

UPDATED JULY 19, 2020

A New Beginning. New Ways to Learn.  
A New Norm for the USVI.

## Virgin Islands Department of Education's Guide to Safely Reopen Public Schools

---

2020-2021 School Year

Racquel Berry-Benjamin  
Commissioner



THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF  
**EDUCATION**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A MESSAGE FROM COMMISSIONER RACQUEL BERRY-BENJAMIN.....2

INTRODUCTION.....3

TIMELINE.....4

THE PLAN: HEALTH AND SAFETY.....5

THE PLAN: LEARNING OPTIONS.....8

THE PLAN: STUDENT SCHEDULES.....9

THE PLAN: OPENING.....10

THE PLAN: SPECIAL STUDENT GROUPS.....11

THE PLAN: LEARNING LOSS.....11

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, ASSESSMENTS & TECHNOLOGY.....12

THE PLAN: SUPPORT SERVICES.....13

## A Message from Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin

July 16, 2020

Greetings, VIDE Family, Students, Parents and Virgin Islands Community:

It has been my honor to participate in the Territory-wide Reopening of Schools Taskforce that created a platform for health experts, government officials, educators, educational leaders, parents and other community partners to offer their insight and expertise into the safe reopening of USVI public schools. I wish to thank the Office of the Governor and our partners at the V.I. Department of Health, V.I. Board of Education, the Collective Bargaining Units, and the V.I. Department of Education's leadership team and staff who have contributed to this document.

As we seek to reopen schools, whether physically or online, this document should be used as the primary guide for safely and effectively doing so. It will serve as a foundation, but will remain a fluid work, as changes are anticipated based on the impact of the coronavirus on our local community. In it you will find what is expected of and available to students, teachers and parents, the "new norms" of educating students in the age of COVID-19, answers to frequently asked questions, and other important information to remain safe and healthy.

VIDE Team, the guidance provided by the V.I. Department of Health and the contents of this plan are only as effective as your implementation of them. Our success, to date, is evidence of how much we can accomplish as a united front. I want to commend you for your resilience and quick response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I am inspired by your commitment to face this great challenge head-on and incredibly proud of how you have pulled together to help keep Virgin Islands' students safe and afford them the ability to continue learning.

I wish to remind everyone to continue to follow the general health guidelines of wearing a mask or facial covering, washing hands frequently with soap and water or using hand sanitizer when water is not available, and practicing social distancing. Our lives depend on it.

Stay safe and remain healthy. Together, we will transform public education in the Virgin Islands.

In Your Service,



---

Racquel Berry-Benjamin  
Commissioner



INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the entire Virgin Islands community and the world. This health crisis has brought with it many challenges and never-before-experienced occurrences. Not to mention, it has changed the landscape of traditional, in-person teaching and learning to one that is online and future-facing.

This document should be considered a living document. We expect this information would be further developed to capture the changes in our local community should the coronavirus impact increase or decrease. This plan was developed with the most current information available at the time of its drafting and will be updated as new data becomes available. As such, the Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) will continue to work with the local health officials and our many partners to ensure our protocols align with the most current scientific information and community expectations. The VIDE will provide employees, students, parents and the general public all subsequent updates to this plan.

In accordance with the Virgin Islands Department of Health’s Reopening of Schools Guidelines, schools will be prepared to shift between three (3) phases based on the escalation or de-escalation of the COVID-19 virus. As of July 16, 2020, the VIDE’s plan to reopen schools for the 2020-2021 school year has been developed around Phase Yellow and Phase Red.

REOPENING OF SCHOOLS	
PHASES	
PHASE GREEN	100% Classroom face-to-face instruction
PHASE YELLOW	Combination (hybrid) of distance and face-to-face classroom instruction
PHASE RED	100% Virtual instruction

## TIMELINE

### MARCH

- 13<sup>th</sup>** • Governor Bryan declared a State of Emergency in response to COVID-19 and directed all public schools closed, effective March 18, 2020 through April 14, 2020
- 30<sup>th</sup>** • Governor Bryan renewed the State of Emergency, extending the Stay At Home Order, which prolonged school closures to April 30, 2020.

