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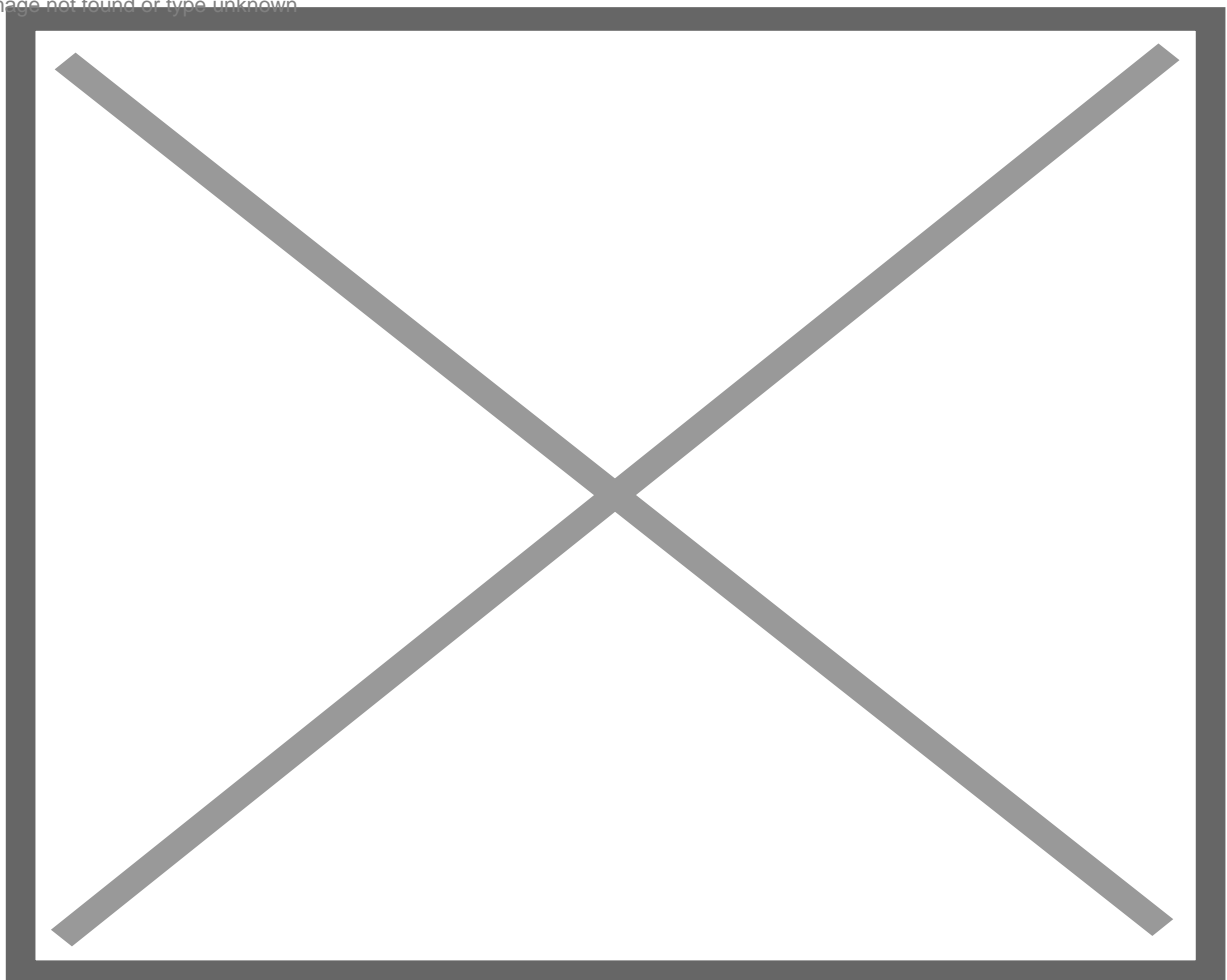
V.I. Dept. of Education Forms Task Force to Support Undocumented Students as Immigration Policies Tighten

Following Governor Bryan's directive, the Department of Education has implemented a policy ensuring that all children, regardless of immigration status, receive an education without inquiry or discrimination.

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Janeke Simon **February 05, 2025**

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The St. Croix Educational Complex High School. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

During Wednesday's meeting of the Senate Committee on Education and Workforce Development, Assistant Commissioner of Education Victor Somme III provided lawmakers with insight into how the department is engaging with federal immigration policies, especially in light

of Governor Albert Bryan Jr.'s [non-cooperation directive](#).

“Evolving federal policies have heightened concerns about the well-being of undocumented individuals, including school-age children in the United States Virgin Islands,” Mr. Somme said. “While immigration remains a federal issue, the reality is that these policies have direct implications for our public education system.”

Following guidance from Governor Bryan contained in his [memorandum of January 29](#), the department has formed a task force, Mr. Somme said. A guidance policy has been formulated and disseminated with school administrators, school monitors, union officials and now with the bus companies, he disclosed, “because we know enforcement activities are happening with the bus companies.” Although the policy is being constantly reviewed and adjusted as the federal stance shifts, it is undergirded by one fundamental principle, according to Mr. Somme. “One undeniable legal and moral obligation remains that all children, regardless of their immigration status, have the right to a free and appropriate public education,” he said, citing the 1982 Plyer vs. Doe Supreme Court case.

“We do not and we will not inquire about a student's immigration status,” Mr. Somme declared. “Nor will we allow external pressures to dictate who is entitled to get an education.” The inclusive and welcoming approach to education extends to adult learners as well, he noted. However, as Mr. Somme acknowledged, “within this past week alone, concerns surrounding a number of undocumented students in our schools have become increasingly visible and pressing.”

The Department of Education, he says, is “working proactively to ensure that undocumented students receive the same level of support, resources and educational opportunities as their peers.” VIDE is doing this by contacting parents and guardians to share the policy document, which is available in several languages. “The role of education is not to police immigration, but to nurture potential,” Mr. Somme declared. “Our commitment is unwavering – as long as children seek knowledge within our classrooms, we will teach them,” he told lawmakers.

Acknowledging the “contentious and evolving” nature of national immigration policies, the Assistant Commissioner of Education nevertheless pledged that “education is a right and not a privilege, and we will uphold that right for every child regardless of their immigration status.”