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- 0:00:00 madam chair we have one present six absent thank you madam clerk um do we have any correspondence december 11 2020 honorable donna fred gregory chair committee on education and workforce development 33rd legislature of the virgin islands capital building st thomas usvi 00804 dare chairwoman fred gregory today is the university of the virgin islands graduation where 370 students will be commemorated for their hard work i will be receiving my doctorate degree in creative leadership for innovation and change and serving as a class of 2020 speaker for the albert a sheen campus therefore i will not be able to attend today's committee on education and workforce development hearing scheduled to begin at 9 a.m in the earl b oddly legislative hall on the island of saint thomas i am respectfully requesting that my absence be recorded as excused my sincere apologies for any inconvenience my absence may cause Thank you for your tolerance in this matter. Sincerely, Allison L. DeGazon, PhD member, Committee on Education and Workforce Development. This concludes the correspondence, Madam Chair.
- 0:01:35 Thank you, Madam Clerk. Please mark Senator Allison DeGazon as excuse and mark Senator Kurt Viallee as tardy. And let me just take this opportunity to congratulate my colleague, Senator Allison DeGazan, for attaining, yes, Senator Allison, Dr. Senator Allison DeGazan for attaining her PhD from the University of the Virgin Islands. I say that's a big feat she served as a senator here in the 33rd and she brought meaningful legislation while still working towards attaining her PhD so and still being a mother so I say kudos to her and I want to offer her congratulations and I'm certain that my other colleagues will join me in congratulating her as the day progresses we progresses we are very very proud of of her. Now, I also want to take this opportunity to welcome Senator Marvin Bleden. He's not a member of this committee, but he is in fact present. At this time, we are going to take a two-minute recess.
- 0:03:04 Thank you. We'll be right back. THE COMMITTEE IS BACK ON RECORD MADAM CLERK CAN YOU PLEASE REVIEW THE RULE CALL AGAIN THANK YOU MADAM CHAIR WE HAVE ONE PRESENT FOUR ABSENT ONE EXCUSED ONE TARDY please mark senator stephen payne as present madam chair we have two present three

absent i'm sorry two present four absent one tardy thank you madam clerk madam clerk please read today's agenda into the record

0:04:55 Friday December 11 2020 9 a.m. the Earl B. Otley Legislative Hall St. Thomas the Committee on Education and Workforce Development will receive testimony from the Department of Education on the following a status update from the Virgin Islands Department of Education on the first marking period plans for student return to classrooms up fitting of classrooms due to COVID-19 pandemic availability of Chromebooks and MiFi devices for students number of students without devices and how they are receiving appropriate engaging instruction expenditure of federal funds and the school lunch program invited testifiers honorable Raquel Berry Benjamin commissioner Department of EDUCATION, CARLOS MCGREGOR, SUPERINTENDENT, ST. CROY DISTRICT, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, AND MR. STEPHAN JURGAN, PH.D., SUPERINTENDENT, ST. THOMAS ST. JOHN, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.

0:06:06 THANK YOU, MADAM CLERK. SO TODAY WE HAVE A PACKED AGENDA. WE HAVE THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION HERE BEFORE US, AND WE most definitely looking forward to hearing from them as it relates to the updates around a public school system here in the territory but before I begin I would like to say that I've been honored to be a chair to be the chair of the committee of education and workforce development that oversaw how we shape the education system of our children and how we should be preparing our residents to shore up our local talent pool around workforce development. Education and workforce development shape the future and the present, and the present Virgin Islands. As a former commissioner of the Department of Education, former employee, a mother of four, and for Virgin Islanders who are educated here in the territory, and as a former Charlotte Mali High School graduate I am honored to have in place in a position to serve as chair in this committee throughout this time I've learned a lot from my committee members from being the chair of course and you know the biggest lesson is learning how to lead not from the front or the back but sometimes leading from the middle and I say that to say that in the last meeting we we found ourselves in a position where we had to subpoena the Virgin Islands Department of Education to come before this body today. And of course the Department of Education held their press conference, I believe it was yesterday or the day before yesterday, before the hearing to give parents and the public necessary information. And I want to venture to say that much of that would not have happened

0:08:02 as soon as it happened, so timely, if we did not exert our oversight responsibility here as senators of the 33rd legislature. So I wanna thank my committee for standing with me and doing what's right for the children of the Virgin Islands. And I wanna also thank the Department of Education for getting the information out. And as we traverse today in this conversation, it is my hope that we'll be able to resolve many of the issues and hear the challenges and most definitely as senators figure out how we can support the department in moving forward, moving the department along for our children in a very progressive way. So I just want to say that this is my last meeting and we've done a lot. There's much more to do and we look forward to working with the Virgin Islands Department of Education and the Department of Labor. But let's make this meeting a productive one. Thank you.

0:09:06 Thank you. I also want to recognize the presence of committee member Senator Kenneth L. Gittins, a carib, and my good president, Senator Novell E. Francis. I think he's also a carib. So good morning, everyone. And we are about to start. The Department of Education is here. Commissioner Berry Benjamin, can you? And of course, let me just reiterate while we're here this morning, I also want to recognize the presence of Senator Kurt VLA. Also, a caribaracuda. So, what is it? A caribaracuda? A caribuda? Okay. So, good morning, everyone. And I'm very happy that we are all here because all of us that are here most definitely are interested in the future of this Virgin Islands. I can bet on that. So, let me just reiterate very quickly that we are here this morning to get a status update from the Virgin Islands Department of Education on the first marking period, plans for students to return to classroom, upfitting of the classrooms to the COVID-19 pandemic, the availability of Chromebooks and MiFi devices for our students, the number of students that are without devices and how they're receiving appropriate engaging instruction, of course, the expenditure of our federal dollars, and an update on the school lunch program here in the territory. Without further ado, Commissioner Raquel Berry-Bengerin, I'm gonna give you an opportunity to identify yourself. Well, there's a number of folks on the Zoom screen, so I will allow you to start by putting your name on the record. Hi, good morning, Senator, good morning.

