



## Minister Richards' Address to the Nation

Re: Extended Closure of Schools from 20th April, 2020 and Contingencies for Instruction

*16th April, 2020*

Fellow citizens and residents, good day.

Today, Thursday, 16th April, 2020, I come once again to address you in my capacity as Minister of Education to reaffirm the Ministry of Education's commitment to ensuring the health and overall well-being of all who work and learn within our educational institutions. The national situation continues to change in response to the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ministry of Education remains very alert and responsive to this reality. This has necessitated some changes to the academic landscape. This address will therefore provide some pertinent information regarding the delivery of education in our nation in the upcoming weeks.

We are all aware that the Easter break ends on Friday, 17th April, 2020 and the academic calendar indicates that schools would reopen on 20th April, 2020. However, the current realities have determined that it is not in the best interest of our students, teachers and our nation for schools to reopen at this time. Our primary consideration has always been to make the best decision regarding education in the context of student and community health and safety in response to the threat of COVID – 19. To this end, all educational institutions will remain closed, in the first instance, for a period of two weeks with effect from Monday, 20th April, 2020. This was not an easy decision but extending the closure of schools for a period of two weeks is in the best interest of our students, school employees, families, and by extension the nation.



This decision applies to all early childhood care and learning facilities, public schools, private and parochial/church schools, and career and technical vocational centres. All colleges and universities shall also remain closed and may not resume in-person instruction or reopen their physical locations. All re-openings will be contingent on public health guidance provided by the Chief Medical Officer and the COVID – 19 Task Force. This simply means we will all continue to observe the Shelter in Place, that is, the Stay at Home orders issued by the Government.

Although on-site instruction in schools has been suspended for a period of two weeks, it is critical that our students continue to learn at home. Educational institutions can therefore continue with online / virtual instruction for students. As a result, the Ministry of Education has taken the necessary steps to ensure that teaching and learning will continue for our students despite the extended school closure.

The Ministry of Education’s Curriculum Development Unit and Early Childhood Unit have organized a selection of educational materials, lessons, and activity suggestions to support continued education in the home. These are for learners at the early childhood, primary, and secondary levels. The educational resources were devised with input from our teachers. The work that will be available for students will be grade appropriate and it will be in alignment with content from different subject areas that students covered in schools during the last school term.

These locally structured and approved educational resources will become available on the Ministry of Education’s website **[www.education.gov.kn](http://www.education.gov.kn)** as of Monday, 20th April, 2020. The website will be intermittently updated with new content during this initial two-week period of school closure. At this juncture, let me once again thank 3 our principals, teachers, subject coordinators, and Early Childhood resource personnel for working to ensure that during this period of school closure students



are not without educational material to support their continued education while they are at their homes.

Additionally, next week, all students in St. Kitts and Nevis will be issued a username and password which allow access to the FLOW Study platform, a website that provides for self-paced learning of content that is aligned with our primary and secondary school curricula. Using the Ministry of Education issued FLOW Study username and password, students and their families are provided several benefits:

1. the registration process is simplified
2. technical support will be available from the Ministry, and
3. most importantly, activities completed by students on the site will be shared with schools and teachers to support students' return to learning in school. Kindly be informed that the school which your child or ward attends will share the registration information with families.

Again, I must underscore the point that this initial two- week period of school closure is necessary to protect our public health. Also be mindful that should there be a need to extend school closures beyond this initial two week period, the Ministry of Education has given extensive thought to how the protracted school closure will impact teaching and learning. In response, we have developed a comprehensive programme for home based continued education for our nation's children.

The home-based continued education plan is phased. It involves the use of FLOW Study, in the first instance, and will be followed by the introduction of virtual classrooms using Microsoft Teams, in the event of protracted closure. We are mindful that some teachers would need to be better equipped for providing instruction in virtual classrooms. Thus, training for teachers to use Microsoft Teams will begin the week of April 20, 2020. This will ensure the readiness of the teachers



to facilitate online teaching and learning should the second phase of home-based education be implemented.

At the Ministry of Education, we are cognisant that regardless of where students' learning is happening, supports must be provided. The Ministry of Education will ensure that schools and by extension teachers are able to provide continuity of education for all students in the most appropriate and accessible ways possible. To ensure continued education for all students in the event of protracted school closure, the Ministry has invested in devices and internet connectivity for those students and teachers who were previously identified as not having access to these necessary tools for virtual education.

By taking these collective actions, the Ministry of Education is ensuring that core functions of the education system can, and will continue, should the national COVID-19 mitigation efforts require the further extension of school closure.

We are very grateful for the partnerships with Flow, the Cable and Digicel. These corporate entities have committed their support to enhancing our efforts to ensure that all teachers and students will have access to the necessary online learning platforms for use during the periods of extended closure of schools.

In addition to the aforementioned interventions, by the Ministry of Education to ensure the continued provision of quality education to students, we have been providing periodic updates and relevant information to school administrators, teachers, parents and families. Over the past weeks, we have been issuing various communications aimed at providing ongoing guidance to schools and the general public. These have been in the form of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and statements by senior education officials. I am therefore urging the general public,



particularly students, teachers, parents and families to continually check the Ministry of Education's website **[www.education.gov.kn](http://www.education.gov.kn)** for updates.

I cannot close without publicly registering my heartfelt and profound gratitude to the Ministry of Education teams on both St. Kitts and Nevis for the diligent work invested to ensure the continued education of our children. The Federal Ministry has worked very closely with the Ministry of Education in Nevis on a coordinated response. Thus, allow me to thank the Administrative Department, the entire Education Planning Division (the Curriculum Development Unit and the Education Management Information System Unit), the Education Services Department, Education leadership in Nevis, and the Education Media Unit. Your work is highly valued and deeply appreciated.

As our Federation continues to adapt to the changes brought about as a result of the COVID – 19 pandemic, be assured that the Ministry of Education continues to work to meet the educational needs of all students and their families. More than ever, this novel period has propelled us to deliver on the theme of the Education Sector Plan: *“Education for All: Embracing Change, Securing the Future”*.

We look forward to the collaboration of all key stakeholders, especially students, teachers, parents, families, communities and other public and private partners, as we strive to ensure that our children receive relevant and quality education. Thank you in anticipation of your support.

I am also appealing to all of us to continue to work to ensure the continued health and safety of our nation's citizens and residents. We can, by our individual and collective actions, prevent the Corona virus from wreaking havoc on our nation, particularly our people, our nation's most valuable resource. Thus, I urge us all to follow all the precautionary recommendations and guidelines outlined by your



caring Government acting on the advice of the national COVID-19 Task Force. Let us exercise the appropriate hygiene and practice the necessary social and physical distancing to limit the spread of the virus. If we continue to work cooperatively, we can successfully get through this unprecedented phase in our nation's history.

Let us all remain safe and continue to pray for God's guidance and direction at this time.

Thank you.

