



THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Office of Public Relations

1834 Kongens Gade, Charlotte Amalie * St. Thomas * U.S. Virgin Islands 00802-6746
Telephone: 340.774.0100 Ext. 8136 Fax: 340.774.1168
340.773.1095 Ext. 7064 Fax: 340.773.4624

April 8, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Cynthia T. Graham
Director, Public Relations & Communications
(340) 773-1095, Ext. 7064
cynthia.graham@vide.vi
www.vide.vi
www.facebook.com/usvi.vide

V.I. PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO REMAIN CLOSED FOR REMAINDER OF 2019-2020 SCHOOL YEAR, GRADUATIONS BEING HELD VIRTUALLY

ST. THOMAS, USVI – Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin announced April 8 during a Government House press briefing that V.I. public schools will remain closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year and that graduating seniors will be recognized in “virtual graduations.”

However, Berry-Benjamin said that although school buildings will be closed, teaching and learning will continue.

While many teachers have already begun engaging their students through remote conferencing services, such as Office 365 Teams and Zoom, beginning Tuesday, April 14, more schools will move to the expanded use of online educational platforms already in V.I. classrooms, including Edmentum, Accellus, and iReady.

In order to understand students’ access to technology at home, the Department conducted a survey in early March that indicated 82 percent of students territory-wide have internet access at home and 66 percent of students own a handheld computer or Smartphone (see full survey results below). To address the needs of students without access to technology at home, the VIDE has leveraged currently available federal funds and reprogrammed monies to secure internet access and other technologies for students requiring it. Each school district will provide those students with a laptop or Chromebook as early as next week.

Berry-Benjamin also announced that 2020 graduations will be held virtually.

“The Department of Education has determined that virtual graduation ceremonies are the best path forward to celebrate the achievements of the Class of 2020,” she said, adding, “summer enrichment classes will also be offered to students in a safe and effective format.”

	Student Population	Surveyed	Percentage
Territory	10,909	8,078	74.0
St. Croix	5,470	3,800	69.5
St. Thomas-St. John	5,439	4,278	78.7

ITEM/QUESTION	NO			YES		
	TERR	STX	STTJ	TERR	STX	STTJ
Do you own a computer?	53%	51%	54%	47%	49%	46%
Do you own a laptop?	41%	40%	43%	59%	60%	57%
Own Handheld computer or smart phone?	34%	32%	22%	66%	68%	78%
Have internet access at home?	18%	8%	12%	82%	92%	88%

Berry-Benjamin said the Department of Education “has begun planning for a permanent distance learning infrastructure to be embedded in our teaching and learning. We have created a cost proposal for a distance learning infrastructure upwards of \$14.5 million.”

Referencing the recent emergency funding made available from the U.S. Congress to assist states and territories during the coronavirus pandemic, Berry-Benjamin said, “Our hope is that the 2020 CARES Act will provide the VIDE many opportunities to transform public education in the Virgin Islands as we know it. We are presently reviewing the details of this Act to capitalize on what it allows.”

The Department of Education will provide an update on decisions for promotion and retention of students, valedictorian and salutatorian announcements, and other pertinent end-of-school-year information.

###