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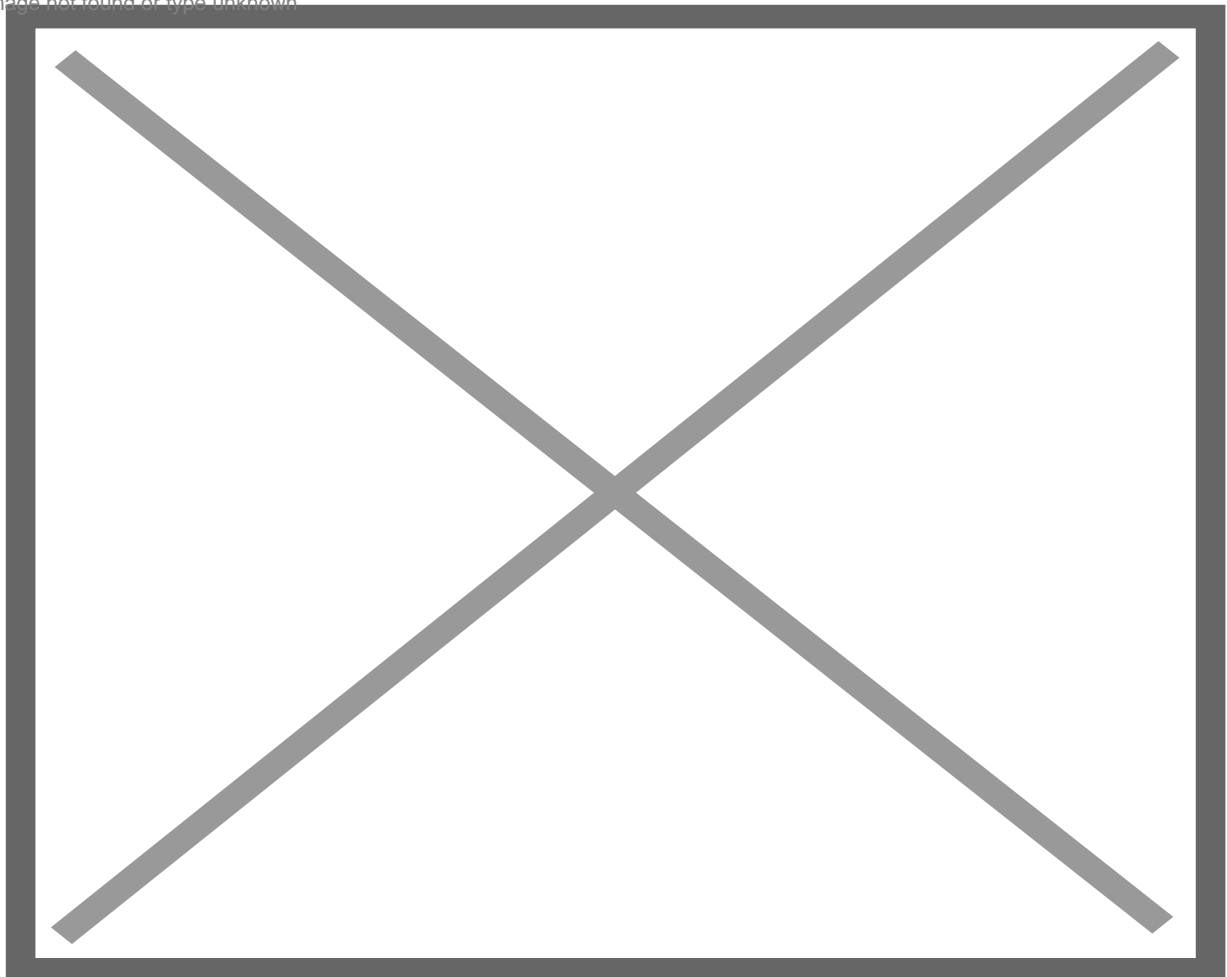
Dept. of Education Bans Unsupervised Cellphone Use in Classrooms, Sets Strict Rules for Emergencies, Prohibited Activities, and Discipline in 2025-2026 School Year

The V.I. Dept. of Education has launched a territory-wide policy restricting personal electronic devices in public schools, limiting use to approved educational purposes and emergencies while outlining penalties for violations and parental involvement.

Community Center / **Published On September 03, 2025 02:38 PM /**

Staff Consortium **September 03, 2025**

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Cellphones and other personal electronic devices will no longer be freely used in classrooms across the Virgin Islands' public schools. The V.I. Department of Education (VIDE) on Wednesday introduced a Personal Electronic Communication Device Use Policy for the 2025-

2026 school year, applying to every student, teacher, administrator, and staff member.

The goal, according to VIDE, is to create classrooms free from distractions while protecting students from privacy risks and online threats. By restricting unsanctioned device use, the department says it hopes to reduce exposure to cyberbullying, inappropriate content, and other issues that interfere with learning.

Under the new guidelines, devices such as phones and tablets can only be used during class when a teacher has given written permission for specific educational purposes. Otherwise, they must remain stored in backpacks or other secure spots. The policy makes clear that exceptions exist for emergencies, including medical concerns, severe weather, or urgent safety threats. Parents are asked to contact a school's front office rather than calling or texting their children directly in such situations.

The rules also outline prohibited activities. Social media browsing, streaming entertainment, playing games, viewing objectionable material, cyberbullying or cyberstalking, installing unauthorized software, and bypassing school network security are not allowed.

To reinforce compliance, VIDE has set up a tiered discipline process: a verbal warning for the first offense, a written reprimand for the second, and confiscation of the device with a parent conference for the third. More serious violations can lead to immediate confiscation and loss of device privileges for the semester.

Any confiscated device will be returned only at the end of the school day and only to a parent or guardian. Both students and parents must sign an annual Acceptable Use Agreement acknowledging that they understand the rules and responsibilities. The department emphasized that it will not be liable for any personal electronics that are lost, stolen, or damaged on school property. This new policy officially replaces all prior memorandums and procedures.

VIDE describes the initiative as part of a wider effort to ensure that classrooms remain focused environments where students can thrive. Questions about the policy can be directed to local school administrators or the Office of the Insular Superintendent. For further assistance, families may also contact the St. Croix District at (340) 773-1095 or the St. Thomas-St. John District at (340) 774-0100.