0:10:57 Everyone in the listening audience and all of the members of the 33rd Legislature present. I'm Raquel Berry Benjamin. Here with me today are members of my leadership team and other members of the Department of Education who has oversight of respective divisions. My top leadership here present are Assistant Commissioner Soong, Deputy Commissioner Ava Penn, Mr. Carlos McGregor, Superintendent of the St. Croix District, Superintendent of the St. Thomas St. John District, Dr. Stefan Juergen. We have Dr. Dion Wells-Hedrington's team.

0:11:41 Mr. Kima Smith, Federal Grants Director. And would you like for me to call out all participants, Senator? No, I would like for the two separate superintendents to identify themselves. You can start with Mr. McGregor. Sure. Good morning,

Senator, and good morning, members of the committee. My name is Carlos McGregor. I'm the superintendent of the St. Croix District. Dr. Yergin.

0:12:11 Good morning, Senator, and everyone else. My name is Stephan Yergin, intolite superintendent for the St. Thomas-St. John School District. Good morning. All right, and I'm going to ask, because there are several individuals on this team's meeting, I will ask that before you speak, you identify yourself for the sake of the sonographer, please. It's very important for us to capture who's speaking at the particular time. So we're going to ask that you, if your cameras are off, please turn your cameras on. um commissioner barry benjamin you may proceed with your testimony thank you senator good morning honorable chairwoman senator donna fritt gregory members of the committee on education and workforce development other members of the 33rd legislature present and the listening and viewing audiences I am Raquel Berry Benjamin, Commissioner of the Virgin Islands Department of Education. The department's leadership team and I are here to provide update on the first marking period, plans for students returning to the classroom, the upfitting of classrooms due to COVID-19 pandemic, the availability of Chromebooks and MiFi devices for students, and the number of students without devices and how they are receiving appropriate engaging instruction, the expenditure of federal funds, and our school lunch program. Present with me are Victor Sonne III, my assistant commissioner, Ms. Eva Penn, my deputy commissioner, Mr. Carlos McGregor, superintendent of schools for the St.

0:14:02 Croix district, Dr. Stefan Juergen, superintendent of schools for the St. Thomas and John District, Dr. Dion Wells-Hedington's team, Mr. Alan Fleming and Mr. Joseph Sibley, Mr. Kimo Smith of Federal Grants. 2020 has been a unique year. The COVID-19 pandemic marks the end of one educational era and the start of another. It has brought about a new beginning, new ways to learn and a new norm for the usbi which we have embraced in the u.s virgin islands there's no going back to what was only movement forward despite the learning curve we are all experiencing i want to remind the community to be inspired that we are here at this juncture future focused as part of our preparation to reopen schools the vide will engage in a safe school reopening tabletop exercise with the partnership of vitima and fema the vide will engage in discussions with two mainland school districts from new york and new jersey we will thoroughly engage these school districts on their experiences thus far with respect to their model for reopening academic concerns operational concerns safety concerns after school programs etc will all be explored we're looking forward to hearing their best practices and other successes

0:15:50 At this time, both superintendents will provide updates on the first marking period, plans for students returning to our classrooms, the uplifting of classrooms due to the pandemic, the availability of Chromebooks and MiFi devices, and how students are receiving appropriate instruction with or without devices. Superintendent McGregor.

0:16:18 thank you commissioner carlos mcgregor superintendent district of st croix the st croix district has recently completed the first marking period of the 2020-2021 school year i would like to highlight our successes across the district although we are in a hundred percent virtual setting we took the opportunity to create a sense of normalcy by conducting virtual parent training in using online platforms and instructional tools celebrating hispanic heritage month red ribbon and american education week virtually conducting high school focus groups by the deputy superintendents and myself distributing over 135 647 meals as part of the no vi chagos hungry initiative included a hearty thanksgiving meal with turkey and all of the trimmons facilitating a virtual meet and greet for magnet students in graves 9 through 12.

0:17:24 collaborating with the department of sports parks and recreation to develop the territory's first student athlete combine in a bubble program achieving reaccreditation of the john h woodson junior high school virtually by the middle states association of elementary and secondary schools conducting a series of professional development for school administrators teachers paraprofessionals and support staff selecting our 2020 district teacher of the year miss alicia ramos alicia walters ramos from the synchro educational complex honoring our 2020 employee of the year miss ertha gray custodial worker the district is continuing to work diligently to address the challenges and needs of our students as they arise as they arise to a data-driven approach data from the first marking period revealed that in a st croy district teaching and learning is occurring district virtual learning walks captured the level of instruction and rigor that students are engaged in this data was used to identify areas of professional strengths and growth within our district 83.9 of our first through 12th grade students received a passing grade in comparison to 89.1 of our first two 12th grade students in the 2019 2020 school year this prompted the district to implement a student success measure where a child that had a grade less than 70 on the report card would show an incomplete an incomplete meant that students had 10 days from the date of report card distribution to improve their grade by contacting their teacher and submitting assignments given at the end of the 10 days the district pass

0:19:24 rate increased from 83.9 percent to 86.3 percent of students passing. 1,108 out of 1,175 first through third grade students received their passing grade for the first marking period. However, there were some students who experienced academic challenges where 8.9 more first graders and 5.3 more second graders received a grade lower than 70 in the first marking

period of the 2020-2021 school year than in the 1920 school year. Students in grades 7 through 12 attended virtual classes regularly with an average attendance rate of 94 percent, whereas the highest absentee rates were in the pre-kindergarten through sixth grades, with an average attendance rate of 80 percent each school team consisting of the classroom teacher guidance counselor administrators and attendance counselors have been collaborating to increase the students attendance rates by contacting students and students and their families to determine the cause for the absence facilitating basic child study team meetings conducting home visits and submitting referrals to the department of human services 73 of our granny preschool students are engaged in daily live lessons with their teachers using personal devices and with extended home learning opportunities through home links for parents the remaining 27 of our granny preschool students are contacted daily to complete work packets with teacher supports the data quantified that having our pre-k to third grade students physically returned to school is the most significant academic intervention that the district can't implement through the delivery of a high quality early learning experience that provides them the tools needed for lifelong success we have been working tirelessly to prepare our buildings to welcome students and staff