### APRIL

- 11<sup>th</sup>** • V.I. Board of Education released Resolution 001/2020-A Resolution Regarding the Promotion and Retention Policy Compliance during the COVID-19 Emergency
- 22<sup>ND</sup>** • Commissioner Berry-Benjamin announced the last day of school for the 2019-2020 school year would be June 4, 2020
- 29<sup>th</sup>** • Governor Bryan renewed the State of Emergency, establishing the Safer At Home Order, and declared all school buildings would remain closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year

### JULY

- 1<sup>st</sup>** • Governor Bryan extended the State of Emergency through September 9, 2020.
- 13<sup>th</sup>** • Governor Bryan announced the start of the 2020-2021 School Year, originally planned for August 10, would be delayed until after Labor Day 2020
- 16<sup>th</sup>** • The V.I. Department of Education revealed its Reopening of Schools Plan



## THE PLAN: HEALTH AND SAFETY

The health and safety of students and staff are the top priorities when making the decision to physically reopen school campuses. The V.I. Department of Education worked in collaboration with local health officials, key community partners, and the Office of the Governor in planning to reopen safely.

School administrators should use the V.I. Department of Health's Reopening of Schools Guidelines and this plan to develop clear protocols for their respective school campuses to ensure the safety of students and staff.

Per CDC recommendations, and consequently, the V.I. Department of Health guidelines, all staff and students should wear face coverings or face shields with a mask beneath while at school or on a school bus, and maintain at least six feet of physical distance during school activities. Additionally, students and employees must wash hands regularly and utilize hand sanitizer as needed.

### MASK PROTOCOL

- Cloth face coverings are recommended as a simple barrier to help prevent respiratory droplets from traveling into the air and onto other people when the person wearing the cloth face covering coughs, sneezes, talks, or raises their voice. This is called source control. This recommendation is based on what we know about the role respiratory droplets play in the spread of the virus that causes COVID-19. (CDC.gov)
- Masks are now a part of the school uniform in U.S. Virgin Islands Public Schools. Students are required to wear a mask to school daily. Masks can be home-made from breathable cloth material or store-bought. Medical-grade masks, such as surgical facemasks or N95 respirators, may be worn, but are not required.
- All masks must be appropriate in size, shape, and fitness to properly cover the face, as well as in written/printed words and/or applied décor. School administrators will determine if masks disrupts the learning environment and address pupils accordingly.
- Breaks from wearing masks shall be taken every 30 minutes, or as needed, while students are in their own safe place. Parents with a child/children who has health concerns should immediately notify the school administrator in writing.

**At a minimum, face coverings should be worn:**

- While boarding, riding, and disembarking the school bus
- While waiting to enter school campus
- While on school campus (except when eating or drinking)
- While in classrooms and during rotations/transitional periods
- While leaving school





## THE PLAN: HEALTH AND SAFETY

### TEMPERATURE CHECKS

- Temperature checks will be conducted daily when students, faculty, and staff arrive at school
- The temperatures of students arriving by private vehicle will be checked before students can leave the vehicle
- Students with a temperature of 100 degrees or higher will remain in the vehicle with parents and not be allowed onto the campus until they can provide written clearance from the Health Department. The same is true for all school-based employees driving personal vehicles.
- Students with elevated temperatures who walk to school or who arrive by school bus will be placed in an isolation room and parents will be called to pick them up. Parents should follow steps in the Health Department's Guidelines for Schools when a child is sick. Similarly, school-based employees who walk to work and show elevated temperatures are required to immediately leave and follow the steps in the Health Department's Guidelines.
- As a precautionary measure, parents are asked to check students' temperatures before they leave home and do not send students to school if they are sick.

### HAND WASHING & HAND SANITIZATION PROTOCOL

(From V.I. Department of Health Reopening of Schools Guidelines)

Proper hand hygiene is an important infection control measure. Each person is required to wash his/her hands regularly with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are not readily available, an alcohol-based hand sanitizer containing at least 60% alcohol should be utilized.

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Hand soap rather than hand sanitizer should be used for younger children
- Clean/disinfect frequently touched surfaces and shared objects after each use
- Hand washing and sanitization are encouraged throughout the day.

