The Virgin Islands Consortium

Education: 'All Public-School Students Will Learn From Home Whether They Have Technology or Not'

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The Department of Education said Wednesday that "all public-school students will learn from home on Mon., Sept. 14, whether they have technology or not." But the department did not respond to a request for clarification when asked how it would engage students virtually if these students did not have the requisite equipment to do so.

The department was responding to concerns brought to its attention by this publication of parents being turned away at equipment collection centers after being told that laptops had ran out. Cynthia Graham, D.O.E.'s director of public relations, said, "All public-school students will learn from home on Mon., Sept. 14, whether they have technology or not. Schools and teachers are prepared to engage all students in academics."

Ms. Graham said many parents did not receive laptops on Wednesday because of the parents' failure to fill out a form. "Many parents may not have received laptops today because it was a requirement to fill out a Home Technology Use Form prior to today's distribution," she said. "The Department repeatedly informed parents that this form was required to be completed in order to be considered for electronic devices due to the limited quantities available."

She also stated that because of limited quantities, laptop and other electronic distribution was prioritized from 12th grade downwards. "Schools continue to make contact with parents who requested devices," she said.

Ms. Graham closed by stating, "The Department looks forward to providing every public-school student with a Chromebook when the devices arrive in the Territory in the coming months," though a timeframe was not provided.

Aside from equipment issues, parents have voiced concern with what they have described as the elephant in the room: parents' difficulty in managing children while having to work — either at home or at the office. Some have suggested that the department abandon its current plan of 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. for learning, and adopt a strategy that would see 8:00 a.m. to 12 noon being utilized for learning, while the afternoon hours are used for administrative work.

Governor Albert Bryan told the Consortium Tuesday that he would take the suggestion into consideration. He also said that what he appreciated about D.O.E.'s strategy is that the first few weeks of school would serve as a test of the current plan, which is subject to change.

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