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Press Release

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Minister for Education Provides Answers to Matters Concerning Education during Covid-19 in Q&A Format

Today, the Honourable Minister for Education, Juliana O'Connor-Connolly provided an update to matters related to education, in a statement presented at the daily Coronavirus Update Press Briefing and hosted by CIGTV. The update was provided in the format of a question and answer session, and comprised the following statements:

Student Access to Learning Materials

1. What measures have been implemented to ensure student learning throughout school closures?

It is not possible to monitor the learning occurring in every single household. Teachers and principals are in contact with parents/students. In many cases teachers also have to care for their own children and support their learning whilst simultaneously trying to teach/support their classes.

When the contingency plan was drafted it was recognized that student learning during this pandemic would not consistently be at the same high level that is provided in schools. This is due to a number of factors including, family needs, support available in the home, stress levels of families and the health of families, to name a few. The focus is on developing methods to make up for the time lost. The Ministry, Department of Education Services and Schools are all working to ensure students will be able to make any educational gaps when Educational Institutions are able to reopen.

2. What help is available to parents both working from home who are unable to supervise their children's learning?

Some schools, public and private, are able to provide online classes to students. This is not always possible especially with younger children who still need to be supervised by parents to utilize the devices. In many cases teachers also have to care for their own children and support their learning whilst simultaneously trying to teach their classes. Parents are encouraged to contact their class teachers or school principals to enquire about the availability of additional support.

3. What support is available for parents with children with special needs and learning difficulties?

Parents are encouraged to call their individual schools to enquire about additional support. Learning packets and online support geared at specific students' needs can be provided. In-person therapeutic services are not available at this time. However, specialists such as Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapist, School Inclusion Specialist, Counsellors and Education Psychologists have been reaching out to the students on their caseload and providing 1:1 support.

4. What provision is being made for kids with no internet connection?

Paper based learning packets have been provided for students who have no internet connection. Schools issued packets when schools first closed and continue to do so. Schools have contacted parents regarding packets, whilst most have been collected or delivered, some parents have not responded to the schools. Parents are encouraged to contact the principals of their respective school should they have further questions.

5. Where can parents access books and other school supplies as the supermarkets are very limited?

Only essential businesses are currently operating. Supermarkets and pharmacies have some school supplies available. Online resources are encouraged as there are a range of online books and other educational resources available free of costs.

6. How many children are there that don't have access to an iPad, computer or Laptop?

This figure is still being determined as there was a limited response to the survey sent from the Department of Education Services. Laptops are currently being provided for students who are scheduled to sit external exams in July and Key Stage 2 (Years 6, 10, 11 & 12). Some households also do not have internet access, and this raises additional issues. We have some households where there is a laptop or computing device, but it has to be shared between parents working from home and multiple children in the home needing access to educational content.

7. What measures have been put in place to assist students who do not have access to computers and whose parents are unable to assist them with schoolwork?

Paper based learning packets have been provided for students who have no internet connection. Schools issued packets when schools first closed and continue to do so. Schools have contacted parents regarding packets, whilst most have been collected or delivered, some parents have not responded to the schools. Paper based learning packets should be at a level for the student to work mostly independently with limited support. Parents are encouraged to call their individual schools should they have further questions.

8. Some children were not able to take their textbooks home and are finding it challenging for this reason. Is this a widespread issue? And what is being done to address this?

Schools have prepared paper based and online resources for students.

“The Minister has used the press briefing medium to give a directive that all relevant textbooks be distributed to the respective students”

9. How are the activities of teachers being monitored? Who is tracking daily classes as some teachers are reportedly not very active with their students online?

Principals have utilized a range of methods to monitor teachers work with students. this has included but not been limited to meetings, sharing work, and online checks.

10. Has any of the Network Providers offers to provide a portion of Free data for single parents or those who would qualify as low income household

We have a small team from the Ministry and DES currently working on a project with the private sector and FLOW has been involved in the discussions as it relates to internet access.

11. What is the ability of Cayman Islands residents to use home school programmes if regular schools are no longer in session?

The decision to home school is a personal one made by parents. To home school parents will need to contact the Department of Education Services (nicki.samuels@gov.ky) to register their child as being home schooled. The Department also checks the programmes being utilized for home schooling

Online Teaching Standards

12. Is there a standard requirement for each Government School to comply with, regarding the online teaching?

There is no standard requirement as the personal circumstances of individual homes differ. Online teaching works well in households where students have access to computer, internet, and support from parents/guardians. We also have some households where education is not a priority as families are trying to manage meeting basic needs (securing food), abuse, loss of employment, illness, sustained stress, mental health issues, etc. Education teams have been providing support with online and paper-based materials whilst also delivering meals to homes and trying to support their own families.

13. Is the DES willing to implement a sole online platform format for all public Schools that involves a live, interactive class session?

This will take time to determine but it is a goal that is achievable. Where there is a will there is a way.

UCCI

14. Can the Minister provide an update on UCCI regarding online classes?

Since the announcement of closure of educational institutions, UCCI prioritised continuity of quality public tertiary education by offering online classes and providing all student services remotely to its student body of over 1,200 students.

Currently, UCCI students are preparing for online final exams happening April 14th-20th.

UCCI's student body in Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac are now registering for online classes for the Summer 2020 Semester and current students are finishing the Spring 2020 Semester

Online class offerings in the Summer will include classes for multiple educational pathways, including: Associate and Bachelor's degrees; Certificate programmes; and TVET courses. To host online classes, UCCI will utilise digital platforms that include Microsoft Teams and Blackboard, among others.

