

# GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS VIRGIN ISLANDS BOARD OF EDUCATION

## BOARD OFFICERS

Kyza A. Callwood, MPA  
**Chairman**

Winona A. Hendricks  
**Vice-Chairman**

Shawna K. Richards  
**Secretary**

**St. Croix Members**  
Winona A. Hendricks  
Terrence T. Joseph  
Emmanuella M. Perez-Cassius  
Shawna K. Richards

**St. Thomas/St. John Members**  
Kyza A. Callwood, MPA  
Judy M. Gomez, Esq.  
Nandi Sekou, Esq.  
Jeanette Smith-Barry

Angel L. Bolques, Jr.  
**At Large Member**

Stephanie J. Berry, PhD  
**Executive Director**

Emmett Hansen II  
**Associate Executive Director**

**St. Croix Office**  
1115 Strand Street  
Suite 201-B  
Christiansted, VI 00820  
Telephone No.  
340-772-4144  
Fax No.  
340-772-2895

**St. Thomas Office**  
P.O. Box 11900  
Dronningens Gade  
Nos. 60B, 61 & 62  
St. Thomas, VI 00801  
Telephone No.  
340-774-4546  
Fax. No.  
340-774-3384

## WEBSITE

[www.myviboe.com](http://www.myviboe.com)



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (NO. 39-2021)**  
Friday, August 27, 2021

## **Virgin Islands Board of Education Calls Department of Education's Announcement Premature**

The Virgin Islands Board of Education today called the Department of Education's move to return select public school students to in-person learning, premature, and is against the return to in-person learning until the Department has attained the required clearances that attest to the readiness and safety of the territory's public schools.

Kyza A. Callwood, Chairman of the 20<sup>th</sup> Board of Education, said the Department's decision to return to in-person learning was not made in collaboration with the Board or in accordance with statutory requirements. "Title 17 of the Virgin Islands Code mandates that the Board, in consultation with partner agencies to include the Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Department of Health, and the Department of Planning and Natural Resources will certify the safety of schools prior to the commencement of every school year," he stated. "While the Board has conducted a walk-through of the territory's schools and provided the Department with recommendations and suggestions for the reopening of schools, it has not received those reports or pertinent responses needed to conclusively determine that our schools are adequately and equitably prepared for the return to in-person learning and instruction. In short, the Department is attempting to circumvent those statutory requirements that are intended to ensure the safety of education personnel and students."

In addition to the lack of certification by critical agencies prior to the re-opening of schools, VIBE has the following concerns:

- The Department's decision to return the PreK-3 students to in-person learning, considering that this population is not eligible for vaccinations and are likely to be asymptomatic or experience only mild symptoms;
- The Department's ability to protect the PreK-3 population from the new and rapid spread of the Delta variant;
- The Department's plan to address the mental health and well-being of the PreK-3 population;

### **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.

- The Department's ability to support technological challenges of internet demand given some students will be on the physical school campus, while others are home;
- The absence of registered school nurses in every school;
- The strategy for conducting COVID-19 testing for teachers and students prior to entering the school campus;
- The process for students entering and exiting the campus, especially for those schools that only have roadway access; and
- The Department's effort to address ventilation and air flow in each classroom that will be utilized.

The Board recommends that the Department - delay the reopening of schools until they can address the Board's concerns and ensure the safety and security of each child while in school due to active spread of Covid-19 and the vulnerabilities associated with the PreK-3 population. The Board also maintains that the pandemic environment demands that school nurses are available at each school facility, to further support the health and safety of education personnel and students.

While Board believes that returning to in-person learning and instruction can support a child's development, the full transition back to the physical school building can prove challenging for some students. However, the Board anticipates that it will continue to work with the Department to satisfy statutory requirements needed to support the safe return to in-person learning. We must make collaborative decisions that is in the best interest of each student, equitably.

###