



**Statement
To The House Of Representatives
By Honourable Fayval Williams
Minister of Education, Youth and Information
January 12, 2021**

Madame Speaker,

We are now in the second week of the Easter term for the 2020-2021 school year and I take this opportunity to provide an update on the status of the face-to-face resumption of teaching in schools and plans for this term, the Own Your Own device and the One Laptop or Tablet Per Child Initiatives.

At the beginning of this term starting on January 4, 2021, Madame Speaker, 129 schools were approved for face-to-face teaching and learning. These schools are allowed a two week period from January 4 to the 18th to fine-tune their preparations for schooling. We expect that more schools will be added to the list as the Ministry of Health and Wellness continues its physical inspections of schools. As of today, 76 schools have actually started.

Madame Speaker, the focus for this term is the preparation of children for their exit exams: CSEC, City & Guilds, CAPE, NCTVET and the Primary Exit Profile (PEP) exams. Grades 6 students at the primary level are scheduled to sit the first of three components of the PEP exam - the **Ability Test, on February 23, 2021.**

Primary Exit Profile (PEP)

We are aware of the challenges and so the Ministry has strategically scheduled the Ability Test first, as this test is not based on the children having been taught the body of subjects in the National Standards Curriculum.

The results of the Ability Test in February will give us a sense of the potential rather than just the academic performance of our children. It will alert us as to what our children are capable of doing so we can adequately prepare them for the Performance Task and the Curriculum Based Test which are based on the National Standards Curriculum and come later in May 2021.

The focus between now and February 23, 2021 will be on getting our students in a frame of mind to successfully sit the Ability Test which comprises 40 multiple choice questions during a period of 1.5 hours.

The Ministry will be offering additional Special Learning Interventions. Students will be provided with fully-funded access to Edufocal and One on One Educational Service in preparation for PEP and other external exams.

Madame Speaker, we should note too that the Ministry has provided support to the vulnerable student population by enabling access to the internet via reverse billing and negotiated for education data plans at reduced rates. This intervention has nevertheless served in this prevailing period of the Covid-19 Pandemic to provide a degree of connectivity that enables participation by vulnerable students (poor and near poor) in the remote teaching and learning environment.

Madam Speaker, Additionally, a mobile student support initiative will be launched on January 18, 2021 to focus on the students who need further support. The Ministry will be providing after-school classes to small groups of five for two hours twice per week using the schools, church halls, community centres, USF community access points, the Jamaica Library Service locations and other temporary learning spaces.

Madame Speaker, we are grateful for the support and cooperation from our stakeholders, as well as for the useful suggestions from principals and teachers. We will continue with our consultations and fine-tune all our efforts as we move forward together.

OYOD

Application Status Update

As of **Thursday, December 31, 2020**, the application deadline, there was a total of **17,773** applications submitted to the electronic system. This represents **49%** of the target. Persons will soon begin to get the eVouchers through e-mail and SMS telling them of the \$20,000 and giving instructions as to how to redeem and with the names of the approved vendor who have agreed to the to minimum specifications and eligibility requirements. There are 13 approved vendors spanning across 101 locations across the island.

We understand the issues that many persons encountered with their TRN and Student Registration Number (SRN). All students who are enrolled in the education sector has an SRN, which is given in Grade 1 or if you entered in a different grade and it remains with the students throughout their school life until they graduate high school.

During the course of having announced the OYOD, 21,120 persons would have called or emailed the Ministry requesting the SRN for their children. All of the 21,120 persons were either told what their child's SRN is or if the child was not registered, for some reason, then the registration would be completed. Obviously, there would have been verification before the SRN information was released.

Regarding the issues with TRNs, the Ministry wrote to the TAJ about this issue and the TAJ has committed to working with the Ministry to resolve those situations in which either the name, date of birth or the TRN number are not matching. The Ministry has begun to pull together the name, date of birth and TRN for those persons that indicated to the Ministry that they have a problem. Emphasize that they can call the hotline at 888-educate (888-338-2283) or 888-schtime (888-724-8463) if they encountered these issues relating to the OYOD.

Madame Speaker, because we want all 36,000 families to have a device in the home, we will reopen the OYOD on Monday, January 18, 2021 to give others, especially those having the TRN or SRN issue, a chance to have the Ministry work with them on those issues. While this is happening, the distribution of eVouchers will commence in January for those person deemed eligible as of December 31, 2020.

One Laptop or Tablet Per Child

Madame Speaker, members will recall that the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information (MoEYI) launched the One Laptop or Tablet Per Child Initiative through the National Education Trust Limited (NET), on October 29, 2020. You will recall that the initiative seeks to galvanise the support of the Private Sector, the Donor Community, the Diaspora and the general public to provide devices for 100,000 vulnerable students. To date, approximately JMD 76.4 Million and US\$148,420 have been pledged for the purchase of devices or a total of \$97.9 M in cash donation or pledges through our partners the PSOJ, the JSSE and NCB Foundation.

In terms of actual devices donated, which is separate from the cash donation, to date, five thousand five hundred eighty-five (5,585) tablets and one hundred

and forty-seven (147) laptops have been processed and distributed since the initiative commenced.

A big thank you to all the companies, individuals, our diaspora, our consuls general, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign trade, alumni associations and others who stepped forward to help in this initiative to assist needy students to participate in the digital teaching and learning process.

Our own National Education Trust (NET) has collaborated with the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica (PSOJ), NCB Foundations, Jamaica Social Stock Exchange (JSSE) and Junior Achievement Jamaica to provide mechanisms for the collection of donations in the form of monetary donations or in-kind (devices donated). Please continue to make your donations to help us reach the goal of 100,000 devices and ensure that each student in Jamaica is equipped with devices to gain the 21st century skills needed in our workforce.

Madame Speaker, on behalf of the thousands of children in our schools, I want to again say a big Thank You to the companies and individuals in Jamaica and overseas who have partnered with us in this initiative. Your help is enabling the Ministry to bridge the digital divide and help our children to continue with their education.

Summary

Madame Speaker, we are doing all that we can to ensure that our students continue to learn and remain engaged with their education during this pandemic, the end of which we know not when. In addition to the

- Online learning using the learning management system provided to schools.
- Streaming of lessons via local free-to-air TV, cable and radio broadcasts.
- Printed material including worksheets and lessons

- Phased Face to Face Opening

We have stepped up our intervention by launching the mobile intervention plan to go into communities to rescue those student we have identified as having had limited engagement with their schools and working with them in groups of 5 for 2 hours per day, twice per week.

Madame Speaker, I also want to again appeal to parents/guardians and the wider community to help our children. All the modalities are still available. The education of our children remains a top priority. We need all of Jamaica to be involved in this process. School is in session, school is keeping, whether virtually, remotely or face-to-face. Classes begin at 9am to 3pm, Monday to Friday and beginning later in January, many of our students will get be engaged in small groups for our after-school lessons to help our students close the learning gap.

As I close Madame Speaker, Habitat for Humanity reminds us that:

“Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world.

It helps people become better citizens, get a better-paid job, shows the difference between good and bad. “

Education shows us the importance of hard work and, at the same time, helps us grow and develop. Thus, we are able to shape a better society to live in by knowing and respecting rights, laws, and regulations.

Education is a key part of a society's growth and progress. When people are educated, they can significantly contribute to their families and society in various aspects and fields, thus creating a stable and stimulating community.”

This is our goal for Jamaica. Thank you Madame Speaker.