

The Virgin Islands Consortium

V.I. Board of Education Orders Redistricting Readiness Report as Parent Questions Mount

The board voted to require a detailed redistricting readiness report from the Department of Education, seeking answers on student assignments, transportation, facility readiness, staffing, timelines and parent communication before the new school year.

Education / **Published On April 07, 2026 05:49 AM /**

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Amid public uncertainty over how the V.I. Department of Education's redistricting plan will affect students, families, teachers and school operations, the V.I. Board of Education on Monday voted during a special meeting to issue a general administrative order requiring the department to provide a far more detailed account of how the process will be carried out.

According to VIBE Chair Dr. Kyza Callwood, board members were concerned that key parts of the department's messaging have not been clear enough, particularly as questions continue to grow over what the redistricting process will mean in practical terms for families and schools.

"The board felt that some of the things that they're either saying via the Senate or through their communication is not clear," said Callwood, noting uncertainty among the public over "when parents would know what's happening with their children, where they will be moving to, when they have to buy school uniform, what's going to be happening with teachers, so forth and so on."

To address that confusion, board members agreed that the Department of Education should produce a redistricting readiness report laying out exactly how the redistricting exercise will unfold on the ground.

Callwood said the report should include information "clearly delineating any redistricting methodology and decision criteria, student assignment framework, student capacity and enrollment projections," and should also "Talk about transportation routes, estimated commute times and safety protocols." He said the report should further include a statement on equity impact, along with plans for accommodating students with disabilities, English language learners, and any other cohort with specialty requirements.

"We want them to be able to provide some type of identification of responsible points of contact for each component of the plan, and formal signoff by the commissioner of Education attesting to the accuracy and completeness of the submitted data," Callwood outlined.

The board is also seeking a clear account of facility readiness, with particular attention to Eulalie Rivera PreK-8 School. Callwood said the plan must address facility readiness "particularly Eulalie Rivera PreK-8 School," and said the report should include input from the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance.

He said the department should provide information on "roof repairs, science and lab upgrades...auditorium competition, cafeteria and kitchen readiness, library mold remediation, intercom system functionality, main office configuration and operational readiness, installation of school furniture."

In addition, the board is seeking a broader communication and engagement strategy. "We also want them to come up with...a comprehensive public facing communication plan" which contains "clear timelines, accessible and parent-friendly materials, [and] multilingual communication," Dr. Callwood declared.

That communication plan, he said, should be part of "a structural and outgoing stakeholder engagement process, including an initial advisory committee with parents, educators and committee stakeholders."

The board is also asking for "full operational call centers to support parent and community inquiries," as well as a school-specific readiness plan for the new Arthur Richards School.

Before the opening of the new school year, the board also wants a final “readiness certificate” issued. Callwood said certificate should confirm that “all facilities are safe and operationally compliant; staffing and student support systems are in place; transportation logistics are fully operational; all legal and medical requirements have been satisfied.”

Department of Education personnel are expected to submit most of the required information before the end of April so that parents and students across the territory will have advance notice of what to expect and how to prepare for the upcoming school year.