

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Possible Covid-19 Exposure Forces Pearl B. Larsen School Class Back to Virtual Learning; Revert Expected to Be Temporary, Education Says

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Entrance of Pearl B. Larsen PreK-8 School By. THE V.I. DEPT. OF EDUCATION

The Dept. of Education said late Thursday that a kindergarten classroom currently engaged in in-person learning at Pearl B. Larsen PreK-8 School will return to virtual learning on Fri., March 5 and Mon., March 8 while the family of one student awaits Covid-19 test results. D.O.E. said the class's return to virtual learning is expected to be temporary.

D.O.E. said the V.I. Department of Health has advised district and school leaders that in-person learning can safely continue within the classroom, which comprises of nine students, a teacher and a paraprofessional. "However, out of an abundance of caution and with the best interests of students and faculty in mind, St. Croix District Superintendent Carlos McGregor has authorized the temporary return to virtual learning for the class until the family's Covid-19 test results are known," D.O.E. said.

The department said the remainder of the school was not affected and can safely continue in-person learning.

Providing details under a subtitle "These are the Facts", the Dept. of Education said a kindergarten family at the school had limited contact with a family friend that has tested positive for Covid-19, and that the kindergarten family informed school leaders of their possible exposure on Thursday. The education department did not say what time of the day officials were made aware of the exposure, and whether the child connected to the family that might have been exposed, had any interaction with other children.

D.O.E. said the "kindergarten family will be tested for Covid-19 by the Department of Health," though it was not clear whether the department meant the potentially exposed child and his/her family, or the kindergarten students at the school.

The department said parents of students attending in-person learning in the kindergarten class have been informed of the matter. The department further stated that all students attending in-person learning at Pearl B. Larsen PreK-8 School are organized into 'bubbles,' with each grade level having access to its own wing, which eliminates contact with other students and areas on the school campus.

The department further explained that students remain with their classmates throughout the school day, and students and teachers eat breakfast and lunch inside their classrooms. Parents transport students to and from school, thus eliminating different grade levels from intermingling on a school bus, D.O.E. said.

"These protocols have been established as part of the return to in-person learning for all district schools, providing for ease of isolation and contact tracing on campuses, should the need arise," the education department stated.

Said Mr. McGregor, "All of our schools have plans in place for scenarios such as this. We know that we are operating in an environment of a global pandemic, so the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff remain first. We continue to follow the health guidelines to ensure that we can operate safely. I trust our kindergarten student and their family will be in good health."

According to the release, D.O.E. Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin pointed out that operating in-person learning safely during the pandemic is the new norm. "It is to be expected that we will have reports of possible exposure to COVID-19 among students and staff, but the important thing is that we have the appropriate protocols in place, which we have now activated at Pearl B. Larsen," she said. "Being able to manage these situations with a smaller student population on our campuses will help us strengthen our operations in the fall, with possibly more students returning for in-person learning during the 2021-2022 school year."

The department said it would provide an update on the kindergarten class's return to in-person learning.

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