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School Reopening Delayed to After Labor Day; Reopening Plan for Public Review Set for This Week

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College fair at the St. Croix Educational Complex By. ERNICE GILBERT FOR VI
CONSORTIUM

As a result of the surge in confirmed coronavirus cases in the territory, the Bryan administration has decided to delay the opening of schools for the 2020-2021 academic year until at least September 8, the day after Labor Day.

“If we were to open schools any earlier, we likely would have to do so 100% virtually, which is a less than ideal scenario,” Mr. Bryan said at this afternoon’s Covid-19 update press briefing.

The governor said the delay locally could come with some benefit, as local education officials glean from best practices implemented by mainland schools to potentially be utilized in the USVI.

Mr. Bryan said D.O.E. has drafted a school reopening plan that is said to comply with Department of Health mandates and Center for Disease Control guidelines. Public review and discussion of the plan will commence this week between stakeholders, to include unions, faculty, staff, and parents, Mr. Bryan said.

To parents in the community who continue to be in limbo with their childcare plans and question whether they should purchase uniforms as D.O.E. works to finalize the school reopening plan, Mr. Bryan said the following, “You need to buy uniforms because we’re going to have school this year. No matter what we do, at some point, they [students] are going to have to come to school.”

Mr. Bryan also said that a meeting with the American Federation of Teachers and other unions was scheduled for today. Items up for discussion include consideration of ensuring that students up to 4th grade receive adequate instruction for the entire school year, as students within that age group cannot be left unattended while their parents go to work.

As a reminder to the public, the territory’s leader restated the three proposed methods of instruction for this academic year:

- In-person instruction: All staff and students attend school for a typical school day.
- Hybrid (partial in-person & partial distance learning): Reduced day-to-day in-person attendance with some people in school on certain days and some in school on other days for a mixture of virtual and in-person attendance.
- Distance learning: Full online or virtual instruction.

Mr. Bryan requested that the option of full virtual instruction for families that do not feel comfortable sending their children to school be included in the plan for public discussion.