

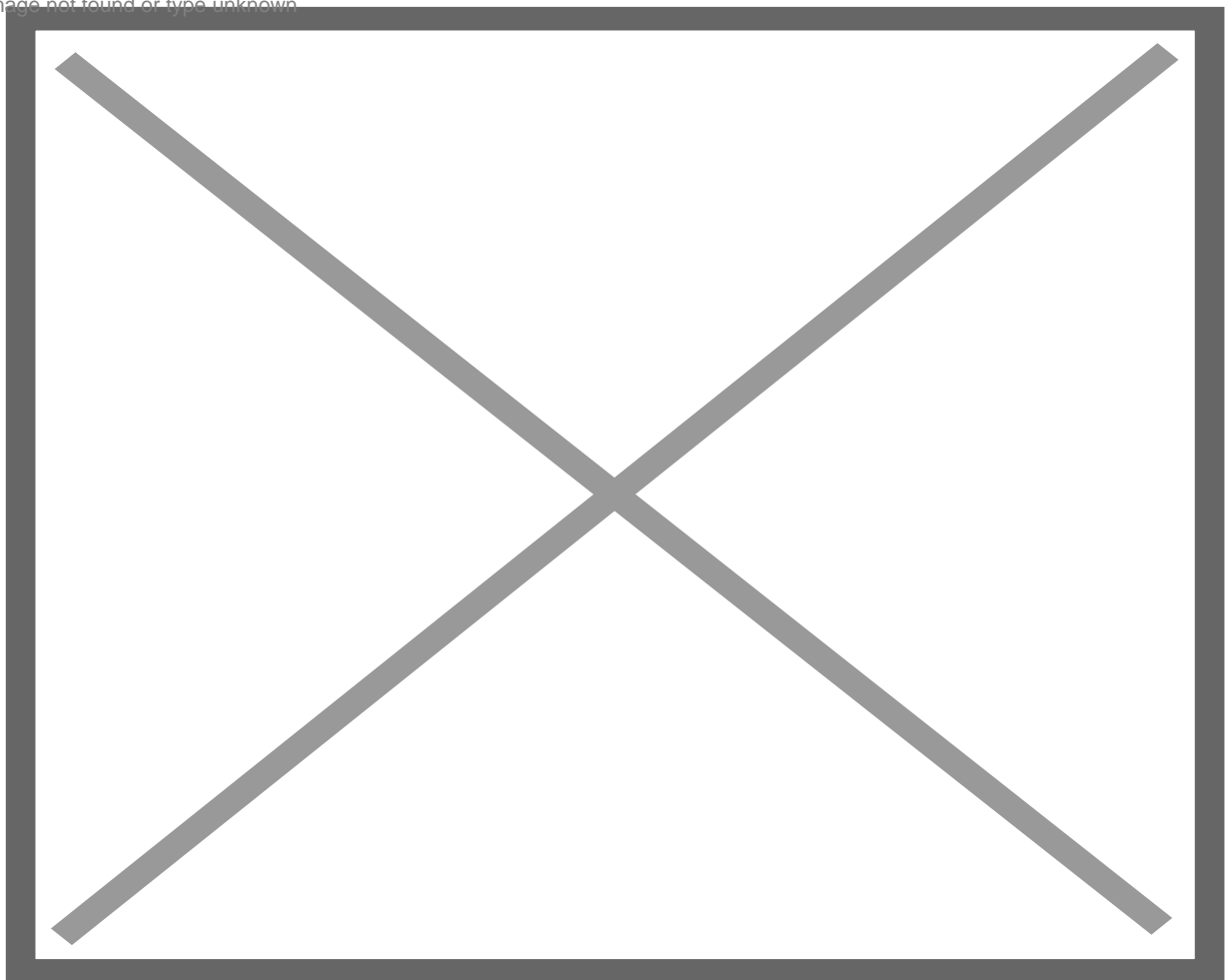
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# Board of Education Calls on D.O.E. to Delay Return to In-Person Learning, Says Department Attempting to Evade Requirement to Ensure Safety of Students and Staff

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The V.I. Board of Education on Friday called the V.I. Department of Education's move to return select public school students to in-person learning, premature, and said it is against the return to in-person learning until the department has attained the required clearances that attest to the readiness and safety of the territory's public schools.

D.O.E. [on Friday](#) announced the resumption of 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.

Kyza A. Callwood, chairman of the 20th Board of Education, said D.O.E.'s decision to return to in-person learning was not made in collaboration with the board or in accordance with statutory requirements.

“Title 17 of the Virgin Islands Code mandates that the Board, in consultation with partner agencies to include the Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Department of Health, and the Department of Planning and Natural Resources will certify the safety of schools prior to the commencement of every school year,” Mr. Callwood stated. “While the Board has conducted a walk-through of the territory’s schools and provided the Department with recommendations and suggestions for the reopening of schools, it has not received those reports or pertinent responses needed to conclusively determine that our schools are adequately and equitably prepared for the return to in-person learning and instruction. In short, the Department is attempting to circumvent those statutory requirements that are intended to ensure the safety of education personnel and students.”

In addition to the lack of certification by critical agencies prior to the re-opening of schools, the V.I. Board of Education said it has the following concerns:

- The Department’s decision to return the PreK-3 students to in-person learning, considering that this population is not eligible for vaccinations and are likely to be asymptomatic or experience only mild symptoms;
- The Department’s ability to protect the PreK-3 population from the new and rapid spread of the Delta variant;
- The Department’s plan to address the mental health and well-being of the PreK-3 population;
- The Department’s ability to support technological challenges of internet demand given some students will be on the physical school campus, while others are home;
- The absence of registered school nurses in every school;
- The strategy for conducting Covid-19 testing for teachers and students prior to entering the school campus;
- The process for students entering and exiting the campus, especially for those schools that only have roadway access; and
- The Department’s effort to address ventilation and air flow in each classroom that will be utilized.

The board recommended that D.O.E. delay the reopening of schools until the department can address the board’s concerns and ensure the safety and security of each child while in school due to active spread of Covid-19 and the vulnerabilities associated with the PreK-3 population. The board also maintains that the pandemic environment demands that school nurses are available at each school facility to further support the health and safety of education personnel and students.

"While board believes that returning to in-person learning and instruction can support a child’s development, the full transition back to the physical school building can prove challenging for some students," stated the release. "However, the board anticipates that it will continue to work with the department to satisfy statutory requirements needed to support the safe return to in-person learning. We must make collaborative decisions that is in the best interest of each student,

equitably."

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