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Dept. of Education Announces March 2 Reopening of In-Person Learning for Early-Grade Students; St. Thomas-St. John District to be Announced Soon

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Classroom at Pearl B. Larsen PreK8 School outfitted with floor markings indicating compliance with the 6-foot social distancing requirement between student desks. By. THE V.I. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

ST. CROIX — Public schools in the St. Croix District will open for in-person instruction for early-grade students beginning March 2, the V.I. Dept. of Education has announced. The reopening comes almost a year after the closure of school buildings on March 14, 2020 as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"All schools received a favorable evaluation to open" after undergoing a series of inspections by the V.I. Department of Health-Environmental Health Division, V.I. Fire Service - Fire Prevention Unit, and the V.I. Board of Education—culminating with the Board of Education passing a resolution on Feb. 25 certifying the reopening of the district's schools, said D.O.E. Insular Superintendent Carlos McGregor,

He added, "It is a proud day for all of us in the St. Croix District. The countless hours of meticulous planning by the district team, school administrators and teachers demonstrate our commitment to educating our students in a safe and healthy environment. The most effective teaching and learning happens when students and teachers are physically in school, and we are happy to be on the road to returning to a sense of normalcy."

Who Returns and When

Beginning Tues., March 2, PreK-1st grade, Special Education Self-contained, and Career & Technical Education second- and fourth-year certificant students will resume in-person instruction, five days a week, D.O.E. said. Beginning Tues., March 9, students in 2nd and 3rd grades will resume in-person instruction, five days a week.

School schedules are as follows:

- Pearl B. Larsen PreK8 | 8:15am-1:15pm
- Juanita Gardine K8 | 8:15am-1:15pm
- Eulalie R. Rivera K8 | 8:15am-1:15pm
- Arthur A. Richards K8 | 8:15am-1:15pm
- Ricardo Richards Elementary | 8:30am-1:30pm
- Lew Muckle Elementary | 8:30am-1:30pm
- Alfredo Andrews Elementary | 8:30am-1:30pm
- Claude O. Markoe Elementary | 8:30am-1:30pm
- Career & Technical Education Center | 8:30am-3:30pm

General education students in grades 4-12 will continue learning virtually, said the department. McGregor further pointed out that parents of students in grades PreK-3rd retain the option of continuing to have their children learn virtually.

Preparations to Return to In-Person Instruction

According to the release, early preparations for students and staff to safely return to in-person instruction began last summer when the department received funding through Congress's CARES Act. Since then, schools have been outfitted with the necessary items in compliance with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention requirements for in-person learning:

- Signage throughout campuses reminding students and staff of safety protocols, i.e., staying six feet apart, washing hands for 20 seconds with soap and water, wearing masks, etc.
- Floor decals or paintings depicting the six-foot social-distancing requirement
- Dispensers strategically placed throughout campuses to readily provide soap, hand sanitizer and paper towels
- Hand washing stations
- Classrooms with students' desks arranged six feet apart and teachers' desks outfitted with an L-shaped Plexiglas barrier

- All bathrooms fully repaired and functioning

McGregor said schools have created an action plan that includes procedures “from the time students, faculty and staff arrive on campus until they leave the school grounds for the day.” These include:

- Temperature checks when arriving
- Procedures for breakfast and lunch
- Mask breaks
- Protocols for addressing students and employees with an elevated temperature

Meals, Bus Transportation & Uniforms

Breakfast and lunch will be provided to students who return to campuses, as well as to those who continue to learn from home, D.O.E. said.

When it comes to transportation, however, McGregor said parents will be required to transport their children to and from school. Students whose parents are unable to provide transportation will continue to learn virtually. Bus transportation will only be provided for self-contained Special Education students, until further notice.

All students are expected to follow their school’s uniform policy; a two-week grace period will be granted to students to ensure compliance with uniform requirements.

Education Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin praised the partnerships that made it possible for school campuses to reopen, according to the release.

“As the Department of Education continues to work closely with our partners at the V.I. Department of Health, the Office of the Governor, the V.I. Board of Education, and all stakeholders, we are pleased the time has come when we can safely return our students and staff to their school campuses,” she said. “We will continue to follow the guidance of health professionals as we move into this phase of educating students during the pandemic.”

Dates for the return to in-person instruction in the St. Thomas-St. John District will be announced shortly.