#### **Key times to clean hands in general include:**

- Before, during, and after preparing food
- Before eating food
- After using the bathroom
- After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing
- Provide paper towels and no-touch trash cans in all bathrooms, classrooms and frequently trafficked areas.
- Schools will take steps to ensure all water systems are safe at all times.
- Allow students and staff to bring hand sanitizer from home.
- Use gloves if required to touch surfaces contaminated by body fluids







## THE PLAN: HEALTH AND SAFETY

### **SANITIZATION**

- Schools will undergo a deep cleaning, in accordance with CDC guidelines, by professional cleaning contractors prior to reopening
- Cleaning contracts have been secured for both school districts
- Custodial workers will conduct routine cleaning throughout the school day; contractors will conduct daily cleaning during after school hours and on weekends
- The Department of Education has procured automatic soap and hand-sanitizer dispensers, and instituted other measures to ensure students and staff can remain safe; fixtures will be installed in schools upon their arrival to the territory

### **IF STAFF/STUDENTS DEVELOP SYMPTOMS SUGGESTIVE OF COVID 19**

(From V.I. Department of Health Reopening of Schools Guidelines)

- School personnel and students who are sick are encouraged to stay home.
- Staff and students who present with COVID-19 symptoms (such as fever, cough, or shortness of breath) at school will be immediately separated from others.
- School administrators will notify Department of Health officials immediately of any case of COVID-19.
- Inform those who have had close contact to a person suspected of COVID-19 to stay home and follow Department of Health (DOH) guidance if symptoms develop. If a person does not have symptoms, he/she is also required to follow appropriate guidance from DOH for home quarantine until cleared.
- Advise sick staff members and children not to return to the school facility/building until they have met the criteria to discontinue home isolation (quarantine).
- Call the DOH Epidemiology hotline 340-712-6299 or 340-776-1519 to arrange for testing and follow CDC guidance if symptoms develop.
- Those who become sick at school will have their temperature taken:
  - Temperature will be taken before entering school buildings or facilities.
  - Students/Staff will be isolated and sent home if reading is 100.4°F (38°C) or above.
  - Confidentiality of student/staff is to be maintained.
  - If the child is in any kind of distress, 911 will be notified immediately.
- If a student is determined to be a person under investigation (PUI), the COVID hotline should be called (before the student leaves the campus). The student will not be able to return to school without a note from the Department of Health or a negative COVID test result.
- Nurses caring for children suspected of COVID-19 exposure should immediately report their suspicion to the Department of Health.
- Schools will participate in contact tracing efforts and specimen collection efforts as directed by local health officials.

**VISIT THE V.I. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S WEBSITE TO VIEW MORE DETAILS ON THE SAFE AND HEALTHY GUIDELINES FOR SCHOOLS: [WWW.VIDE.VI](http://WWW.VIDE.VI)**



## THE PLAN: LEARNING OPTIONS

### 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR

The school year begins on **Tuesday, September 8, 2020**. This date is subject to change, should the impact of the coronavirus in the local community increase or decrease. Students, parents, teachers, and all school-based staff should remain flexible.

### SCHOOL DAY

- School days will begin and end as normal
- Six (6) hours for elementary students
- Six and ½ (6.5) for secondary students

The goal of the Department of Education is to maximize instructional hours within the boundaries of the health guidance, such as incorporating social distancing, taking breaks from wearing masks, transitional times between classes, and sanitizing surfaces throughout the school day.

### LEARNING OPTIONS

#### **Option #1 – “Learn from School” \***

- The “Learn from School” option provides the benefit of a hybrid in-person classroom instruction combined with distance learning. In this option, the total school population is divided into half, so all students are not on campus at the same time
- Students are grouped into two cohorts – A & B – and will enjoy in-person interaction with teachers three days per week and distance learning two days per week
- Each cohort will have a full day of class – six (6) hours on the elementary level and 6.5 hours on the secondary level

**\*You are not required to complete an online form if selecting the “Learn from School” option**

#### **Option #2 – “Learn from Home”**

- The “Learn from Home” option affords public school students the ability to learn exclusively online, from their home, through the aid of educational platforms, such as Edmentum, Acellus and iReady, and will be guided by a teacher
- Students enrolled in “Learn from Home” are required to remain in this tract for a full semester at a time
- Parents may choose this option for their children by completing the “Learn from Home” form on the [www.vide.vi](http://www.vide.vi) website
- Please note that the “Learn from Home” option should not be confused with “Home Instruction,” which requires the student to unenroll from the USVI public-school system. Visit [www.vide.vi](http://www.vide.vi) for more information on Home Instruction enrollment.



