



## STATEMENT

### TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

By The Honourable Fayval Williams

Minister of Education, Youth and Information

November 30, 2021

Madam Speaker,

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Education has been supporting our schools to continue the education of our students despite the challenging circumstances.

Madam Speaker, you may recall that approval was granted for a phased resumption of face to face learning for the 2021/2022 academic year which has allowed for all pre-primary (Brain Builder Centres, Basic and Infant Schools/Departments), 376 small primary schools and Grade 11-13 students in the secondary schools who are preparing for external exams to resume in-person learning using a whole day or a rotational schedule.

In the first week of face to face learning, which commenced on November 8, 2021, **248** of the approved **376** primary schools opened

for in-person learning and these schools reported an average attendance of 33,158 of approximately 50,000 students or 66% for the week ending November 12, 2021 for in. In the second week which ended on November 19, 2021, 410 schools opened for face to face learning (this includes some of our stand alone infant schools) and our principals reported an average attendance of 40,147 or approximately 80% students reporting for in-person learning.

Since the reopening there have been 5 reported cases of infection among students as well as 2 suspected cases amongst teachers. These were managed within the covid19 protocols.

### **Large Primary Schools**

Madam Speaker, in continuation of our phased reopening of school, Cabinet has granted permission for our larger primary schools to be opened for face-to-face.

A total of 383 primary schools have been approved for the next phase of face to face learning. These schools are our larger primary schools, some with their enrolment above 630 while others are occupying 80% or more of their capacity and will account for approximately 164,651 students. There are 214,522 students enrolled at the primary level with a compliment of 11,614 teachers engaged in the delivery of the

curriculum and providing support for the development of students.  
These institutions:

- Must use blended and/or the rotational schedule given their capacity and Enrolment
- Must be inspected and approved as COVID-19 compliant by the MoHW
- Must strictly observe the COVID-19 protocols in the daily operations

All those working in the school environment are expected to be vaccinated given the availability of the COVID vaccines and the special arrangements that have been made to accommodate our school staff.

Those who work in the school environment are expected to be present for work once the students are scheduled to be at school. Persons with co-morbidities are encouraged to get vaccinated and observe the COVID protocols once on the job.

Our schools are required to work with parents to determine the start-up date. This can be a staggered start given the preparation that may be needed at the school level.

## **Secondary Schools**

Currently, there are 206,635 students at the secondary level. Approximately 56,300 or 27% of these students are benefiting from limited face-to-face learning in preparation for external examinations. These are Grades 11 – 13. However, 73% of the secondary level cohort of students are limited to the remote learning opportunities which complicates the efforts to reduce the learning loss, to prepare them for internal and external examinations, and to reduce or eliminate the unaccounted-for student population.

Secondary schools reaching 65% or more of their student population fully vaccinated are allowed to be back in face to face learning. The remote learning opportunities will continue to be available for those who are not fully vaccinated. This includes the online/computer-aided learning, audio-visual learning and learning kits. Our secondary schools:

- Must use blended and or the rotational schedule given their capacity and Enrolment
- Must be inspected and approved as COVID-19 compliant by the MoHW
- Must strictly observe the COVID-19 protocols in the daily operations

All those working in the school environment are expected to be vaccinated given the availability of the COVID vaccines and the special arrangements that have been made to accommodate our school staff.

Those who work in the school environment are expected to be present for work once the students are scheduled to be at school. Persons with co-morbidities are encouraged to get vaccinated and observe the COVID protocols once on the job.

Our schools should work with our parents to determine the start-up date. This can be a staggered start given the extent of the preparation that would be needed at the school level.

Several of our high schools have reported that they have attained or almost attained their 65% vaccination rate. Some of these schools are Ardenne High, St. George's College, York Castle High, Campion College, St. Andrew High School for Girls, Glenmuir High, Denbigh High, Knox College and Kingston College.

It must be noted that to date 124,604 students age 12 to 18 have received at least one dose of the Pfizer vaccine which is 60% of the targeted population of 206,635. Of this number, 49,415 students are

fully vaccinated which represents approximately 24% of the targeted population.

Where possible and necessary, schools will be encouraged to utilize the outdoors for classes; ensuring appropriate contingencies (e.g. tents and tarpaulins) are in place, so that in the event of adverse weather conditions, face-to-face teaching and learning can continue in a safe and seamless manner. The MoEYI will remind and direct the schools to stagger their respective lunch and break periods and have students eating in their classrooms instead of in a cafeteria/canteen setting.

