



## **STATEMENT**

### **TO HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**By Honourable Fayval Williams**

**Minister of Education, Youth and Information**

**September 29, 2020**

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Madam Speaker,

It is my pleasure to update this Honourable House on the plans and programmes that have been put in place by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information for the official start of the new school year on October 5.

As we are all aware, Madam Speaker, Jamaica has been severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The education sector, in particular, has been hard hit. Face-to-face schooling has been disrupted. Schools have been closed for an extended period and there is an urgent need for solutions that will allow our children to continue receiving quality formal education amidst the continuing pandemic.

Since assuming office on September 14, I have had a series of meetings with a wide cross-section of stakeholders representing, students, parents, teachers, principals, administrators, the book publishing and retail industry and internet service providers among others.

Arising out of those meetings and in consultations with the officers at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information, we have endeavoured to arrive at a place to allow for the official start of the new school year come next Monday.

The most recent advisories from the Ministry of Health and Wellness regarding the community spread do not support face-to-face teaching and learning. Additionally, major stakeholders such as the JTA, Principals Association and the National Parent Teachers Association have raised objections to face-to-face teaching and learning at this time. As such we will commence classes with students remaining at home and utilizing any or all of the three approaches to receive their lessons:

1. The first approach is **Online**, in which students remain at home and access lessons via the Learning Management System (LMS). In this approach, teachers and students will be in a virtual classroom environment. The teachers will be able to teach online and the lessons will be recorded for students to access at their convenience as many times as they would like in order to improve the mastery of subject matter.

To access lessons online, the students will need to have a device (laptop, tablet or smart phone) and internet connectivity. The students and teachers will not need to have a data plan to access the Google Suite Learning Management System or G-Suite for Education. Students and teachers are being provided with email addresses which they will use to sign on to the online classroom. Of course for security, they will create their personal passwords. To-date, 15,466 teachers and 190,352 students already signed on and are using the system. This figure represents 32% of students across early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary, public and private institutions. We continue to work with the ECC to bring onboard the Early Childhood practitioners.

We are also training our special needs teachers and those in the private schools.

Approximately 20,000 teachers have been trained on the Learning Management System to create their virtual classrooms so that they can seamlessly conduct classes and have an overall dexterity with the system so that in the event a student needs some assistance navigating, the teachers have the competence to respond. Additionally, we have trained system administrators to support the students in navigating the virtual space.

The Learning Management System is a cloud based system and is a platform managed by Google as part of their education product offering. The platform is cloud based which means it is not dependent on the Ministry of Education having thousands of servers to manage and so all students utilizing this platform should not experience any capacity issues.

2. In the second approach, the Ministry will be providing lessons through **audio-visual** using TV, cable and radio. TVJ will be providing a dedicated channel for 24 hours while ReadyTV, in collaboration with CVM, will also be providing a 24 hour dedicated station along with lesson to be aired on PBCJ and cable channels. Several radio stations will also participate. The Ministry will publish a schedule on our website, on all the social media platforms, in the newspapers (Gleaner, Observer and the Star), emails to the principals of schools, teachers and to the students so that they know precisely at what time their classes will be on.
3. The third approach is for the Ministry to provide **learning kits** for students to utilise along with their textbooks and worksheets at

home. The textbooks and workbooks will be available through the schools for pick up during the first week of the remote learning. Every student will have the Government issued textbooks and worksheets where applicable. For those students who live in deep rural parts of Jamaica and have to depend on the printed materials only, there will be special worksheets and practice books that will be printed and distributed to these students through their schools. Additionally, the students will get printed lessons for 2 weeks in advance. The completed worksheets will be picked up at established points so the teachers can mark the completed work and be in touch with the students and parents via telephone, WhatsApp groups for the classes or text messaging.

4. Madam Speaker, I am making an appeal for community support for our children especially in the inner cities and rural parts of Jamaica where parents have to go to work. I am also making a national appeal as well for NGOs and faith-based organizations to work with families to ensure the safety and protection of our children. In the home, this is where the aunts, uncles, grandparents and older siblings can come together and schedule your time so that there is always some supervision in the home for our students. We are going through this pandemic together.

