

V.I. Board of Education Boosts Student Financial Aid Amid Lengthy Executive Session

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In a special meeting on Thursday evening, the Virgin Islands Board of Education approved a number of measures following a lengthy executive session.

The meeting began shortly after 5:30 p.m. and was immediately followed by a motion to move into executive session. This prompted a short, vigorous discussion due to opposition by one board member, who argued that a closed session would be in violation of the sunshine act.

However, other members supported Board Chair Kyza Callwood's argument that the discussion would necessarily entail disclosing personal, sensitive financial information of some of the students, and that would require the board to protect the privacy of those students by going into executive session. The motion carried over the objections of two of the board's members, and

BOE then began an executive session which lasted approximately four hours before returning to report their decisions.

The board has made a decision to raise the total funding that students can get from its loan and grant program to \$3,000, apportioning an additional \$1,500 each for loans and grants. Furthermore, the maximum limit for these awards has been boosted by \$500, a change justified by the high cost of education, as stated by the Board of Education Chair, Dr. Kyza Callwood.

The board also considered and approved a motion to give students who have fallen behind in maintaining GPA requirements a semester to “catch up” on their grades, so that they can remain eligible for their scholarships. This provision, according to Mr. Callwood, also makes accommodation for students who were unenrolled from a class through no fault of their own.

A motion to allow discretionary funds awarded but not accepted by students to return to the board’s revolving fund was also approved, as was a motion to increase the board’s discretionary fund to \$11,250 from \$10,000. “This allows for other students to get additional monies to be able to go to school,” said Mr. Callwood, speaking of those who apply under the board’s financial aid program.

A raft of scholarship awards and grants were also discussed and approved by the board, including the in-service training grants, special legislative grants, general scholarship awards and nursing awards among others. Recipients of the financial aid, awards, and grant packages will be listed on the board’s website as well as in local press outlets.