15. How many students are enrolled in the nursing program, and how many of them are giving practical experience in the testing of Covid-19?

We have 29 students. 19 are in years 2-4 where they are in clinical settings. First year students are only in the classroom.

Students take a course where they are taught PPEs. The prevention measures that are required. All elements including hand washing, donning and removal of gloves, gowns, masks, goggles are taught. In each year during clinicals they are evaluated against many things including the appropriate use of PPEs. For example, when you enter a patient's room, you need to understand their condition and determine the appropriate set of PPEs that are required.

With respect to testing for COVID 19. Students are taught general swabbing techniques. The nasal pharyngeal swabbing that Dr. Lee refers to has not traditionally been a part of the programme of study. Should this be part of the programme of study in the future, the technique would be taught within the hospitals as part of student clinical experiences

Facility Upkeep

16. Can the Minister address the issue of schools, regarding the maintenance and cleaning of the schools to ensure that the un-occupied classrooms do not develop mold which will later be a health issue for the students when school resumes?

The Facilities Coordinators/Superintendents at DES are conducting weekly checks on their schools during the period of closure. They are specifically looking out for any a/c issues, leaks, alarm malfunctions, and any other issue that may arise from an unoccupied campus. Cleaning of the campuses is focused around high contact areas where meals are being prepared as part of the school meals programme and bathrooms used by security guards, in addition, a deep clean of the facilities is planned to take place before schools reopen.

Schools' Reopening

17. Re-opening of School, how will this be coordinated and the timeline in which the public can expect that this will be done? What Public Health Guidelines will be put in place for Schools when they reopen?

Schools will be closed until further notice as we continue to monitor the spread of the COVID-19 virus. With additional cases being reported almost on a daily basis it is not possible to provide a timeline. We hope that with continued social distancing and additional methods in place, we as a community, may be able to stop the spread of the virus and enable the country as a whole to reopen for business/school.

18. Will all teachers, staff and kids be tested before schools re-open?

This question has been deferred to HSA and further update will be provided upon receipt of a final decision.

19. When schools re-open, will you have all the students stay back for this year?

The Ministry of Education and the Department of Education Services are considering options for re-opening schools. This is dependent on the length of time schools are closed.

In addition to education provision, we recognize that students' emotional, mental health and wellbeing will also be significantly impacted by this pandemic. Given the impact this will have on learning, the resumption of schools cannot be 'business as usual'. Stress management, establishing clear routines and maintaining effective communication will be crucial for both students and teachers. Awareness training for staff and the provision of resources that support responses to various behaviours will be needed as well as support from educational psychologist, councilors, etc.

20. Has the Ministry given any consideration to moving the summer vacation forward and beginning the new school year earlier than usual?

The Ministry of Education and the Department of Education Services are considering various options for re-opening schools however moving summer vacation forward would critically impact many students who are due to sit external examinations in July.

Graduation

21. Will there be any Graduation this year, if so, how will the ceremonies be conducted?

High School graduations were scheduled for the end of August. We are however, continuing to monitor the spread of COVID-19 in our community and will provide updates as needed.

Private Schools

22. Is that lawful for Private Schools to charge full fees while children are not in school when they are not providing proper online platforms, just links to mediocre free websites or short weekly Zoom meetings?

This is a contractual arrangement between the parents and the respective private schools. Parents are urged to contact the principals and the school board. MEYSAL is currently seeking a legal opinion, and if it is deemed that legislation or regulation is needed, MEYSAL will be prepared to move this matter forward.

23. Can families who are not getting the standard they require, remove students from private schools and sign them up into the government homeschooling platform?

Students can register for Government schools (this is dependent on available spaces) or homeschools (given they have sources suitable home school resources. Switching from a private school to a public school may prove problematic for students as the necessary assessments to ensure a smooth transition would not be able to be carried out at this time. Teachers may struggle to meet the needs of new students without having the opportunity to test/examine previous education experiences. A high influx of students to public schools as a

method to avoid private schools' fees is not recommended. Private schools have been made aware of the range of concerns presented by parents. The Ministry has asked them to be considerate of parent needs and to contact parents directly to provide support.

24. Are the private schools also required to have online classes, if so, what are the prerequisites? If not, when will CIG apply standards for virtual learning at private schools that must be in place for all schools and what will be the consequences for not meeting those standards?

There is no standard requirement as the personal circumstances of individual homes differ. Online teaching works well in households where students have access to computer, internet, and support from parents/guardians. We also have some households where education is not a priority as families are trying to manage meeting basic needs (securing food), abuse, loss of employment, illness, sustained stress, mental health issues, etc.

25. Will families get credit if schools did not provide learning support and parents had to pay for their own resources in addition to school fees?

This will need to be discussed with individual schools as the Government does not set school fees for private schools.

26. Can government not mandate an "at cost" school fee re for-profit schools rather than current 100% fees?

The Government does not mandate school fees for private schools.

27. Are the private schools still getting their government subsidies?

Yes. The Private Schools Association receive \$1,000,000 in subsidies from the Government for the 2019-2020 academic year. This amount is split between private schools that are a part of the Association.

For a trusted and reliable source for all official updates and information on COVID-19 Coronavirus monitor daily and visit www.gov.ky/coronavirus

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