### **Tablets/Laptops for Students**

Madam Speaker, to augment the 18,000 tablets and the over 12,000 desktop computers already in the school system, the Ministry will procure and distribute additional tablets and laptops, commencing with the distribution of 40,000 tablets for PATH students effective October 2, 2020. These will be distributed by eLearning and will be targeted at PATH students in grades 4-6.

The public high schools have been provided with the funding to procure laptops for students at Grades 10-13 who are on PATH and for other vulnerable students as identified. Please note that eLearning will also be working with the high schools to support the procurement of the laptops.

In addition, the E-Learning Jamaica Company has completed the distribution of tablets to teachers under the Tablets for Teachers Jamaica Teachers' Association Heads of Agreement. Those teachers who have not yet received based on the time they were employed will be dealt with during the Christmas term.

The protocol for distribution of the tablets/computers along with supporting forms have been circulated to schools. In addition, Madam Speaker, the Ministry's Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy for use by schools to guide parents who will be procuring technological devices for their children has also been circulated, along with the specifications for tablets and laptops.

### **National Learning Management System (LMS)**

Madam Speaker, I am happy to report that consequent to the Ministry's partnership with Google, commencing September 14, 2020 all educational institutions will be provided with a G-Suite for Education account through the MOESCHOOLS.edu.jm domain.

This means that all teachers and students will have an email account provided by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information to access the system.

This will facilitate the implementation of the National Learning Management System at no cost to all institutions. The MOESCHOOLS.edu.jm account will provide schools with access to the full G-Suite for education applications. G-Suite for Education is a learning management application that includes the Google

Classroom, which can be deployed school wide as a single space to host all online classes while at school or from a remote location.

Included in Google Classroom is “Google Meet” which supports live interactive teaching and learning activities. The National Learning Management System will also provide school leaders, teachers and students with access to a collection of applications to perform the following tasks and more:

1. Manage email accounts
2. Create presentation
3. Schedule and track events
4. Centrally store files
5. Create spreadsheet documents
6. Create and share Quizzes
7. Perform word processing
8. Utilize the electronic whiteboard (Jamboard)
9. Record Students' Grades
10. Provide access to central monitoring for Education Officers to better support schools

Madam Speaker, in an effort to support the efficient implementation and utilization of the National LMS, the Ministry has made ongoing Google Classroom training available to all teachers, through the Jamaica Teaching Council (JTC) and through partnerships with local and overseas universities.

Principals, Vice Principals and other middle managers have been accessing leadership training through the National College for Educational Leadership (NCEL).

School-based System Administrators have also been receiving training provided by the Enterprise School Management System Unit. This started on August 27, 2020 and has continued throughout the month of September, 2020.

Madame Speaker we are reminding school administrators to register their institution for this service by completing and submitting the **National LMS Registration Form**. Schools with their own G-Suite for education account are being asked to also complete the registration form and indicate the name of their G-Suite domain.

Schools that have started to use the G-Suite or other LMS should switch over or work with our technical team to integrate their domain with the MOESchools.edu.jm domain so that they can benefit from the fully-funded benefits afforded under the Ministry's partnership with Google.

Schools that are currently using other solutions such as the School Management System (SMS) offered by Renweb, Smart Term and other services providers can continue to do so while the Ministry provides the technical support and required resources to enable these partnerships.

### **Free Access to Education Data/Internet Support**

Madame Speaker, the Ministry has entered into partnership with Flow Jamaica, Digicel Jamaica and ReadyTV to facilitate internet access and broadband services to enable the teaching and learning in all schools utilizing the G-Suite Learning Management System domain being provided. This means that all principals, teachers, students and parents can now be engaged in virtual/online teaching and learning activities without the need to utilize their personal internet data.

The Ministry is also now completing the negotiation for schools to have the bandwidth required to host lessons from the schools. An allocation to augment data support for teachers and students is also being considered.

All the technical processes are being implemented including training of key stakeholders. Already over 952 schools have activated their account.

