

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Commissioner Outlines Vision for Education Overhaul, Welcomes School Maintenance Bureau

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V.I. Dept. of Education Commissioner Dionne Wells-Hedington

Education Commissioner Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedington during a recent V.I. Board of Education meeting outlined extensive plans for educational reform in the upcoming academic year.

Focused on maximizing the potential of the Department of Education's employees and students alike, the commissioner underscored the significance of reformative changes, personalized learning plans, and the advent of the School Maintenance Bureau. The meeting touched upon various areas, including instructional practices, staff development,

the integration of technology, and infrastructure development.

"We know that as a leader, I am responsible for ensuring that the resources and support are available to help my employees become the best at whatever they are tasked to accomplish," she stated, highlighting her role in driving educational progress.

The commissioner presented the department's intent to strengthen foundational skills, emphasizing the imperative need for improving instruction in reading and math. Efforts will focus on expanding career and technical programs and developing transition plans for students in partnership with other government agencies and the business community.

In her report, Wells-Hedrington addressed the significant role of school principals in student success. She noted the development of school improvement plans and the allocation of funding for their implementation, which will serve as a measure of accountability. Her confidence in the department's strategic focus was evident in her assertion that, "We improve our instructional practices to meet the needs of our students, which are our clients."

The commissioner elaborated on the specific preparations underway for the St. Thomas-St. John and St. Croix districts for the 2023-24 school year. These preparations range from aligning strategic priorities with school improvement planning and professional development to utilizing mobile virtual reality labs to enhance student engagement and improve math and reading scores.

On the infrastructure front, Wells-Hedrington discussed the the Dept. of Education's collaboration with FEMA for securing funding for school improvements and new constructions. She spotlighted projects already in progress and those awaiting final execution, underlining the importance of kitchen upgrades and fencing improvements. Both districts have received funds from the CARES Act to address air quality issues and other facility needs.

Amidst these ambitious plans, the D.O.E. also aims to address the high turnover rate among its personnel by launching aggressive local and international recruitment campaigns. Through strategic collaboration with the University of the Virgin Islands' School of Education, the department promotes on-the-job learning for student teachers, resulting in a significant number of new hires, she said.

The discussion also addressed the operational aspects of the forthcoming School Maintenance Bureau. The commissioner explained that this new bureau would integrate the facilities and maintenance unit, engineering, and the disaster school units, providing a robust structure for maintaining existing educational facilities. [A bill sponsored by Senator Donna Frett-Gregory](#) led to the establishment of the bureau.