0:21:46 back to school therefore following the guidance of our public health officials the st croix district is currently making the necessary preparations to transition from phase red to phase yellow of the vid saves reopening of school plan for the second half of the 2020 2021 school year phase yellow will include a combination of distance and face-to-face classroom instruction which we will refer to as a hybrid model approximately 1878 students enrolled in pre-kindergarten through third grade special education to include sie and self-contained and second year career and technical education students will physically return to the school buildings the week of monday january 25th 2021 full time five days a week 4th through 12th grade students who learn in general education settings will continue learning at home and we will continue to evaluate options for safe return to in-person learning for those students in 2021 school schedules will remain the same in the second semester where school days meet the minimum instructional hours by grade level as prescribed by law specifically elementary schools will incorporate a staggered return for the first two weeks to assimilate students to the school building and new protocols in accordance with the cdc guidelines this will allow students to practice the logistics of social distancing temperature checks meal distribution and other aspects of campus life to ensure compliance efficiency and safety pre-k through first grade students will physically return the week of january 25th 2021 second and third grade students will physically return the week of february 1st 2021 special education to include sie and self-contained

0:23:54 classes and second year career and technical education students will physically return the week of january 25th 2021 teachers and students will continue to utilize chromebooks digital resources and platforms such as schoology edmentum i ready think central etc for both face-to-face instruction and distant learning each school will host reopening orientation sessions for parents as schools will look and feel very different when teachers and students return for the second semester a variety of new signage have been procured and will be posted throughout our campuses to inform students and staff of new procedures students will be seated in socially distant layout in classrooms in accordance with cdc guidelines all public school students are required to wear a mask as part of their school uniform and employees working with students shall wear face mask and other appropriate ppe although students will be required to bring their own from home, each school will have PPE resources to provide as needed.

0:25:16 Both student trifold partitions and teacher L-shaped desk barriers have been procured. Hand sanitizer stations are being mounted in classrooms and hand washing stations are being strategically placed amongst the school campuses. The St. Croix District has procured additional handheld thermometers for schools to supplement the initial distribution each school received in September, as temperature checks will be conducted daily when students, faculty, and staff arrive at school.

0:25:50 The No Child Goes Hungry program will continue to provide meals for students in school and learning remotely. availability continues to be of the utmost importance to us in this virtual learning environment as of december 7 2020 2475 devices which includes 1575 laptops and 850 chromebooks and 1000 mi fi devices have been issued to parents to facilitate student learning Presently, the 612 students that have indicated that they need a device to complete assignments will receive a Chromebook through our recent shipment of 730 Chromebooks. The district is expecting a shipment of 2,000 Chromebooks by the end of December and will continue to distribute devices throughout the second semester, resulting in every student receiving a device. An additional 350 MiFi devices will be distributed in the second semester to provide internet service to students who are now receiving Chromebooks. The St.

0:27:09 Croix District has encumbered \$4,113,596 of the \$7,784,167 Education Stabilization Funding, also known as the CARES Act, as of December 1st, 2020, Grant Status Report. Of the remaining \$2,862,036, \$1,536,457 have been allocated for non-public schools, and \$1,320,579 of district funds have been allocated funds have been allocated for professional service contracts, operating supplies, machinery, and equipment. Currently, justification letters for professional services,

operating supplies, and equipment are within the procurement process. Additionally, the District met its target of encumbering 100% of funding tied to our Fiscal Year 17 Consolidated Grant Application funds by September 30th, 2020. It is our hope at the district that we will be welcoming students back to our campuses beginning the week of January 25th, but as a community we must take all necessary steps to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. We are committed to our teachers, students, parents, and the entire community as we continue to move forward in providing the best learning opportunities for our students. At this time, Dr. Stefan Juergen, Superintendent of the St. Thomas District, will continue the testimony.

0:29:07 You're unmuted. You're unmuted, Superintendent. Mr. McGregor are you are you finished okay you're again you're on mute yes I was having some trouble coming off of mute i'm fine now thank you you may proceed please with me today is deputy superintendent ms disha powell i'll be reporting on the st dama st john school district the presence of covet 19 has caused the virgin islands department of education to join the nation and rest of the world to drastically modify its regular education programming in the move to 100% virtual learning from preschool years through adult learning. The entire learning community has now had some experience in teaching and learning virtually. We continue to review the guidelines of the Center for Disease Control and the local Department of Health.

0:30:30 We also monitor the updates that are reported on the active cases of COVID-19 and the threat it poses to individual life as well as the impact on the greater society. The Department of Education has designed several plans to suit our ever-changing situation from 100% in school to hybrid models to 100% virtual. distribution based on the device survey that was initially completed by parents a total of 1328 computers were requested at the beginning of the 2020 2021 school year the department distributed the entire inventory of approximately 780 computers that were available in schools and in the district office to students that were in need of a laptop we began distribution with grades 12 then 11 10 and 9th grade students before we distributed to students across the district that had absolutely no device and were receiving learning packets at the close of week one there were 988 students that did not have devices. All of those students have since been supplied with a computer from the district. Thus far, 1,280 COVID-funded Chromebooks have arrived and have been distributed to students. Currently, we have 130 students remaining that are using cell phones.

0:32:17 The St. Thomas St. John district will continue to distribute Chromebooks throughout the month of December, resulting in every student receiving a device. The move to virtual learning also brought the need to monitor students' attendance more frequently. Teachers report two absences in one week to the attendance counselors and they make contact with parents.

