



THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Office of Public Relations

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**Virgin Islands Department of Education Officials Issue Statement on Recent
Teacher Job Action and Student Protests**

The Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) wishes to address the ongoing situation concerning teacher job actions and student protests. This statement aims to clarify our position and provide insights into the steps being taken to address these concerns.

“Regarding recent events, the VIDE appreciates the accountability that our faculty, staff, students, parents, and our community are placing on us to address these long-standing issues that have plagued the department for many years. We understand that the demands made by our educators are rooted in a genuine desire to improve not only their working conditions but also the quality of education provided to our students,” said Commissioner Wells-Hedrington.

It is with a deep sense of commitment that the VIDE is invested in the well-being of our students and teachers. The teacher strikes and student protests have brought to the forefront concerns and aspirations of our educational community that the department remains steadfast in resolving. We acknowledge the validity of these concerns and are fully dedicated to addressing them and to ensuring that our educators have the necessary resources, support, and fair working conditions to excel in their roles.

“Equally important are the voices of our students. We acknowledge the student protests that have arisen because of the teacher job actions. We recognize their right to express their concerns about school conditions that impact their education. We also recognize their right to engage in peaceful acts of protest that do not pose a risk or harm to themselves or others. We look forward to engaging in open and respectful dialogue with students. Students, your input matters, and we are committed to creating opportunities for you to be heard. The VIDE will establish upcoming meetings for students to share their concerns and suggestions regarding their education,” said Commissioner Wells-Hedrington.

“As a superintendent, I believe in the right of our students to have their voices heard, and I deeply respect their awareness of current issues, which enables them to provide valuable input. As I emphasized to the students who protested on Friday, your voice carries weight, but I urge you to express it safely. This means maintaining a safe distance from the roadside and staying within the boundaries of your respective campuses,” said Superintendent Ottley-Herman.

Superintendent Ottley-Herman further added, “Both high school leadership teams collaborated with their staff and the Virgin Islands Police Department to ensure the safety of students who attended classes and participated in protests. The primary entrance gates of each school site remained open until the campus was clear of any potential issues.”

The impact of these protests on student instructional hours, however, cannot be overlooked. It is important to minimize disruptions to the learning process during these challenging times. Learning loss is a major concern for the VIDE because when it occurs, it is at the detriment of our students. All teachers and students in the St. Croix District are required to report to school on Monday, September 25, 2023.

Effective Monday, September 25th, the St. Croix School District will implement schedule adjustments aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of the current heatwave on students, faculty, and staff:

- **Juanita Gardine and Eulalie Rivera PreK-8 Schools:** These schools will begin the school day at 7:30am and end at 12:30pm.
- **John H. Woodson Jr. High School:** Will begin at 8:00am and end at 1:15pm.
- **St. Croix Central High School; St. Croix Educational Complex; and the Career & Educational Technical Center:** Will begin at 7:40am and end at 1:05pm.

“The job action has led to a decrease in instructional hours, causing learning loss due to the absence of teachers. Consequently, the school year will need to be extended with extra hours, and in certain instances, additional days, to fulfill the necessary minimum instructional criteria. This job action also affects the community since parents are frequently required to pick up their children and make special arrangements during this period. Furthermore, businesses in the area are experiencing repercussions as a result. By working together, we can overcome the challenges we face and ensure a brighter future for our students,” said Superintendent Ottley-Herman.

The department is proactively working on solutions to the issues raised by our educators and students, with a focus on improving working conditions and providing necessary resources. The VIDE is committed to full transparency and will host a special public presentation “**Education 360: A Comprehensive Reform Blueprint**” on **Thursday, September 28, 2023**, to provide clarity, facts, and accurate information on the following areas of concern:

- **Federal Funding**
- **Maintenance Timelines**
- **New Schools Updates**
- **Academic Recovery**

The department welcomes your input. The public will be able to pre-submit questions and concerns and VIDE officials will answer them during the live broadcast on September 28th. Regular updates on maintenance progress will also be provided to keep the public informed on specific timeline projects.

At the Virgin Islands Department of Education, we are committed to fostering a positive and productive learning environment for our students, which starts with ensuring our teachers are well-supported and motivated.

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