



# THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Department of Education Outlines Plans for Virtual Reopening of 2020-2021 School Year**

ST. THOMAS, USVI – Virgin Islands Department of Education Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin, along with District Superintendents Carlos McGregor and Stefan Jurgen, Thursday outlined the Department’s plan to open the 2020-2021 school year on a fully virtual schedule. Highlights from the plan include students and school-based staff will learn and work from home, Sept. 8 – Jan. 20, 2021; laptop and Mifi internet devices, as well as desks and chairs will be distributed to students needing those items; and a new online technology that will serve as a hub for teachers, students and parents to communicate will be implemented.

The announcement was made during Government House’s weekly “Press Box” Facebook live townhall, following Governor Bryan’s midday revelation that the territory would return to the “Stay-at-Home” reopening phase, effective Aug. 17, due to a recent uptick in COVID-19 cases.

“After careful consideration and guidance from Department of Health officials, the V.I. Department of Education has made the decision to conduct the first semester of the 2020-2021 school year virtually,” Berry-Benjamin said.

Key areas of the plan to reopen USVI public schools virtually are outlined below:

### **SOFT OPENING**

A ‘soft opening’ is planned for the first two weeks of school. This will allow students and staff to:

- Practice the logistics of using technology devices and educational platforms
- Become familiar with virtual classroom etiquette and protocols
- Administer diagnostic assessments
- Ensure compliance and efficiency in all aspects of the virtual learning environment

## **SCHOOL DAY**

- Students will engage in daily, live online direct instruction guided by a teacher, Monday - Friday

Each grade level will meet the minimum number of instructional hours, as per the VI Code:

- Grades PRE-K, KG, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>: 4 hours and 30 mins
- Grades 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup>: 5 hours
- Grades 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup>: 5 hours 30 mins

**NOTE:** After a period of assessment with the Department of Health, a determination will be made whether schools are to transition to a hybrid model for the second semester. This will involve some days learning on campus and other days learning from home. Parents will also have the option to have their children continue learning from home.

## **ONLINE LEARNING PLATFORMS**

- Schoology is a new online platform that will serve as a hub to house all digital platforms supported by both Districts, including iReady, Edmentum, and Acellus. It also serves as a communication tool that allows teachers to interact with parents and students. Additionally, Schoology manages students' academic and co-curricular calendar. Finally, it is an extension of the Department's already-existing student information database—PowerSchool. This makes it easy for teachers to enter grades, and students and parents to view grades.
- Teachers will:
  - Log in to Schoology and use Microsoft Teams to conduct and record daily, live lessons
  - Share recorded lessons taught using Schoology
  - Use Schoology and Microsoft Office 365 as the main communication tools with parents

## **COMPUTER DISTRIBUTION**

- At the start of the 2020-2021 school year, laptop computers and Mifi devices from the VIDE's current inventory will be distributed first to families in need of the electronics
- When the VIDE receives its shipment of approx. 12,000 Chromebooks within the next two months, each student in the USVI public school system will be provided a computer
- Parents are asked to complete the "Home Technology Information Form" at [www.vide.vi](http://www.vide.vi) or call **(340) 775-2250 on St. Thomas or (340) 778-1600 on St. Croix** for assistance. They may also visit the Curriculum Center in both districts. **The deadline to submit the form is Friday, August 14, 2020.**
- Parents are required to sign for all Department-issued technology and are obligated to pay the full cost of electronic items provided by the V.I. Department of Education that are damaged, lost or stolen

NOTE: Students who have laptop or desktop computers at home are asked to use those, as the VIDE's current inventory is limited and will be distributed to students without those electronics first. Parents who wish to purchase a laptop computer for their children, may visit the Department's website, [www.vide.vi](http://www.vide.vi), and download the spec sheet.

### **SCHOOL UNIFORMS**

- TOPS: Students are required to wear their uniform shirt  
BOTTOMS: Students may wear knee-length or longer pants, or a skirt at an appropriate length
- Hair bonnets, hats, and headwraps are prohibited during school hours – unless these items are traditionally worn as part of the student's religious attire
- Excessive jewelry, or other accessories, that may cause disruptions or distractions during virtual sessions are not allowed

### **LEARNING SPACES AT HOME**

- The V.I. Department of Education will issue desks and chairs to families who wish to have them to ensure students have a suitable learning environment at home
- Furniture will be thoroughly sanitized prior to distribution to families
- Families will be required to pick up the items from designated schools – the VIDE will not provide delivery service

### **MEALS**

- All school kitchens will remain closed and School Lunch services will be suspended until further notice. The Department will update the community on when meals will resume.

### **TRAINING**

- In an effort to ensure a full understanding of operating safely during the coronavirus pandemic and how to navigate the “new normal” of our school environments, a series of trainings have been arranged for teachers, students, parents, school nurses, custodial workers, kitchen workers, school monitors, bus drivers, school administrators, and all other school-based personnel
- Training dates and times have been announced; sessions will be conducted online or in-person, when it is safe to resume in-person gatherings while following social distancing guidelines
- Training for parents on the online platforms their children will use will also be provided

### **SPECIAL EDUCATION & ENGLISH LEARNERS**

- The U.S. Department of Education-Office of Special Education has allowed schools the

flexibility to utilize distance learning options to ensure students with disabilities and other special populations, such as English Learners, receive the services of their individualized Education Plan (IEP), and are fully integrated into every aspect of preparation and participation, and to ensure the needs of all students are addressed.

### **CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION**

CTE classes engage in learning activities that require critical thinking and hands-on application.

- Counselors will provide students the necessary guidance they need on their respective career pathways
- Theory will be taught online

**NOTE:** After a period of assessment with the Department of Health, a determination will be made on whether special student groups, identified above, can safely report to the physical building for in-person teaching and learning.

### **LEARNING LOSS**

- In an effort to respond to and address the anticipated learning loss students experienced during the 2019-2020 school year, a critical intervention period will be implemented during the first marking period. Afterschool programs in English Language Arts and Mathematics will also be offered:
  - A. Intervention services will be provided to students in grades KG through 5<sup>th</sup> using one-and-one and/or small group online supports
  - B. Tutorial services will be provided to students in grades 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>. Students will benefit from one and one and/or small group online supports.

The complete plan to open V.I. public schools virtually will be available for download on the Department's website, [www.vide.vi](http://www.vide.vi), by close of business on August 14. It will include in-depth details of students' daily schedules by grade level, grading guidelines, support services for students and staff, and more.

"Let us all remember to remain flexible throughout this process," Berry-Benjamin said. "Our goal is to educate our students in the safest most effective way possible."

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