0:32:46 with more than 10 absences for the marking period are contacted by the guidance counselor. Of the 5,495 students in the district, 1% or 72 students have an irregular attendance pattern despite being issued a device from the district. five percent or 254 students have an extreme irregular attendance and one percent 67 or no shows truancy student attendance is a critical indicator in determining positive student outcomes there is a direct connection between student attendance and student academic social and emotional success the students that are considered truant have been absent for more than 20 days they are the students that that need additional support and must remain in close contact with teachers guidance counselors administrators and caring professionals the schools and district office has gone to great length to track monitor and stay in close contact with these students and their parents a district task force that consists of attendance counselors guidance counselors monitors superintendents school resource officers was organized in collaboration with the virgin islands police department the task force mission is simple to locate children that are not presently engaged in active learning with the department of education as students return to school school counseling support will continue to address the causes of trauma that students experience such as economic hardship death of friends and family members

0:34:52 violence abuse and neglect as we continue to monitor student success we've done a comparison of the first marking period and compared 2020 school year to the first marking period of the 2019-2020 school year in 2019-2020 school year the student count was approximately 4970 students for a total of 36,545 grades. 86.2% earned a passing grade, 31,488 grades, and there was a 12.2% failure rate with 4,474 grades. There were no students that received an incomplete and 586 students that didn't receive a grade. In a 2020-21 school year where the student population is approximately 5,462 there were 34,354 grades where 80.1 percent earned a passing grade or 27 517 grades that were passing there were 15.5 percent of those grades were a failure and not amongst the 5,312 students 888 students or 2.6 percent receive no grades and 1.9 percent

0:36:49 or 637 received incomplete due to COVID-19 the district's traditional after school program was modified to support those students that struggle as a result of not having the necessary equipment that was caused by the sudden transition to virtual education programming the virtual after school program serves all students that are currently failing so that they are able to recover grades and achieve success in their classes the district will provide ongoing support to students in an effort to build their academic and skills and support their classroom learning additional supports are also provided for ells some special education students receive supports through a specialized program funded by the district students will also have

access to computer-based intervention programs outside of virtual live sessions that will also help to support their achievement needs the 2020 after school program will be completely virtual until the return to in-person instruction the grading policy was modified for the first semester of the 2020 2021 school year to provide teachers with more flexibility to assign a grade to the work of students with varying abilities to complete and return assignments greater emphasis was placed on student participation and the definition of participation was expanded to include more options for students to engage in learning students participation accounted for 50 percent

0:38:41 the student's grade teachers assigned no grade lower than a 50 if students made reasonable efforts to participate in the learning process as we look ahead to second semester we realize that virtual learning has its advantages there are still segments of our population that we believe will benefit more from face-to-face learning for this reason we have examined the progress of our most vulnerable population in an effort to transition from virtual to face-to-face learning The following students will physically return to the campus during second semester. Students in grades pre-k, kindergarten, and first grade will return to school two days per week, effective January 25, 2021. Students in grades second and third will return to school two days per week effective february 1 2021 students in grades 4 to 12 will continue learning from home we will continue to evaluate safety measures and health concerns prior to making decisions about the return of this population social education students that are in self-contained programs will also return on january 25th 2021 for five days per week and lastly second year career and technical education students will return on january 25th 2021 for a full week of instruction teachers will be provided with time to properly close out the semester and make the physical move back to school to prepare classrooms during the week of January 18th

0:40:41 to January 22nd. Elementary schools will use the first two weeks to stagger the return of students to make every effort to reintroduce them to their new environments. They will have to learn about the physical layout, applying social distancing, wearing masks, and following all other guidelines outlying to keep them safe those that are returning to school on a hybrid model will be assigned to a cohort and will receive two consecutive days of learning on campus with the teacher present and three days of virtual learning on the alternate days paraprofessionals will provide academic support such as review of content reinforced concept and practice skills wednesday one of the virtual days will be used to deep clean the classrooms as the teacher meets with all members of the cohort of both cohorts online in small groups also interventions office hours and parental conferences will be utilized on wednesdays deep cleaning will also take place at the end of the week the remaining two days when cohorts are not in the physical building students will be engaged in asynchronous learning, this means that students will be engaged with online resources and teacher-generated activities. COVID-related signage will be posted throughout school campuses to remind all school-based personnel of the new procedures on a school campus due to the pandemic. Students will be seated in a socially distant layout in classrooms and meals will be brought to them as common spaces such as the cafeteria cannot be used at this time as per the guidelines of the cdc while each school each school will have mask on hand they are for emergency purposes only all public school students are required to wear a mask as a

0:42:45 part of their school uniform desk barriers have been procured to uplift the classroom and hand sanitizer stations are being mounted in our classrooms bathrooms and other areas on campus lastly though we have shared the plan with the public it is important for everyone to be mindful that this is a time to exercise patience even as we share this plan with you today the situation around us is rapidly changing and those changes more than likely will impact these very same plans. The presence of COVID-19 has caused the Virgin Islands Department of Education to join the nation and greater world to drastically modify its regular education programming in the move to 100% virtual learning from preschool through adult years. The entire learning community now has some experience in learning virtually we will continue to monitor the active cases and be guided by the center for disease control and department of health lastly i do want to acknowledge that we are very proud of selecting a teacher of the year in miss christina cenosa the teacher of the year 2020 teacher of the year from the ivana Udurken High School. She is the St. Thomas St. John District Teacher of the Year and we also recognize Ms. Cherise Benjamin Thomas as the Employee of the Year for 2020 for the Virgin Islands Department of Education. And now turn to Mr. Kimo Smith to report on the

0:44:35 federal funds. Good morning senators and the listening body. The Virgin Islands Department of Education Federal Grants Office currently manages 16 federal grants received from the United States Department of Education. The awarded grants include special education, Consolidated Grants, Strive and Reader, Adult Education, Improving Education in the Positive School Climate, Project Restart, and our CARES Education Stabilization Fund grant. The included table provides information on this grant as of November 30, 2020.

