



THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION WELCOMED STUDENTS BACK FOR THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

The Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) welcomed students back on Monday, August 7, 2023, for the first official day of the 2023-2024 school year. Assistant Commissioner Victor Somme III, St. Croix Insular Superintendent Dr. Ericilda Ottley-Herman, St. Thomas-St. John Insular Superintendent Dr. Stefan Jurgen, and members of the VIDE's senior leadership team greeted students in both districts with a feeling of excitement and determination.

Commissioner Dionne Wells-Hedrington was unable to join Governor Albert Bryan Jr. and her senior leadership team on school visits due to a critical family emergency. However, each district utilized their Insular Superintendents and Deputy Superintendents to physically welcome students to respective campuses and engage in a round of first day school visits on St. John, St. Thomas, and St. Croix.

The theme yesterday for the VIDE was, "Welcoming Back Our Shining Stars" and schools throughout the territory had red carpet displays with balloons as students entered their respective campuses. A special banner with a hand-written message by Commissioner Well-Hedrington was also prominently placed at each school. Her message read: "I am eager to welcome back our shining stars for a successful and productive 2023-2024 school year as we continue to transform today's learners into tomorrow's leaders."

In the St. Croix District, Insular Superintendent Dr. Ericilda Ottley-Herman, Deputy Superintendent Dr. Carla Bastian, and Acting Deputy Superintendent Karen Chancellor visited the St. Croix Central High School, the St. Croix Educational Complex High School, Claude O. Markoe Elementary School, and Eulalie Rivera K-8 School. Assistant Commissioner Victor Somme III and the St. Croix District team accompanied Governor Albert Bryan Jr. in visiting the Lew Muckle Elementary School, Ricardo Richards Elementary School, and Pearl B. Larsen K-8 School.

In the St. Thomas-St. John District, Insular Superintendent Dr. Stefan Jurgen toured the Julius E. Sprauve School on St. John with Governor Albert Bryan Jr. Students were greeted with encouraging words for a productive and successful school year. Insular Superintendent Dr. Jurgen and Deputy Superintendents Dr. Desha Powell and Dr. Symra Dee Brown-Gumbs visited the

Ivanna Eudora Kean High School, Charlotte Amalie High School, Joseph A. Gomez Elementary School, Yvonne E. Milliner Bowsky Elementary School, Jane E. Tuitt Elementary School, Joseph Sibilly Elementary School, Ulla F. Muller Elementary School, Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School, and Lockhart K-8 School.

Throughout both districts, classrooms were creatively decorated by teachers to welcome students back to engaging environments fit for dynamic instruction. As a part of the school lunch menu, high schools on St. Thomas and St. Croix had fully stocked salad bars which were well received by students. The healthy addition of a range of salad choices will be available at each high school during the ongoing school year.

An additional aspect of huge success was the VIDE's Dads Take Your Child to School Day initiative. A huge thank you is extended to all fathers, father figures, male role models, fraternities, and community organizations who participated in this event to make it a success. This initiative led by the VIDE's Social Emotional Learning Unit encouraged fathers to take their child to the first day of school and meet with teachers to learn ways that they can support positive behaviors. Joining the Virgin Islands Department of Education in support of this initiative was the Office of Gun Violence Prevention and the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands.

Regarding first day challenges, some schools had to accommodate students who missed their original registration and orientation dates. Late orientation will continue at respective schools across both districts. "Parents are reminded of the importance of ensuring that their children are present and on time for school. Attendance is a vital component in the success of each student. Students must be present in school and maintain consistency in their attendance. This is an important week as students settle in for the new school year and learning and instruction begin. Parents are encouraged to contact their child's school if orientation was missed," said Commissioner Wells-Hedrington.

Parents and students of the Juanita Gardine PreK-8 School are reminded that that school will experience an abbreviated schedule with a start time of 8:15 a.m. and dismissal time of 12:30 p.m. The temporary schedule is due to the completion of the electrical system upgrade for the school. Breakfast and lunch will be served to all students. School bus services will also be provided to transport students to and from school. The school will return to a regular full schedule on Monday, August 14, 2023, from 8:15 a.m. to 3:15 p.m.

The Virgin Islands Department of Education will continue to keep the public informed regarding any changes to school instructional times that may impact students. The public is also encouraged to stay informed by visiting the vide.vi website and the Virgin Islands Department of Education Facebook page. Public discussions on key topics will continue on the VIDE's Community Connect Series which will take place each Thursday via Facebook live and resume on August 17, 2023.

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