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All Elementary School Students Will Return to In-Person Learning Jan. 10; Hybrid Model Announced for Jr. High Students, Seniors

Education / **Published On November 08, 2021 01:29 PM /**

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The V.I. Dept. of Education on Monday provided details of its Jan. 10 2022 school reopening plans, which sees all elementary school students returning to five-day, in-person learning while junior high and high school students will learn under a hybrid approach that includes some days of in-person instruction and some virtual learning.

Education Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin opened the press briefing by stating that with Covid-19 vaccines available to all adults and for children ages 5-11 — along with active infections in the territory receding — "it is the right time to begin moving toward a greater sense of normalcy for all of our students."

Along with Ms. Berry-Benjamin, St. Croix Superintendent Carlos McGregor and St. Thomas-St. John Deputy Superintendent Symra Dee Brown were also on hand to provide information relative to preparations in their respective districts. The press conference was held at Gov't House on St. Croix.

According to Mr. Gregory, all students enrolled at the Lew Muckle Elementary School, Ricardo Richards Elementary School, Alfredo Andrews Elementary School, Pearl B. Larsen PreK-8 School, Eulalie Rivera, Claude O. Markoe and Juanita Gardine schools will attend classes in-person five days a week.

He added that seventh and eighth grade students at John H. Woodson Junior High will attend school in-person two days per week and two days virtually. One day, Wednesday, will be set aside for deep cleaning.

Ninth grade students attending the St. Croix Educational Complex and the St. Croix Central High School will have four days in-person learning and one day virtual.

Tenth, 11th and 12th grade students at both high schools will have two days in-person learning and three days of virtual learning each week.

Students at the Positive Connections Alternative Education site will attend school three days in-person and two days virtually.

The St. Croix Career and Technical Education Center's schedule will remain the same, Mr. McGregor said. "These students will learn in-person five days weekly."

Mr. McGregor said the St. Croix district has invested heavily in protective equipment and other measures to help mitigate Covid-19 outbreaks. Among them are Plexiglass barriers for the desks of teachers and students, hand-washing stations, automatic soap and hand sanitizer dispensers, temperature check instruments, safety signage, designated isolation rooms and instructional technology "to ensure that our schools are safe for the return of our students and staff," he said.

Similarly to the St. Croix District, ninth grade students attending the Charlotte Amalie High School and the Ivanna Eudora Kean High School will have four days in-person learning and one day virtual. These 9th grade C.A.H.S. and I.E.K.H.S. students will attend in-person learning Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursday and Fridays. Deep cleaning has been scheduled for Wednesdays.

Like the St. Croix district, C.A.H.S. and I.E.K.H.S. 10th, 11th and 12th grade students have two days in-person learning and three days of virtual learning each week. The district has also taken similar measures aimed at mitigating spread of the virulent disease.

Asked by the Consortium for a timeline on when the senior students would return to five-day in-person learning, Mr. Gregory did not provide a timeline. Instead, he pointed to the student population of high schools — estimated to be around 900 at each high school, according to Mr. McGregor — as the reason for the hybrid approach for the seniors compared to the elementary students.

He said St. Croix elementary schools have an estimated 400 students at the highest, while St. Thomas elementary schools average 600. The John H. Woodson Junior High School has roughly 500 students, the superintendent said.