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Dept. of Education Unveils School Reopening Plan That Includes Two Learning Options: Learn From Home and In-Person/Virtual Hybrid

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At this afternoon's Covid-19 update with Governor Albert Bryan, officials from the V.I. Department of Education unveiled pertinent details of the reopening of schools for the 2020-2021 school year, to include two learning options, a two-week long soft opening, daily temperature checks, masking, cleaning of schools, and trainings. The full document is available for review and download on the Dept. Education department's [website](#).

The goal at the forefront of the plan is to keep students and staff safe, while providing a quality educational experience, said D.O.E. Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin. The academic year will tentatively commence on Tuesday, September 8.

Over the past few weeks of press conferences, Mr. Bryan related the three proposed modes of instruction for the fast-approaching school year.

Today, the Education Department's leadership team unveiled the plan's two learning options:

1) Learning from School (a hybrid model): Students are grouped into two cohorts.

- Cohort A: Three days of in-person interaction with teachers and students and two days of distance learning each week
- Cohort B: Three days of distance learning and two days of in-person interaction

Each cohort will have a full day of class, six hours for elementary level students and six and a half hours for secondary level students, D.O.E. explained.

2) Learn from Home (distance learning)

- Students will use online educational platforms (i.e. Edmentum, Acellus and iReady) and will be guided by a teacher.
- Parents must enroll their children in this option through the department's website.

According to St. Thomas-St. John district superintendent Dr. Stefan Jurgen, students who receive services through the Division of Special Services or ESL, will continue individually or in small groups, regardless of the learning option families decide upon.

"Schools will undergo a deep cleaning in accordance with the CDC guidelines by professional cleaning contractors prior to reopening," said Carlos McGregor, D.O.E St. Croix District superintendent, relaying that cleaning contracts have been procured for both school districts.

There is no going around the importance of schools needing to be cleaned prior to reopening. However, national reports on the strictness or lack thereof of CDC guidelines persists. The NPR on Thursday reported that the CDC will not release school guidelines this week as had been expected.

The most current public information on the CDC website is dated May 19, 2020 and is titled "Considerations for Schools". They are not strict guidelines, as shared in a fact-check story in a May 22 USA Today report. However, the "Virgin Islands Re-opening Schools Guidance 2020-2021" document and the reopening plan, — which is subject to change based on the pandemics impact on the territory — appear to rely heavily on these recommendations.

The CDC's considerations shared that the lowest risk to students and teachers is a virtual-only model. The hybrid model, named Learn from Home in the territory's reopening plan, is considered "more risk". The highest risk is traditional full-sized and in-person instruction and will not be a part of the plan for school reopening in the territory.

During the first two weeks of reopening, students and staff will actively participate in a soft opening of schools to practice implementation of the reopening plan, to include appropriate social distancing, the process of temperature checks prior to entering the campus, and meal distribution, Mr. McGregor made known.

Temperature checks of all students and staff will be conducted daily prior to entering the campus. According to the plan, any staff or student arriving to school in a vehicle, who has a temperature of 100 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, will not be permitted to leave their vehicle or return to the campus until written clearance is received from the Department of Health. Students who walk to school or arrive by bus with similar temperatures will be placed in an isolation room and parents will be contacted to pick up their children and follow Health Department steps and guidelines thereafter. Staff who walk to school will be asked to immediately vacate the campus and follow guidelines as well.

“As a precautionary measure, parents are asked to check students' temperatures before they leave home and do not send students to school if they are sick,” Mr. McGregor said.

“All public school students are required to wear a mask as part of their school uniform. Teachers and staff are also required to wear masks,” the St. Croix District superintendent added. Detailed specifics on masking are also worked into the plan. Breaks will be included in the school schedule every thirty minutes as needed to give students and staff time to remove their masks.

Virtual and in-person trainings for students, parents, all school-based personnel, and school bus drivers are to take place “in an effort to ensure a full understanding of operating safely during the coronavirus pandemic and how to navigate the new norm of our school environment,” said Mr. Jurgen. Dates and times will be announced, the St. Thomas-St. John district superintendent informed.