

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Public School Students Return to Virtual Classes Jan. 10; In-Person Learning Pushed Back to Jan. 24

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In-Person classes for students in public schools in the territory will resume on January 24, 2022 but in keeping with the schedule to reopen schools on January 10th, Governor Albert Bryan has announced that on that day the reopening will be all virtual classes.

“I want to announce today that all of the territory’s public school students in grades Pre-K through 12th grade will return to school on January 10th virtually. All public schools will return to school on January 10th but everyone will be virtual,” the governor said Tuesday in his first news conference for 2022.

There are currently more than 2,000 active Covid-19 cases territory-wide, and this is contributing to the delay for in-person classes. However, the situation is under continuous assessment. "We are continuing to monitor these active cases and make an evaluation every two weeks, but this is our plan for now," said the governor as he justified the decision for students to resume classes using technological devices.

Despite the two weeks delay for in-person classes, all school-based personnel are to report to their respective school campuses as scheduled for Friday, January 07th.

"Our Department of Education personnel have been affected by the virus too, so even though we don't have teachers in schools or monitors or cafeteria workers, they still out there being infected by the general public in this community spread. We are already having shortages in terms of having teachers available or having personnel to do monitoring," the governor explained.

"As we go on, we will be monitoring these staff shortages which is one of the reasons why it is so important to have people report on Friday. We will have a better picture of how many people we have healthy, how many people we have with Covid-19, how many people are outside of the territory and trying to get in," he said.

Sharing information about the situation in other states, Governor Bryan said that across the nation, the public school systems are in a similar situation almost everywhere and are going virtual. "So, the respective plans based on the public health situation in the states are doing as much as possible to try and get their students in schools, but at the same time mitigate the spread," he said.

Mr. Bryan said local data is projecting a significant reduction in active cases for the coming days because it appears as if the numbers have peaked and are now flattening out. "We think as we move on during the week, we will start to see the numbers flatten out in a little bit. The other thing that is happening is that the people are recovering rather quickly," he said.

Besides the resumption of classes online on January 10, the various government offices that closed or offered reduced hours will be returning to normal. "I will make sure that if there are any other changes to come about, we will let you know," he said.

Referring to the low vaccination rate among children in the USVI, the governor attempted to persuade parents to get their children vaccinated before the commencement of in-person classes. "We understand that there is still a number of students eligible for the vaccines who are not yet vaccinated, so if you are a parent out there, we want you to keep your children safe, so go out there and get them vaccinated," he said while encouraging those who qualify for a booster shot to have it administered.

"For all those students who are already vaccinated, you can get a booster if it's been more than six months. We want to make sure that we have a safe as possible learning environment for all our students and for all of our administrators and our teachers. I agree with everyone that the classroom is the best setting for learning, you don't have any argument there," he said.