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Dept. of Education's 1,000-Plus Page 'Master Plan' For New School Buildings Completed; Next Phase: Architectural Design

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Governor Albert Bryan at a Tuesday press conference announced the completion of the V.I. Department of Education's Educational Facility Master Plan, a 1,000+ page document that will guide the new construction and modernization of public schools in the territory, the Dept. of Education said in a release issued late Tuesday.

Education Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin, Chief Operations Officer Dionne Wells-Hedrington, Ed.D., and Office of Disaster Recovery Director Adrienne Williams-Octalien joined the governor for the announcement.

Calling it “a major milestone in our recovery,” Mr. Bryan said, “This is another step toward a bright future in the Virgin Islands with education. As you know, education is really the main driver in what a Virgin Islander will do in years to come. And we want to make sure that we have schools, not only with the technology to power that, but the atmosphere that makes a Virgin Islands’ child understand that they are a winner from the time they start. It is important that we create an atmosphere of warmth, an atmosphere of learning, where teachers, students, administrators and parents can come together and prepare Virgin Islands’ students for a very bright future.”



According to the department, the Educational Facility Master Plan document was compiled over a six-month period, beginning January 2020 and concluding on June 30, 2020, by the DLR Group, a global design firm “that approaches educational design thoughtfully and holistically,” according to the firm’s website. D.O.E. said the master plan will inform the proposal of modernized and new construction of public schools over the long-term to provide modern learning environments for the territory’s public-school students. It outlines an approach to implement the community’s vision of what schools should be and provide a framework for decision-making in moving forward in a fair and equitable manner.

Key components of the Master Plan include:

- Preliminary program summaries/site diagrams for each of the 18 schools (six rebuilds and 12 modernizations/expansions) based on an inquiry-based curriculum
- An emphasis on 24/7 safe and secure schools that enable a learning continuum that embraces students, teachers, administrators, parents, industry, and the greater community
- A focus on “applied learning” that includes career and technical education (CTE) opportunities that link to industry
- Outdoor learning priorities that support the development of the whole child
- Sustainable/resilient practices
- Professional development that connects innovative learning facilities with curriculum and curriculum delivery

Berry-Benjamin commended the work that was accomplished in the face of the coronavirus pandemic.

“The VIDE continues to advance many of its priorities – one of which is the construction of new public schools in the territory,” she said. “Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington and Chaneel Callwood-Daniels have been the Department’s tireless champions of this important work, along with the Office of Disaster Recovery, FEMA, and our partners at the DLR Group.”

She added, “This is a tremendous victory for Virgin Islands’ students, educators, and our public education system, as a whole.”

Dr. Wells-Hedrington, who leads the department’s new schools efforts, said, “This is a very great day for the Department of Education because it marks our expectations of what our facilities will look like in the future. It’s about forward movement and making changes that benefit the children of this Territory.”

D.O.E. said now that the master plan is completed, the next step is to acquire the architectural design firms that would work with the community to design the schools. Additionally, ensuring the necessary steps are made with FEMA to obtain the funding is critical.

“Our core responsibility at the Office of Disaster Recovery is working to secure the funding for the recovery projects, as well as identifying projects and applications for every dollar that comes into the Territory,” Williams-Octalien said. “The ODR has been working closely with FEMA to secure the funding to repair schools and other facilities, and we have also been working with the Department of Education to push these projects forward.”