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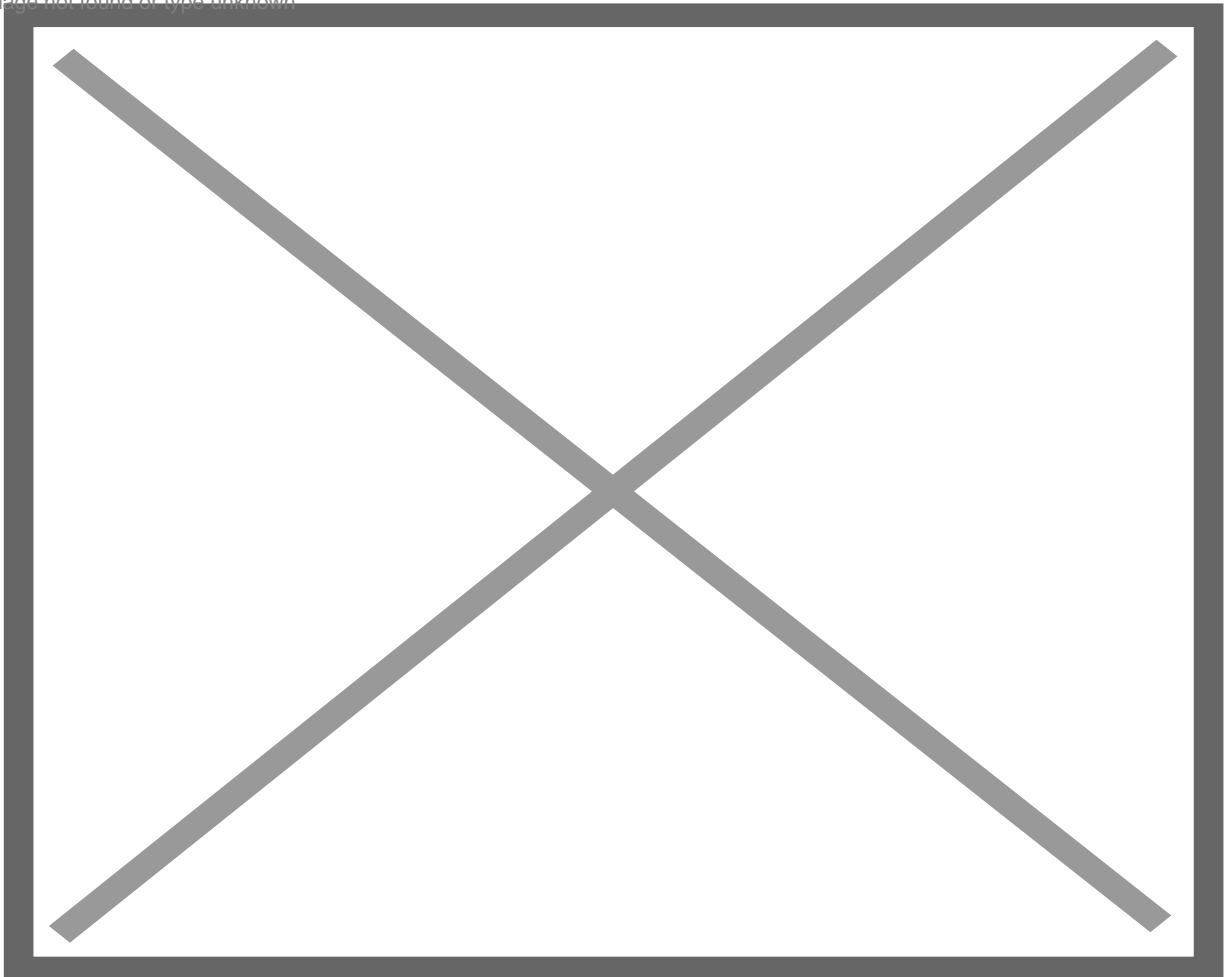
## Public Schools Closed Through August 16 as Cleanup Crews Struggle With Power Outages and Large Tree Removal Post-Tropical Storm Ernesto

**Essential staff to continue maintenance efforts; department aims to reopen schools by August 19 if power is restored and campuses are deemed safe**

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The V.I. Department of Education has announced that all public schools will remain closed on Friday, August 16, as cleanup efforts continue in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Ernesto.

The decision follows progress in clearing exterior debris, including downed trees and hazardous materials, from school campuses across the territory, the department said. However, challenges remain, particularly in the removal of large trees, which require specialized equipment for safe

clearance.

Essential school staff, including principals, custodians, and maintenance workers, have been on-site since the storm's passing, focusing on both exterior and interior maintenance, VIDE said. Despite these efforts, electrical outages in both districts have severely impeded cleanup activities. The department said the lack of power has hindered deep cleaning and other essential maintenance tasks inside classrooms and school facilities, making it difficult to prepare the campuses for the safe return of students and faculty.

The department emphasized that the current conditions are not yet conducive to reopening schools. Even so, VIDE said it remains hopeful that uninterrupted electrical service on Friday will allow further progress in the cleanup efforts, with the aim of reopening schools on Monday, August 19.

All essential school staff are required to report to their respective school sites on August 16th at 8:00 a.m. District and state-level employees are also expected to report to their work locations at the same time, as government offices will be open. The department urged students and faculty to remain at home during this time to avoid interference with the ongoing cleanup activities and to ensure everyone's safety.

VIDE extended its gratitude to partner agencies and acknowledged the challenges faced by the Water and Power Authority during this time.

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