

**GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
VIRGIN ISLANDS BOARD OF EDUCATION**



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May 15, 2021

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**VIRGIN ISLANDS BOARD OF EDUCATION ENCOURAGES VIDE TO
RECONSIDER 2021 GRADUATION PLANS**

The Virgin Islands Board of Education (VIBE) strongly encourages the Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) to reconsider its plans for public high school graduations across the territory. The Board recognizes the completion of high school as a milestone accomplishment for students, and the importance of celebrating this achievement of receiving a high school diploma. The VIBE also commends students and parents on their advocacy efforts for a graduation experience that is safe and meaningfully celebrates the students' perseverance after four years of academic disruption due to hurricanes, unplanned school closures, and the coronavirus pandemic.

Since March 9, 2021, the VIBE has been requesting the plans for the 2021 graduation and promotional ceremonies from VIDE Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin. The Board anticipated receipt of plans that adhered to COVID-19 safety guidelines to include virtual programs for a second year, smaller open-air/field ceremonies, or other creative options. To date, the VIBE has not received a response. As a policy-making Board and partner in public education, the VIBE sought to be proactive and collaborative with the VIDE to develop graduation plans that honored student and community wishes and department mandates.

While the VIBE recognizes the department's statutory oversight for the day-to-day operations of the schools, the Board also has a fiduciary responsibility to investigate those matters that are of great concern relative to the management and operations of the public schools in the Virgin Islands. Graduation is among one of the final operational actions before the academic year ends. The Board opposes mandates that do not support parity in both districts or that make participation by students and their guests inequitable.

After considering the two public statements made by the Commissioner of Education, the complaints of students, families, and the community, the VIBE strongly urges the Commissioner to adjust the restrictions imposed and accept the following guidelines while honoring the established health mandates:

1. Allow school administrators to properly plan the in-person graduation experience for the Class of 2021, with restrictions on the number of persons in attendance at one time and requirements for masking and social distancing.
2. Conduct multiple ceremonies per school.
3. Limit the length of each ceremony - not to exceed one and one-half hours.
4. Allow each graduate to have two guests in attendance and strictly enforce this requirement.
5. Allow schools to use outdoor spaces where applicable.
6. Allow schools to provide adequate seating, with 4-6 feet distancing for graduates and guests.

The Board of Education looks forward to a resolution of this matter in ways that best honor health and safety guidelines and our graduates' milestone accomplishments.

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MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Virgin Islands Board of Education is to provide leadership and oversight, set policy and advocate for continuous improvement of the Public Education System of the Virgin Islands of the United States.

VISION STATEMENT

Each child is provided with the best quality education which guarantees academic excellence, promotes our history and culture, and builds strong local and global communities.