0:45:17 The Virgin Islands Department of Ed obligated \$14,361,929 of its FY2017 Consolidated Grant and is currently working on liquidating outstanding obligations in the amount of \$2,044,709. dollars. The liquidation period for the FY17 Consolidated Grant is set to expire December 31, 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has never negatively impacted the

department's ability to liquidate timely. Vendors continue to experience delays with receiving goods from manufacturers and delays from shipping partners and getting goods to the Virgin Islands. Additionally, during the transition of third-party fiduciary agents from Basilio Cab Associates to McConnell and Jones, the Virgin Islands Department of Ed had limited access to the financial management system, thereby restricting the receipt of goods in the system and entering of invoices for payment processing as a result of these challenges the department has requested approval from the United States Department of Education to extend the liquidation period of our FY 2017 consolidated grant the department continues to work with our vendors and feels confident that with the additional time we will be able to receive our goods supplies and deliverables tied to service agreements allowing the liquidation for all outstanding obligations the department has

0:47:08 obligated a little more than 50 percent ten million sixty six thousand three hundred and sixty dollars of the CARES funds are received on June 22 of 2020. However we are also facing challenges with this grant as vendors have been unable to deliver goods and equipment timely this has adversely impacted program implementation and the continuation of services to meet the educational needs of our students thank you good morning this is Victor Sam the third the assistant commissioner of education and I will now speak on the school lunch program for the 2020-21 school year the school breakfast and school lunch programs began operations on October 1st 2020. Meals are available for all enrolled students attending public private and parochial schools territory wide through the No Virgin Islands Trial Goes Hungry Feeding initiative the meals are served as a bulk unit which allows students to receive breakfast and lunch at the same pickup time daily in an effort to minimize in-person contact as well as relieving parents from making frequent trips to pick up meals. While we are experiencing a decrease in participation, we remain committed to providing healthy meals to students while working virtually.

0:48:53 From March 2020 to date, there have been 21 waivers from the United States Department of Agriculture accepted on behalf of the school food authorities which allows flexibility in which meals are customarily served during a normal school day in addition to their regular enrolled schools the Saint Thomas St John District has been providing meals to two new private schools the Virgin Islands Montessori School and Peter Gruber International Academy on Saint Thomas and the Gift Hill School on Saint John for the months of October November 2020 a total of 134,587 reimbursable bulk meals have been served In addition to the regular enrolled schools, the St. Croix District has been providing meals to one new private school, the School of the Good Shepherd, with one new school, the Coral Reef Academy, about to come on board shortly.

0:50:08 For the month of October-November 2020, a total of 135,647 reimbursable buck meals have been served in the St Croix District the total number of meals served by the department for the months of October and November is 270,234 total certified reimbursable meals thank you as we look forward to safely reopening schools I ask for your support partnership and flexibility throughout this process thank you for the hard work to the hard working employees of the Department of Education who have worked tirelessly to ensure the safety and overall needs of students and families here in our territory successful school systems have strong positive and consistent community support so I take this time to say a special thank you to our parents your understanding and support makes all the difference and to commission I can ask you on her team at the Department of Health for their continued guidance I'll close by asking everyone to continue following the health guidelines of wearing a mask or facial covering washing hands frequently and practicing social distancing this concludes my testimony my team and I are here to answer any questions that you might have thank you thank you commissioner Barry Benjamin and thank you to the two superintendents and the assistant commissioner for their testimony as well

0:51:59 Well, of course, today is a short day for this particular committee because we have to move into session by noon, but it's unfortunate that we have to do that because based on the testimony that was provided today, I am certain that my colleagues have so many questions around what's truly happening with our students. Colleagues we are going to go to a seven minute round but before we do that I um there are a number of things that jumped out at me so I'm going to start with my concerns around the St Thomas St John District uh truant no-show population and um what are we doing about it I see that um we talked about counselors going out to making contact with parents and I learned yesterday for full disclosure that there was a team of individuals from the Department of Education along with the officers from VIPD who work at the schools who actually went out yesterday for the first time to address this whole truant situation. So I need to find out first whether or not that is true and how in fact we could have 254 truant students and 67 students who are no show and what are we doing about it. Our students are losing in this battle and our job is to make sure that they win. So superintendent and I note of course that the superintendent from the St. Croix District did not necessarily provide that level of detail. So, Dr. Yergin, we need to get an update as to how we are dealing with this issue and how we are going to ensure that we are going to save our children from an academic perspective. These numbers do not look good based on, I mean, you have 5% of your 5,000 students truant and 1% no show that's six percent that's truly truant so um you know what what's what are we doing with the no show are they dropouts did they leave the island what's the story and how are we addressing the truancy senator thank you for asking the question because I really want us to I thought it was really

really important for us to really put that information out there because it's really

0:54:39 and appeal so that everyone in the virgin islands community is aware of you know one of our biggest challenges at this time many of our students are at home and when parents leave home many of them just go back into bed students are not showing up for a variety of reasons i see them as i traverse the island many of them are not logging on and so that number of 254 represents five percent of our students that really need to be coming to school regularly and i just really want to make an appeal to our parents that it's so important for you to have students and make sure it's really the parents responsibility to ensure that students are arriving to school every day now we know that arriving to school looks a little different in that they're actually in their homes but you still have to make sure that they are up that they are alert that they are prepared for the day's learning so you know the department of education uh we our guidance counselors our attendance counselors are reaching out our monitors that are out there feeding our students are also engaging them we have made contact with just about you know all of our students that are not showing up regularly and we know that it's something and we want to see immediate improvement so i'm just making and appeal to parents that you really need to follow up with the school i need to ensure that your students are attending school regularly so so so um i don't want to belabor this because

0:56:32 like i said we don't have look time is not on our side today which is very unfortunate but um superintendent uh the question was specifically how is the department of education is dealing with this issue and you basically said that the counselors are in touch and i also went further to say that um i learned yesterday that um the monitors etc went out to the school to the various neighborhoods for the first time and you did not touch on that and again 254 truant students in the st thomas st john district is unacceptable and the question is what are we truly doing about it i heard your appeal to the parents but we have to recognize that we are going to lose a generation as a result of this so it means that we have to we should be doing all that we can do to address this there should be some concrete plan in place to address this and i didn't get that from you well i i if i can also add i know you mentioned the task force we did establish a task force for for the purpose of being able to go out and locate a lot of these students and that's what we've been doing. When did you start doing that? We've been we have been in collaboration with the Virgin Islands Police Department from weeks ago we stepped it up a notch using the resource of Virgin Islands Police Department but we've been out looking for students. When did that process begin to begin, Superintendent.