## THE PLAN: STUDENT SCHEDULES

- The VIDE has adopted an A/B schedule. Teachers' rosters will be divided equally with students placed into Cohorts A and B
- Students in Cohort A will attend school on Monday and Tuesday of each week, and the Friday of each "odd week" beginning from Week 1 of the 2020-2021 school year
- Students in Cohort B will attend school on Wednesday and Thursday of each week, and the Friday of each "even week" beginning from Week 2 of the 2020-2021 school year

A/B Schedule (WEEK 1)						
Student Cohorts	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	NOTES
A						All students in the A group are taught in the physical classroom on Monday & Tuesday.
B						All students in the B group are taught in the physical classroom on Wednesday & Thursday.
A						A & B Cohorts will alternate between weeks. Students in the A group are taught in the physical classroom starting on the Friday of Week 1 (Odd Weeks)

A/B Schedule (WEEK 2)						
Student Cohorts	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thurs	Fri	NOTES
A						All students in the A group are taught in the physical classroom on Monday & Tuesday.
B						All students in the B group are taught in the physical classroom on Wednesday & Thursday.
B						A & B Cohorts will alternate between weeks. Students in the B group are taught in the physical classroom starting on the Friday of Week 2 (Even Weeks)



## THE PLAN: OPENING

### SOFT OPENING

- Schools will incorporate a “soft opening” for the first two weeks following reopening in an effort to acclimate students and staff to school in the age of COVID-19
- This will allow students and staff to practice the logistics of social distancing, temperature checks, meal distribution, and other aspects of campus life to ensure compliance and efficiency
- A variety of new signage have been designed and will be posted throughout our campuses to inform students and staff of the new procedures
- Sixty-second video promos will air online, and on local radio and TV to inform students, staff, parents and the community of the new on-campus procedures

### TRAINING

- In an effort to ensure a full understanding of operating safely during the coronavirus pandemic and how to navigate the “new normal” of our school environments, a series of trainings have been arranged for teachers, students, parents, school nurses, custodial workers, kitchen workers, school monitors, bus drivers, school administrators, and all other school-based personnel
- Training dates and times will be announced; sessions will be conducted virtually or in-person, while adhering to social distancing guidelines

### CLASSROOM & CAMPUS

- In keeping with CDC and local health guidelines, classrooms will be arranged to seat students six feet apart
- Students and staff are expected to adhere to social distancing and other COVID-related signage placed throughout the school campus at all times

### BUSSING

- In keeping with CDC social distancing guidelines, school buses will carry less than half of their capacity on each pick up. We are asking for parents’ assistance by transporting their children to and from school. Parents without personal transportation and who are in need of bus service, should complete the “Pupil Transportation Application” on the [www.vide.vi](http://www.vide.vi) website.
- Students are required to wear a mask at the bus stop, and while being transported to and from school on the school bus

### MEALS

- Breakfast and lunch will be provided to students enrolled in both the Learn from School and Learn from Home options (students may bring their own meals to school)
- As per CDC guidelines, large common areas, such as the cafeteria, will remain closed
- On the elementary, jr high, and K-8 levels, students will be served meals in their classrooms; on the secondary level, grab-and-go stations will be set up for meals  
(elementary, jr high, and K-8 teachers will remain in the classroom with students during meals)
- On days students are not scheduled for in-person, classroom instruction, parents may pick up their meals from the school; this also applies to parents of students enrolled in the Learn from Home option
- Students should bring bottled water to school; water fountains and bubblers are to remain closed, per CDC and local health guidelines



## THE PLAN: SPECIAL STUDENT GROUPS

### SPECIAL EDUCATION & ENGLISH LEARNERS

- With the uncertainty of the pandemic and the flexibility provided by the U.S. Department of Education-Office of Special Education, schools have a unique opportunity to utilize in-person and distance learning options to ensure students with disabilities and other special populations, such as English Learners, are fully integrated into every aspect of preparation and participation, and to ensure the needs of all students are addressed.
- For students receiving special education services, schools will create schedules to meet the requirements of each student's Individual Education Program Plans (IEP) and provide services to students by utilizing one of the Department's two Learning Options (see Learning Options above). Similarly, for English Learners, schools will use one of the two options to educate English Learners and various technologies to push the content to those who choose to learn from home so they can learn the language. The WorldClass Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) test is now 100% online and will be administered virtually.

