director of Residential Life and Housing at 422-6429 and Dean of Students at 424-8559 for further instructions and assistance.

ADMINISTRATIVE OPERATIONS

Staff are advised that although they are to work remotely effective Monday, 16th March, they should remain in contact with their supervisors. Staff members who provide essential services including Security, Physical Plant, Information Technology, and Business Office are advised that they will receive further instructions from their department heads.

The public is advised to use all available online resources to complete business transactions where possible during this interim period, including.

BTVI

Effective March 16, all face to face classes at BTVI have been cancelled until April 14, 2020. The primary focus during the closure is the safety and health of students, faculty, staff and administration. Only limited services are available on campus. Updates on the services available are posted on social media and the BTVI website.

Many classes have been and are being moved to an online format. Training on the use of online has been made available to faculty. In particular, BTVI will use technology to enhance course content until the end of the term. BTVI has been approached by the Rotary Club of Nassau Sunrise to provide training on the use of zoom as a means to hold virtual meetings. Dean of Information Technology and Online Education is developing and delivering these educational seminars.

In addition, a series of free online training programs/ courses are available to faculty that can assist them in improving their teaching capabilities. These professional development courses are also important in respect to building a better understanding of online education.

Finally, plans are being prepared to properly manage end of term issues such as exams. Again, the primary goal is the safety and well-being of all stakeholders. However, we do want to ensure that students are able to successfully complete their studies this term.

In light of the global issue, NAECOB as of March 2020 will recognize all online programmes completed at Institutions that have been accredited by agencies acknowledged by NAECOB. Programmes completed by Institutions not Recognized by NAECOB prior to March 2020, will not be accepted.

As further investigations of the recently reported COVID 19 case are not yet completed, the Ministry of education is guided by the need to exercise great vigilance. Therefore, as the country is now braced to guard against the spread of this illness in our community, it is imperative that every resident of The Bahamas realize the vital role we all play in its containment. The Ministry reiterates the importance of each citizen to vigorously following the protocols outlined by the WHO in conjunction with the Bahamas Ministry of Health.

As the PM stated in his National Address, fake news is very prevalent. Therefore, be sure to pay attention ONLY to credible and reliable news sources.

With God's help, we will conquer this malady that afflicts us.

God bless the Commonwealth of the Bahamas

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