0:58:14 October... So it began in October? The physical going out to look for students began October 28th. Alright, I know that the St. Croix District did not provide any updates around that, and I'm certain that I have a number of colleagues from the St. Croix District, the St. Croix District. So I'm going to move on. In the interest of time, Senator Blyden, you're recognized for your seven minutes. Thank you. Thank you so much, Madam Chair. Good morning to my colleagues. Good morning to the viewing and listening audience. And good morning, Commissioner Berry Benjamin. Thank you so much for your testimony. And good morning to your colleagues there with you. Good morning, Senator Blyden. I want to continue there. Dr. Juergens, I want to continue there because I made a note in my, as you're testifying with a truancy, and a number of 254, that's a very disturbing number. My question is, did you look in to see, number one, what the reasons for it, and number two, what grade level are we speaking about in terms of the numbers? Do you have those numbers available?

0:59:31 the other information available doctor i can't get you i can't get you a breakdown of those students that are having issues with attendance i do have it per school and per grade level okay i think that's critical also so we can basically follow up and see exactly what what can be done and why they're having those issues. It can be something simple, it can be some measure, but in order to deal with the situation, you need to know that those information and know to respond to it. I think that will go far away. Secondly, in terms of the schedule to go back to school in January, I applaud the department for trying their best and following other model that's already working in bringing our students back to school. And I think that would also assist with the truancy issue you have. I noticed in St. Croix District that they're going back to four or five days for all the students in St. Thomas and John District is two days a week for several grade levels.

1:00:34 Is there anything that can be done in terms of having old numbers change in this district and still maintain the safety of our students and faculty and staff? Dr. Jorgens? Senator, I first want to let you know that it's the goal of all of ours to have our students in school for five days, that's exactly what we hope for. But in designing any plan, you have to take into consideration the resources that you have available. And in this district, we just do not have the number of paraprofessionals to be able to split the class in half and assign that half to the paraprofessionals. Also the physical space is also an issue. So those two factors, if we're maintaining social distancing, have contributed to why the St. Thomas St. John plan is not allowing students to come into school for five days out of the week.

1:01:42 And speaking about applying, I noticed in your testimony you also spoke in reference to working tirelessly in order to have the buildings back in shape to welcome back our students and staff. with that being done succinctly as we speak we

have we have purchased hand we have purchased hand sanitizer dispensers soap dispensers we've uh washing stations signage will be on every campus in in addition to that i understand that that supplies but in addition to that do you have plexi going up in some areas etc in the schools that was that was in the testimony we do have plexiglass on every student's desk as well as all teachers desk we've also outfitted the main office in every school uh with the plexiglass all of our schools will be issued ppes okay very well let's speak um about the devices because despite um the testimony in terms of um devices and students being given the devices through the end of december i'm still receiving a lot of calls to my office when it comes to parents and devices. As a matter of fact, up to last night when I met this parent, she was pretty concerned and very disappointed because she was stating to me that, I'm not going to mention her school, I'm going to talk to the commissioner offline, that her daughter was given a computer that was donated to the school because at the time they didn't have any. But from the time she received it, it was not working properly and she has been behind in her work and she's have been trying to get a device um changed or get a no one and she was told she have to pay for it and i said no one should have to pay for a device especially with the schools when we have devices given up for free so i told him i'm going to follow up with a commissioner and see how we can assist her daughter um expeditiously because that's a problem to me and after i saw the testimonies stating that everyone had given what given a device but why do we have 130 students remaining that's using cell phone is that because they don't

1:04:00 want a device um dr jurgens how does that work senator as the devices come in we get them in the hands of the students we first started giving devices to students that did not have a device at all i understand that and that's what i read but i'm asking for a hundred for 130 students that's still using a cell phone is that because they still have not received the device oh that's a choice that's that's my question that's correct so as the next batch comes in that will take care of that 130 students oh okay so we still have more batches to come in before the end of the year to take care of those 130. and what about situation like a young lady where the device um is not functioning the way it should no force of the student own how does that work what type of backup do we have what type of plan do we have in place when it comes to those type of of situations we have to consider several things senator if if a student was issued a device and the device becomes damaged and we don't have another device to give them at the time they're gonna have to wait until we get a device to be able to give it to them i understand i agree with you know i'm not saying that i asked what is the plan moving forward when it comes to those types of situations that's all i'm asking what's the plan currently currently senator we have about 2500 computers that we are still waiting to receive and situations unique situations that you have just mentioned that will be addressed once we continue to receive the additional computers from our inventory okay let me um go to i'm I'm a commissioner.

1:05:46 Good morning again, commissioner. Let me ask quickly in terms of trying to have the students back on campus come January 25th. Ms. Madam Chair, come January 25th. And I know we have a situation with testing when it comes to student dealing on the buses. And also I know there was some meeting with school bus in terms of them preparing and getting ready for the new semester come January. How have the talks been going and have they been taken care of in terms of the advance in order to prepare and come to capacity and make sure that buses are inspected, et cetera, when it comes to busing our students to and from the schools? Hi. Thank you for the question, Senator. As it relates to testing, in speaking with the Department of Health and receiving their guidance, the students will not be tested. There's no need to test every child to enter the campus. Temperature checks will be taking place.

1:06:43 Any child or adult who are showing symptoms of any kind, they will be the ones who would go in the isolation area and then follow up with the Department of Health to get tested. As it relates to our school buses, back in August, we asked our community, if you recall, we were opening on a hybrid model And we asked the community, specifically parents, to drop the children to school, their child to school. And that's specifically because the bus, we did not have enough bus, buses throughout the territory to transport all of our students. And that still remains true today. And we asked our parents to continue to transport our children in January, until we can finish the contract between our bus company until the health department inspects the buses and until we can have accurate enough, it can never be 100% accurate enough information from our parents, then we can begin prioritizing the bus transportation. We ask parents to be 100% transparent with us and use the honor system with respect to transporting students. Unfortunately, you know, we know it's a small community and many of our parents were not. It's just that we moved to a hybrid, I'm sorry, a virtual model.