Flow and Digicel will also continue to offer their reduced Education Data Plans. Once an individual subscribes to an education data plan, in addition to voice minutes and data, they will have zero-rated access to 17 frequently used learning platforms and websites via the flow network and 128 frequently used learning platforms and websites via the Digicel network.

ReadyTV will continue the installation of their system in the 100 communities approved by the Ministry. The Ministry is also exploring other initiatives to support the other 138 schools that cannot access any network.

### **Free Access to MoEYI eResources Application**

Madame Speaker, the Ministry is casting as wide a net as we can to ensure all children have access to an education. A lot of time has already been lost but we are endeavouring to make up for that.

To this end, the Ministry has partnered with App Developers, Content Producers and Curators to address the needs for e-resources at the school level. Some of our content providers are Book Fusion, Learning Hub Online, CHEETAH, Friends in the End, and the eLibrary Project. Additionally, the Ministry will utilize other approved apps such as Calculation Time and free Apps that have been evaluated and found to be suitable for the different levels of the system. These have been



pooled together and are accessible under the MoEYI eResources App both on and offline.

Madame Speaker, I am also very happy to report that all users of electronic devices (tablets/computers supplied by the Ministry or procured by guardians), will have access to the MoEYI e-Resources App. This is a single platform for all resources that provide both online and offline access to eBooks, content, worksheets, quizzes etc. aligned to the National Standards Curriculum and the Primary Exit Profile (NSC and PEP) as well as other interactive learning solutions targeted at the early childhood to the secondary levels.

Students who bring their own devices to schools and those who will receive devices procured at the school level will also gain access to the eResources App.

The Ministry's eResources App is now in the Google Play Store for ease of access to all. Students who receive tablets and laptops can now download. Please note that once downloaded, the app will be available offline.

### **Support for Independent/Private Schools**

Madame Speaker, the Education Ministry's programmes are not restricted to public schools. In fact, we are extending our outreach to independent and private schools.

What this means, Madame Speaker, is that:

- All Basic Schools will be provided with access at no cost to the G-Suite and relevant content through the Early Childhood Commission once the institution is registered.
- All Independent/Private Schools will also be provided with access to the G-Suite and content once they are registered with the Independent Schools Unit located at the Central Ministry.

- These schools will also be provided with a selected number of tablets/laptops for needy students as identified and based on availability of funds.

We are also sharing a schedule for television and radio as well as the approach being used for the distribution of worksheets for those without internet access.

### **Subsidy for Needy Students who are not on PATH**

The Ministry has heard the cries of families in need with regards to tablets and laptops. Every student wants to be online and we recognize that need.

For non-PATH needy families, the Ministry will make available a subsidy of \$20,000 to 36,000 students towards the purchase of a tablet or laptop. There will be a registration process and criteria for the selection of the 36,000 students. We will announce the start date for the registration process.

We have a minimum specification for the tablets and laptops so that parents can be guided and do not end up with inferior tablets and laptops.

For tablets, the minimum specification is 1 gigabytes of memory, 32 gigabytes of storage and at least an 8 inch screen.

For laptops, the minimum specification is 4 gigabytes of memory and 500 gigabytes of storage. The laptops should also come with Intel I3 or dual core processors.

eLearning has negotiated wholesale prices with selected vendors of the Jamaican equivalent of US\$150 for tablets and US\$460 for laptops inclusive of GCT. There is also a 12 month warranty process.

I am spelling this all out for the benefits of parents so that they have the requisite knowledge.

Additionally, the Ministry is in talks with the PSOJ to launch a One-Laptop-or-Tablet-Per-Child initiative. We are calling on corporate Jamaica, NGOs, faith-based institutions, international development partners, private individuals and the diaspora to help us equip our students to be able to access online education.

The Ministry of Education is fully committed to providing the resources and helping the education system to transition to one that can effectively navigate the new normal. This requires us to pivot the odds in our favour and to capitalise on the seeds of opportunity through consultations and strategic collaboration.

Madam Speaker, it is often said there is an opportunity in every crisis. The current public health crisis has presented the education system with an opportunity to retool for the technological age and to help our children cope with contemporary challenges.

We cannot fail our students.

Thank you.

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