

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Dept. of Education Now Says All Graduation Ceremonies Will Be Drive-Thru, Refusing to Budge Even After Protest

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St. Croix Central High and Educational Complex students protested outside Gov't House on St. Croix on Sat. May 8, 2021, displeased by the Dept. of Education's alleged flip-flopping on in-person graduation plans to settle on a drive-thru setup. By. KYLE MURPHY FOR VI CONSORTIUM

Students of the Charlotte Amalie High School were to enjoy an in-person, sit-down graduation ceremony with restrictions and protocols in place to protect against the spread of Covid-19. However, that's no longer the case as the Dept. of Education — following an outcry from St. Croix graduating seniors who have called on the department to allow in-

person, sit-down events for the St. Croix Educational Complex and St. Croix Central High School — has doubled down on its stance in a release issued Saturday where the department said it sought to "reinforce and clarify" its position.

The hardening of its posture not to host in-person, seated graduations occurred during livestream while St. Croix students [were protesting the department's decision](#). The department continues to say its actions are to protect students against the spread of Covid-19. On the U.S. mainland, both high schools and institutions of higher learning are hosting safe, [in-person, sit-down graduation ceremonies](#).

Said D.O.E., "As the territory is still responding to the coronavirus pandemic, the Department of Education and its schools are committed to doing everything to ensure the health and safety of its students and staff. In the same way the department has opted to conduct classes in a hybrid fashion—with some students attending in-person and others attending virtually—graduations are being conducted hybrid. In 2020, graduations were conducted virtually, as Covid-19 continued to rage and a vaccine was not yet available; this year, as increasing numbers of residents are being vaccinated, the VIDE has taken the approach to conduct the 2021 high school graduations in a hybrid format, with the guidance and support of the V.I. Department of Health."

Said Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion, "The Department of Health is committed to working with the Department of Education to keep students and their families safe from Covid-19. The DOH approves the guidelines to be observed within both Districts and will have our Covid-19 team on site to assist. Graduations are important milestones, and we are all so proud to see our students accomplish their goals. We must remember that we are in the midst of a pandemic with 88 active Covid-19 cases in the territory. The health and safety of the public is my top priority."

Below, the department's plans for 2021 graduation events:

- All graduation ceremonies will be conducted in a hybrid fashion—some ceremony elements will be prerecorded while others will take place drive-thru fashion: First Component: Prerecorded messages from school officials and dignitaries; Second Component: In-person diploma presentations; Third Component: Prerecorded cap-and-gown presentation of graduates
- All graduation ceremonies will be executed in a mobile format, this will consist of either a drive-through ceremony or a walk-through ceremony
- All graduation ceremonies will feature graduates walking across a stage or designated area to receive their diploma, be greeted by dignitaries
- Parent/Guest will be allowed to take photos while graduate is crossing the stage
- No graduation ceremony will accommodate seated, in-person audiences
- All graduations will be live streamed on the Virgin Islands Department of Education's Facebook page

St. Croix Central High School – May 18, 2021 @ 10 a.m.

- A stage will be erected in the main parking lot

- Students will drive up, exit the vehicle, walk across stage to receive diploma, then return to vehicle and exit campus

St. Croix Educational Complex High School – May 19, 2021 @ 10 a.m.

- A stage will be erected on the school's soccer field
- Students will drive up, exit the vehicle, walk across stage to receive diploma, then return to vehicle and exit campus

Ivanna Eudora Kean High School – May 20, 2021 @ 1 p.m.

- Students will drive up to the elevated steps of the gymnasium, exit the vehicle and move toward the Walk Ray to receive their diploma, then return to vehicle and exit campus

Charlotte Amalie High School – May 21, 2021 @ 1 p.m.

- Students will line up outside, enter the Ruth E. Thomas Auditorium and walk across the stage to receive their diploma
- Students will exit the auditorium and campus after receiving diploma