



THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

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Virgin Islands Department of Education Addresses Parent Concerns and Clarifies Senator's Inquiry Regarding Special Education Bus Transportation

On September 10, 2024, the Virgin Islands Department of Education's Division of Special Education held a critical meeting to address concerns and clarify questions raised during the Senate Committee on Education and Workforce Development hearing on September 9, 2024. The inquiry focused on a matter involving a Special Education (SPED) student's transportation.

The meeting convened key stakeholders, including former Senator Nelly O'Reilly, concerned parents, Special Education Bus Supervisor Ms. Peters, Special Education District Director Dr. Tanya Lockhart, and Deputy Superintendent Andrea Shillingford.

The meeting was prompted by a recent misunderstanding regarding a student's transportation. A parent initially believed their child was not picked up due to incorrect information that SPED buses lacked fuel. However, upon review, it was verified that SPED Bus Supervisor, Ms. Peters, made multiple attempts to contact the parent when the student was absent due to illness. Unfortunately, the parent missed these calls.

This incident underscored the critical need for clear and effective communication regarding the division's transportation procedures. SPED students typically receive door-to-door transportation services unless otherwise agreed upon by the child's education team. When a student is absent, the SPED Bus Supervisor contacts the parents the following day to confirm attendance and coordinate transportation. In this case, the student was absent on Friday, and the parent missed the follow-up call on Monday.

During the meeting, Deputy Superintendent Shillingford emphasized the importance of transparent communication and thorough fact-checking to avoid misunderstandings. The productive dialogue allowed for the parent to express concerns and feel supported by the SPED Division. Additionally, former Senator O'Reilly shared her commitment to verifying information directly with the VIDE. The VIDE values the opportunity to maintain open communication with concerned stakeholders and community advocates.

Deputy Superintendent Shillingford expressed appreciation to the parent and former Senator Nelly O'Reilly for their continued advocacy. "We are grateful for the parent's commitment to their child's well-being and for former Senator O'Reilly's ongoing support of our community. Their advocacy ensures that we continuously strive to improve our services," Stated Deputy Shillingford.

The Deputy Superintendent also commended Ms. Peters for her dedication to her role as SPED Bus Supervisor. “Ms. Peters’ commitment to ensuring our students’ safe transportation is exemplary. Her efforts to maintain clear lines of communication with parents, even in challenging situations, are vital to our department’s success,” Shillingford remarked.

To enhance transparency and prevent future misunderstandings, the VIDE’s SPED Division reiterated its standard procedures for special education transportation: when a student is absent, the SPED Bus Supervisor will contact parents the next day to verify attendance and arrange transportation. Parents are encouraged to check voicemails regularly and return any missed calls, as these may be from the SPED Bus Supervisor. Additionally, parents are urged to notify the school or the SPED Bus Supervisor in advance of any planned absences to facilitate efficient route planning.

This meeting underscores the division’s commitment to transparency, accountability, and ongoing support for families within the special education community. The Division of Special Education will continue its diligent efforts to address concerns and enhance services for all students.

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