### **Public Transportation**

The MoEYI remains cognizant of the critical importance of safe transportation in the thrust to resume face-to-face teaching and learning of schools. Many students rely on public transportation in commuting to and from school, and as such, it is imperative that students have available to them, transportation services that carry them in a safe, reliable and responsible manner; observing established protocols. The support of the Ministry of Transport & Mining (MoTM) from a monitoring and enforcement standpoint is indispensable. Indeed, the MoTM is an imperative partner in seeing to it that children who have to rely on public transportation, are carried to and from

school in a manner that is safe and responsible; averting overcrowding in public passenger vehicles and ensuring that the operators of public passenger vehicles are encouraged to adhere to the prescribed passenger limits as an important part of the infection prevention and control measures.

Madam Speaker, the parliament is asked to note that the Ministry has in place a rural transportation programme to accommodate close to 7,500 PATH and other needy students from 250 primary and high schools, across 13 parishes. This service will be reactivated to support targeted students of schools that will be open face to face. The Ministry will also continue to strengthen its partnership with JUTC to accommodate students in Kingston and St, Andrew, St Catherine and targeted corridors in St Thomas and Clarendon.

In addition, the Student Passenger Rail Service is being organized by the MoTM in partnership with the MoEYI, the Railway Corporation of Jamaica, and JUTC and will commence operation from Old Harbour and Linstead to Spanish Town once schools are resuming face-to-face teaching and learning. Under the guidance of the MoTM, the Student Passenger Rail Service will provide transportation service to at least 400 students on a daily basis. The service will observe established infection prevention and control protocols and is expected to have ongoing monitoring and assessment.

The Ministry of Transport and Mining in partnership with the MoEYI has commenced discussion with the leadership of 27 primary and high schools in western Jamaica for Montego Bay Metro to partner with private operators contracted by schools to provide transportation support to students. This partnership is expected to improve the quality of service provided to students.

### **COVID-19 Protocols**

Madam Speaker, whereas children under 12 years of age are not eligible for COVID-19 vaccination at this time, it is imperative that the mask mandate be established and strictly enforced vis-à-vis all persons who will be in the school setting/environs. The MoEYI is in full support of the Government's thrust to vaccinate persons to whom vaccination is available, and as such, will actively encourage the parents/guardians of children who attain 12 years of age to get their child/ward vaccinated as a critical layer of protection against serious illness and hospitalization in the event they contract COVID-19. In so doing, school blitz are being held weekly towards full vaccination of the 12-18 cohort of students.

Several schools have hosted their vaccination blitz and this resulted in the increased vaccination rate previously mentioned. Some of these schools include Manning's High School, St George's College, Kingston



College, Mt Alvernia High, Champion College, Denham Town High, Titchfield High, Iona High, Edwin Allen High, Glenmuir High, York Castle High, Bishop Gibson High, Belair High and deCarteret College.

Fern Court High, Thompson Town High, Kemp Hills High, Brown's Town High, Kingston Technical, St. Andrew Technical, Meadowbrook High, Edith Dalton James, Carberry Court and Randolph Lopez Special Schools are having their blitz today.

St. Hilda's High and Discovery Bay High are scheduled for this Thursday;

Tarrant High, Gaysteand High, Steer Town and Aabuthnot Gallimore High are having their blitz this Friday; and Marcus Garvey Technical High, York Castle and Ocho Rios High Schools are schedule for this Saturday.

There are several others scheduled for next week.

### **School Blitz Pre-registration/Parental Consent**

The schools will have forms for students to pre-register for their vaccination. The form has a space for parents to give their consent if they cannot accompany their child to the vaccination site. The

principals are expected to call the parents and verify and carefully document this on the registration form. The principals can also ask the parents to send verification via WhatsApp or email of their consent and that they would not be able to accompany their child to the vaccination site. This is to ensure parent and child are in sync and that there are no liability issues.

### **Vaccination of Schools' Personnel**

Whilst COVID-19 vaccination is not mandatory at this time, it is highly recommended that schools' personnel who must interact with students be vaccinated. There are approximately 40,000 persons in the school sector. The data from the MoHW showed that 38,435 persons within the education sector have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine (96%), of which 17,960 persons are fully vaccinated.

In light of the fact that students at the primary level are not required to be vaccinated at this time as no vaccine is currently available to them, the MoEYI anticipates that staff members will be responsible and exhibit due care in their actions.

Madam Speaker, whilst there is no specific requirement at this time for persons such as vendors or traffic wardens to be vaccinated, within

the context of the resumption of face-to-face teaching and learning and the fact that those persons either operate at, or in close proximity to the schools, and as such, may come into contact with students, the MoEYI strongly recommends and encourages them to get vaccinated. School administrators are expected to be vigilant in this regard.

Thank you.