1:08:10 So we really didn't need the buses at the time. Short answer is our parents are still being asked to assist with transporting their child and children to school. Nothing has changed. We're still very much in this pandemic. So are you working with and meeting with the school bus company? Yes, Senator. And as a matter of fact, yes, Senator, as a matter of fact, ACSOM leads that charge, along with Attorney Hudson as a committee, because, again, there's negotiations taking place, and that has not finalized to date. Thank you so much for your response, Ed, and thank you, Madam Chair, for the leniency.

- 1:08:49 Thank you. Let me take this opportunity to recognize the presence of Senator Janelle Quezaro. please mark as present and two of my other colleagues who are non-committee members Senator Oakland Benta and Senator Giovanni James thank you for being here before we I hear your point of inquiry Senator Veillet we talked about we talked about about students on cell phones and their students who still don't have devices. Have we done an analysis to determine whether or not those students are the students that fall in the failure rate category?
- 1:09:39 And that's for both districts. Well Commissioner, what is the direction that you are providing to your superintendents around how they should be addressing that whole failure rate issue in the department? What's coming from the state level as far as um the policy around those students who are using cell phones those students have that have no devices and how are we tracking whether or not they are in they are in the fair read numbers how are we looking at this this needs to be looked at if it's not commissioner so senator you're you're good good day thank you for the question the to respond to you both districts have been advised to first of all get the numbers on our students who are absent attendance number one pass fail from the first semester which i'm sorry from the first marking period which they described in their testimonies the districts recently based on the numbers they got back from the physical um walkthroughs um dr jurgen mentioned the police department was involved in his walkthroughs those numbers and analysis was not done today at least a complete analysis have not been done to match the students using devices cell phone devices attendance absenteeism as well as um pass or failure rate that analysis has not been done to date senator it's not that it won't but they've they're they're following the directive and the charge commissioner and and with respect to with respect to i think you asked about cell phones the department of education perspective
- 1:11:28 same thing so i i i hear you and i hear that you have no process and you have no policy in place and by now the second when did the second the first semester end when did the first semester end we can't hear you we're having we're having Is there any difficulty hearing you?
- 1:12:04 Commissioner, can you hear us? Superintendent Juergen or McGregor? The second semester ends on January 20th. the first semester end. The first, first marking period, I'm sorry, first marking period, my apologies. The first marking period ended on November 5th. November 5th and we are hearing that the students who have no devices, no cell phones, who perhaps who perhaps more than likely fall in this field rate, who are using cell phones, who have no devices, who more than likely fall in this field rate, we have not done an evaluation. This is why we have to have these types of meetings.
- 1:13:08 You know, whether or not it's, you guys like it or not, this is why we have to be here. Because that should have been done. How are we identifying those students? How are we providing support to those students? How are we recognizing that, you know what? Tommy is utilizing a cell phone, or he has no device, and in fact, he's failing. How are we providing supports to those students who have zero devices? Senator? Mr. Sorry, my staff just told me I was frozen. Yes, you were.
- 1:13:47 Okay, Senator, to answer your question, I think it's November 4th, November 5th, to be exact, was the end of the first marking period. Commissioner, that was not the question. The question is, let me ask it again, because it's a very important question. We talked about the level of failure rate here in both districts, and the question that I have for you as the Commissioner of Education is what policy do you have in place to push out to your superintendents around those students who are utilizing cell phones and those students that have no devices? How are we addressing those? And has there been any analysis done around whether or not those students are the ones that fall within this field rate category? And how are we providing the necessary support to those students and their parents?
- 1:15:02 Thank you, Senator. Like I indicated, the direction from the state office was clear to both superintendents. As a matter of fact, my direction came from the Board of Education. As you know, the Board of Education directed, made up a resolution rather, a position that grading must occur within the first, for this school year, despite COVID-related issues.
- 1:15:36 Both districts were directed to come up with a grading plan. That grading plan was shared and expectations were shared with the Board of Education. And that is exactly what both districts are doing now. The analysis that you're asking about is not completed. They started that process, hence the data that we gave to you in the testimony. So with respect to guidance from this office, they were both given a directive to come up with how we're going to address students with and without those devices. They did it because we had to adhere, first of all, to the Board of Education.
- 1:16:18 Commissioner, I'm going to have to move on and have a point of inquiry or a point of information, but I just want you to know that your response is not acceptable. I'm going to- I didn't expect any difference. Yeah, it's not acceptable, I'm gonna tell you why. I'm just not going to say it, but your response is not acceptable. Your response is not acceptable because the question that I ask is around how we are addressing the failure rate and have we looked at those specific students? You're telling me all kinds of things about Board of Education.

