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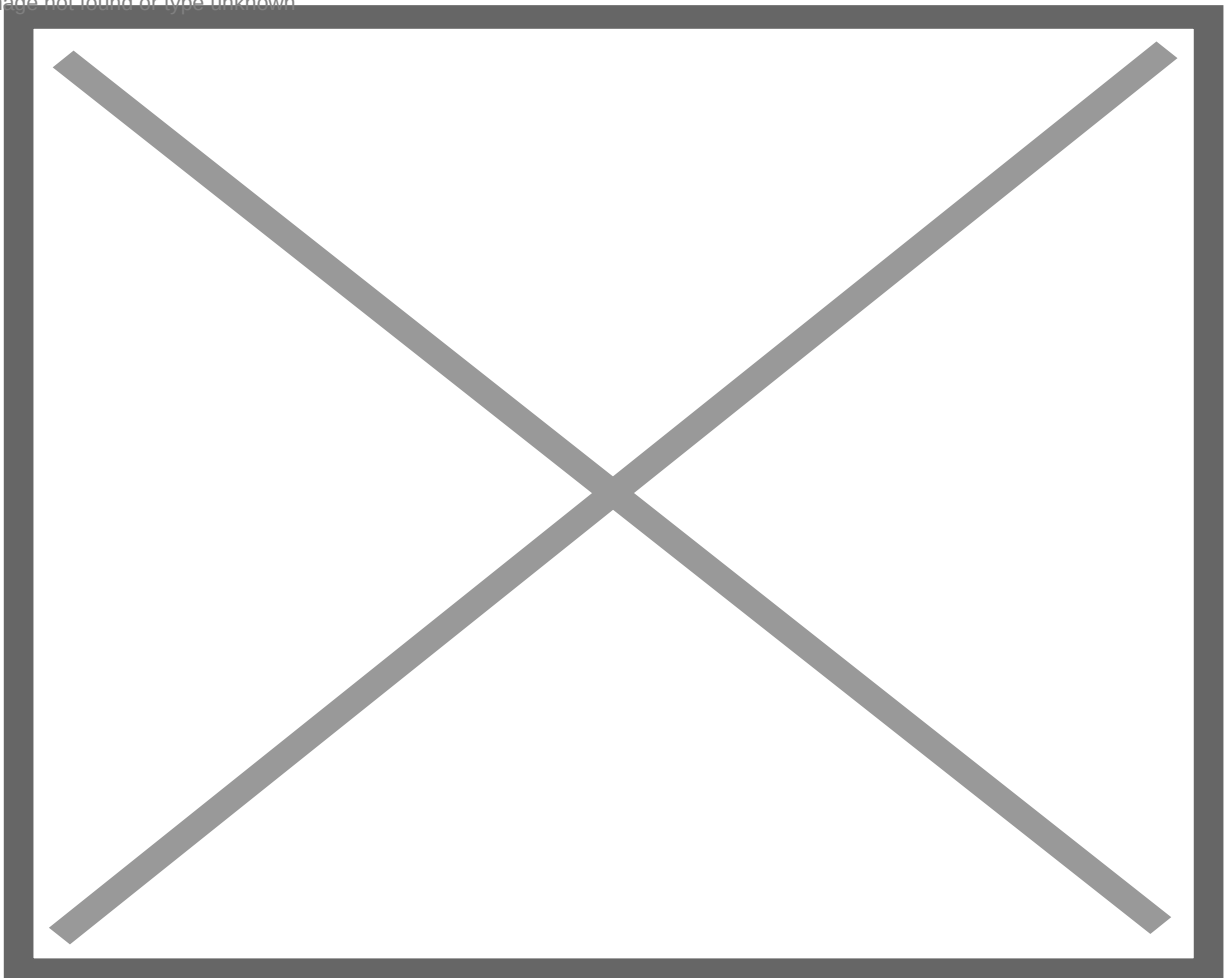
Arthur A. Richards Pre-K-8 to Open Aug. 10 as St. Croix's First New School in 30 Years; Ribbon-Cutting Set for Aug. 7

VIDE says the Arthur A. Richards Pre-K-8 School will open Aug. 10, following an Aug. 7 ribbon-cutting, as crews finish the campus and lawmakers press the department to address after-hours security and the possible cost of hiring a private security firm.

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Nelcia Charlemagne **July 15, 2026**

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Architect's rendering of the new Arthur A. Richards PreK-8 School campus By. VIDE.

ST. CROIX — The Arthur A. Richards Pre-K-8 School will open to students on August 10, 2026, the V.I. Department of Education told lawmakers Tuesday, with a ribbon-cutting and community celebration scheduled three days earlier as crews complete the facility's final installations and

outdoor work.

Education Commissioner Dionne Wells-Hedrington described the opening as VIDE's "largest milestone to date." The school will be the first newly constructed school in the territory, and the first on St. Croix, in 30 years.

"The design-build contractor and local subcontractor crews are working around the clock on the installation of fixtures, furniture, and equipment, as well as landscaping, paving, outdoor play areas, and the field," Ms. Wells-Hedrington told the Senate Committee on Education and Workforce Development.

She added that "it is very refreshing to see the teaching pool completed and filled with water for use by our students."

VIDE has also completed several elements of its transition plan ahead of the opening.

Ms. Wells-Hedrington said "student placements have been finalized, employee transfers have been completed, and parent notifications have been distributed."

District and school personnel continue to "work diligently to complete the remaining operational, logistical, and instructional tasks necessary to ensure a seamless opening for students, faculty, and staff," she said.

The August 7 ribbon-cutting will formally mark the opening of the campus. The department will also offer tours and host an "appreciation BBQ" as part of the event.

Ms. Wells-Hedrington said the gathering is intended to "engage our community and allow people to celebrate this milestone."

VIDE is "fully prepared to provide a safe, innovative, and student-centered learning environment from day one," the commissioner said.

The department will provide training related to the school's technology, innovation systems and maintenance. The contractor "will remain engaged during the warranty period to support the facility," Ms. Wells-Hedrington added.

Lawmakers Question After-Hours Security

While senators welcomed the approaching opening, they raised questions about how the new campus will be protected, particularly after students and employees leave for the day.

Senator Franklin Johnson asked VIDE officials to explain the school's security provisions.

VIDE architect Chaneel Callwood said the campus will have "several layers of security", beginning with a gated parking lot and guard booth.

A second checkpoint inside the compound will include a metal detector. Visitors entering the first building, which houses administrative offices, will also pass through a secured vestibule.

Ms. Callwood explained that "that gate will be monitored, and then in order to get into the first building, which is an admin building, there will be a vestibule where people enter through double doors, and they will be in an enclosed vestibule until they are buzzed in by the staff."

Asked about protection outside regular school hours, Ms. Callwood said the property is “completely fenced, and it has cameras.”

Mr. Johnson maintained that cameras and fencing may not be sufficient without personnel stationed at the campus. “After hours, if we don't have bodies there, that school ain't gonna last,” he warned.

Ms. Callwood said she could not address the school's operational security arrangements. Ms. Wells-Hedrington acknowledged that hiring a private security company could become necessary but would require additional money.

“If it is determined that we need to invest in a security firm like Ranger America...that will require additional funding,” the commissioner said.

VIDE was “unable to sustain our previous contract with that vendor, but those are things that can be put in place,” she added.

“I sure hope that we think seriously about that,” Mr. Johnson responded.

Senator Novelle Francis, chairman of the Committee on Budget, Appropriations and Finance, agreed that the issue should be addressed “sooner rather than later, because I think it's critical as we endeavor to open this new school.”