## THE PLAN: LEARNING LOSS

### LEARNING LOSS

- In an effort to address the learning loss students experienced during the 2019-2020 school year due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, afterschool programs in English Language Arts and Mathematics will be offered. Students and teachers interested in participating in afterschool programs should complete and submit the "Student Afterschool Application" and "Employee Afterschool Application" forms at [www.vide.vi](http://www.vide.vi).
- Students will benefit from in-person and online supports unique to each individual school

### EPISODIC DISTANCE LEARNING

- Should the pandemic strengthen in the community, after-school services should be offered from a distance using the available technology, and school personnel should maintain connections with parents and others from their school community.





## CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, ASSESSMENTS & TECHNOLOGY

### CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, ASSESSMENTS & TECHNOLOGY

- The standards and teaching material that currently make up the Curriculum at the V.I. Department of Education remain the same.
- Teachers will design and execute lessons using existing standards and instructional resources
- Teachers will schedule assessments in-person for students who choose the Learn from School option and schedule assessments on the online platforms for students who choose the Learn from Home option.
- Standardized Assessments are still on hold by a waiver from the 2019-2020 School Year. The plan will be updated when updates are received from the U.S. Department of Education.
- Each child will receive a Chromebook and access to the internet at home.
- Schoology is a new online platform that serves as a hub that houses all digital platforms supported by both Districts, including iReady, Edmentum, and Acellus. It also serves as a communication tool that allows teachers to interact with parents and students. Additionally, Schoology manages students' academic and co-curricular calendar. Finally, it is an extension of the Department's already-existing student information database—PowerSchool. This makes it easy for teachers to enter grades, and students and parents to view grades.

### FIRST MARKING PERIOD

- The 2020-2021 School Year will begin with the inventory of laptops and electronic devices currently available at the V.I. Department of Education until the Chromebooks and other educational supports for students that have been ordered arrive in the Territory.
- Similar to last year's operation, the Department will distribute laptops and Mifi devices to students until its entire online infrastructure is complete. Students with underlying health conditions will be given priority for the electronics to ensure they can continue learning while away from the physical classroom. Parents with children who have underlying health conditions may visit the Department's website at [www.vide.vi](http://www.vide.vi) and complete the "Learn from Home" form to help us better serve you.

### CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

- CTE classes engage in learning activities that require critical thinking and hands-on application.
- Schools will develop schedules to allow labs and other hands-on activities to occur during the days students are physically in the classroom.
- Theory can be done in-person and out of the classroom.
- Schools should ensure CTE programs engage students and staff in a safe manner according to the health and safety guidelines.
- Schools will develop a process that ensures all tools are cleaned after each use, so they are ready for the next student or class. This may vary from school-to-school.
- Counselors will provide students the necessary guidance they need on their respective career pathways.



## THE PLAN: SUPPORT SERVICES

### SUPPORT SERVICES

The COVID-19 pandemic has created high levels of stress for many of our staff, students, and families. This experience emphasizes the importance of social-emotional wellbeing for all. As such, the emotional wellbeing of students, staff, and families has been at the forefront of the Department's planning and decision-making. Wellness services will be in place to serve our populations. As a preventative measure, schools will:

- Promote the wellness of students and staff on a daily basis.
- Partner with the appropriate professionals to ensure the wellness of students and staff.
- Make the necessary referrals for extreme cases beyond the scope of the school.
- Develop a system to connect with students and families to promote attendance

### COUNSELING/MENTAL HEALTH

- Services will be utilized through the V.I. Department of Health and other contracted professionals
- School personnel, such as counselors, will continue to be trained to address the overall wellness of students
- All VIDE employees are encouraged to maximize the Employee Assistance Program for their personal wellness