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Dept. of Education to Resume Some In-Person Learning Sept. 7; Grades 4-12 to Continue Virtually

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The V.I. Dept. of Education announced Friday that it will resume in-person learning on Sept. 7 for students in grades PreK-3rd, Special Education self-contained classes, and Career & Technical Education students enrolled in a specific career pathway. Students in grades 4-12 will continue to learn virtually. Parents of students slated to return to campuses may also choose to have their children continue to learn virtually, the department said.

D.O.E. Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin, in consultation with Governor Albert Bryan and Health Commissioner Justa Encarnacion, planned a phased approach to returning students to school campuses as the territory continues to respond to the highly contagious Delta variant, Education said in its release.

“We are prepared and excited to bring our most vulnerable student populations and those needing hands-on training back to our school campuses, as we did in March,” Ms. Berry-Benjamin said. “This approach will ensure we are providing students with that all-important face-to-face instruction, but in the safest way possible. We have established safety protocols on our campuses that students and employees will practice, and school administrators will enforce. The Department of Education continues to work closely with Governor Bryan and Commissioner Encarnacion concerning the safe operation of schools during the pandemic.”

Said Mr. Bryan, “It was important for the Bryan-Roach Administration to get our students back into physical classrooms, but also give parents the benefit of choosing how their children would learn – whether virtually or in-person. Last school year, the Department of Education had an extremely successful return of students to the school campuses, and we believe now is the right time to begin the process of bringing students back, as vaccinations have seen an encouraging increase territory-wide in recent weeks.”

According to the release, school administrators will return to campuses on Aug. 31, while teachers, other professionals and support staff will return on Sept. 1. Teachers who will resume in-person instruction will conduct virtual classes from 8-10 a.m., Sept. 1-3, and use the remainder of the workday to prepare their classrooms.

Return to In-Person Learning

- Schools that open for in-person learning on Sept. 7 will revert to virtual learning, if guided by the VIDOH to do so, should an increase in COVID-19 cases impact in-person operations
- Students or staff exhibiting any signs of illness should remain home and seek medical attention
- The Department of Education has equipped its schools with the necessary technology to seamlessly move from in-person operations to virtual operations when necessary
- All students needing a laptop or MiFi internet device have been issued these items - additional MiFi devices will be made available in early September
- Students are required to be dressed in full uniform while on campus
- Visitors, including parents, are not allowed on school premises without an appointment

Campus Safety Protocols

Masks

- Students and staff are required to wear masks that cover the nose and mouth while on campus; masks are considered a part of the school uniform
- Regular breaks are incorporated into the school day or on an as-need basis for students to remove their masks outside

Handwashing/Sanitization

- Frequent handwashing and/or use of hand sanitizer is a normal part of the school day
- Additional handwashing stations have been placed throughout school campuses; bathrooms and classrooms have been retrofitted with automatic paper towel, soap and hand sanitizer dispensers

Social Distancing

- Under the guidance of the V.I. Department of Health, a two-feet distance will be maintained between desks and students/staff are required to maintain three-feet social distancing when traversing the campus

Plexiglas Barriers

- Plexiglas barriers are installed at teacher desks, at student desks in grades PreK-3rd, and at front offices. These barriers are not required by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) or the VIDO; the Department of Education installed the items as an added measure of safety for students and staff

Temperature Checks

- Temperature checks will be taken each morning before students and staff are granted entry into the school building
- Isolation rooms have been made available on each school campus to accommodate students and staff exhibiting signs of illness

Covid-19 On-Campus Testing

- With support from the VIDO and the consent of parents, schools will conduct regular COVID-19 testing of students
- The Department of Education has also partnered with Affinity Empowering, a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services contractor, to bring PCR testing to K-12 students

Vaccination

- The Department of Education strongly encourages all employees and students age 12 and older to get vaccinated
- The Department of Education, in conjunction with the Department of Health and the teacher's unions will host a series of on-campus vaccination drives for school-based personnel during the month of September
- To schedule an appointment for a FREE COVID-19 vaccine, visit www.covid19usvi.com/vaccines.

School Lunch

- Students in grades PreK-3 will receive packaged breakfast and lunch meals in their classrooms
- Other students may retrieve breakfast and lunch, in a grab-and-go format, from a designated area on the school campus
- Cafeterias will remain closed
- Parents/guardians of students learning virtually may visit the meal distribution site closest to their home to pick up meals (see attached distribution sites)

School Bus Transportation

- School bus transportation will resume regular operations; a comprehensive bus schedule will be released to the public

- Students and bus operators are required to wear a mask that covers the nose and mouth while on the school bus
- Under guidance from the VIDOH, no more than two students are allowed per seat
- The VIDOH will conduct regular site visits to bus stops to ensure safety protocols are being followed

For the last three months of the 2020-2021 school year—March through May—the Department of Education resumed in-person learning for students in grades PreK-3rd, Special Education self-contained classes, and Career & Technical Education students enrolled in a specific career pathway.