- 1:16:50 The question is, have we looked at those specific students to identify whether or not they are the ones that fall in that category, and how are we providing them with support? I specifically asked about the first marking period, which ended November 5th. And we have students that failed on November 5th, when the marking period closed, but we have yet to make an assessment to determine, so why? Is it because they don't have anything?
- 1:17:23 They're using cell phones? I'm speaking, I'm speaking, Commissioner. I'm trying to respond to that question. I am speaking please allow me to speak this is my meeting these students have not been assessed they may have been and perhaps I need a lot of superintendents to expound on it but based on your responses the information has not flowed up to you as to whether or not that has occurred and that's something that you should have been very interested in finding out whether or not those students who have no devices are in fact impacted. How in fact are they impacted and how can we assist with ensuring that we provide the necessary supports to those students? That's basically the question. That's basically the concern. Our reason for being here is because we've received several complaints from parents about their inability to um to get the proper education for their children at this time and we can't continue to ignore it i know that you are doing what you have to do but i'm asking you to get center focused get center focus on the needs of our children it is a problem Senator Vaila you're recognized for your seven minutes for your point of inquiry that's not an accurate statement thank you madam chair good morning to the people out of virgin dollars good morning colleagues good morning to the testifiers uh commissioner some information i'd like you to provide you don't have to give me the response right now but hopefully in a few minutes the number of paraprofessionals by district number of kinder to third grade teachers by district and number of students kinder to third grade by district thank you madam chair you got it
- 1:19:19 yes senator veille thank you so much thank you senator veille The Senate is up here and you are recognized for your seven minutes. Thank you very much for the time, Madam Chair. Good morning to the testifiers. Good morning, colleagues. Good morning to the listening and viewing audience. I'm going to preface my questions today with a comment. However, it's not intended to come across as something negative to any one of the testifiers said today because of none of you all when leadership at the time this is about cell phone technology smartphones which are an intricate part of technology have been considered illegal contraband for years in our schools imagine where the Department of Education would have been today if they had embraced the use of smartphone technology years ago I had students utilizing smartphones as a tool of learning and completing assignments.
- 1:20:23 I can distinctly remember attending a workshop at one of our senior high schools and there was a young counselor and she took out her smartphone and she was speaking to a group of 12 grade students and she asked the students to take out your smartphones and I'm going to walk you through the steps of applying for a scholarship for college. And she was halfway through the process with the students the principal came into the cafeteria and saw that the students wanted cell phones with the counselor and the principal went up to the front of the auditorium and chastised the counselor like she was a little child had the school monitors take every cell phone away from the students and they were applying for a scholarship to attend college the principal said i don't care that's illegal contraband just like weed a cell phone was considered illegal contraband just like weed on a school campus Commissioner quick question good morning to you and I'm keeping in line this question is keeping in line with social distancing could we have gone to split session in the territory for five days a week for example at elementary school level have k2 third through 8 to 11 30 4 to 6 from 12 to 3 at the junior high school level 7 graders from 8 to 11 30 8 graders from 12 to 30 and on the senior high level 9 and 10 from 11 from 8 to 11 30 and 11 and 12 from 11 to 12 11 to excuse me from 12 to 12 30 after hearing the concerns of the
- 1:22:10 superintendents. It appears that distance learning isn't quite working in the best interest of our students. What's your take on that, Commissioner? Thank you, Senator. Thank you, Senator, for your question. Yes, we have several options as it relates to students returning on a social distance manner. However, given the timeframes that you describe, that would not be feasible and the best option because the biggest challenge in operating and starting a school day and making sure it runs smoothly is transition time. And transition time and the transportation of students and the drop-off, pick-up, all of that takes into play and we must consider the time lost in that transition time. So once we get students on a campus, it's important to keep them posted for a certain amount of hours maximize that time and then do the transition so that plan would not be feasible the way you described it but i'm sure other plans um would would be possible um your second question senator if you if you don't mind repeating the second piece okay well keeping in line with um how was virtual learning uh affected student performance three minutes how was it right so so sorry go ahead no go ahead did you hear the question i said how was virtual learning affected student performance thank you for the question senator um we've what we've noticed and heard based on the feedback we've gotten from our surveys and teachers a lot of our students who've done well traditionally in
- 1:24:01 in the classroom have struggled with online learning. And likewise, some of our teachers, we have eight teachers who do a phenomenal job, you know, teaching in person versus online. Nonetheless, a lot of our challenges, our students are

challenged, our teachers are challenged with the learning curve. We're all going through a learning curve with the technology being between the teacher and the student. So I can say that it has had some negative impact to answer your question directly, but that's not across the board. have seen some positives and some successes like any anything new um the future is promising to be filled with technology and artificial intelligence so this learning curve we hope to and we and we're actually hopeful i know that we're going to get get by it it's just new for us all and you know a level of fear do exist among many okay and keeping in line with your answer what after school support programs are in place to help students who are struggling And these are questions really for the districts, but we do have virtual, we do have virtual afterschool programs, which will remain that way until we get back to in-person learning. If you'd like our superintendents to talk more about the virtual afterschools, they can.

1:25:18 Okay, superintendent, Juergen. Oh, Mr. McGregor, Mr. McGregor, if you're online already. Sure, good morning. Good morning. Good morning, sir. Good morning, Senator. To answer your question, what are we doing to assist those who may need additional help? In the St. Croix District, between 1 and 3 p.m., that is the time that interventions happen in the district for those students who need that additional help. January 2021, we will begin our virtual after-school programs from K-6 and K-8. One of the things I must say, I'm getting some preliminary, you know, on-a-roll numbers come in, and I got some on-a-roll numbers from Central High, and there were a little over 300 students on-a-roll, and that's a school that usually have about 200 and change students in honor roll so again you know the virtual uh we have a 94 attendance rate in the high schools so it seems to be the virtual is working very well for those those older students and that's why we wanted to make sure that we get our k3s in at the beginning of the second semester and once a matter of fact the 730 chromebooks landed at our dock so we have about 605 students without a device so as soon as early next week when we get the the chromebooks after dock and into our warehouse we'll be able to give every one of those 605 students who don't have a device they'll now have a chromebook plus the 2000 we're getting later on this month that will take care of those devices that we had loaned

1:27:12 out to students we'll be able to get those back and they'll get a brand new chromebook so our students in the district will have a have a laptop but the answer again answer the question yes we have a concern with the k-3 the younger kids in terms of the attendance rate and that's why it was so important for us to bring those students back which we are doing um january 2021. let me see you again in the st thomas st john school district one of the things that has been done is we we have to look at the grading policy because it really the new grading policy that we put in place to accommodate first marking period really really looks at you know providing our students with more options so those students that were not successful we have issued them an incomplete and our after school program has been designed especially for those students that were not successful i will be working closely with them in our after school program to ensure that they are successful okay um if i can also just report on there are a number of students that um are doing really well uh we have some cases of students that are able to focus more at home and so we we continue to look at the entire picture but there are a number of students that are doing very well with virtual learning but we also uh if i reported also that the 72 students that we've issued laptops to and they have a regular attendance pattern so here it is that group has the tools but uh their attendance is still irregular so i just wanted to bring that

1:29:01 balance okay thank you and mr mcgregor you stated in your testimony that 612 students have indicated that they need a device to complete assignments and how are these students receiving instruction since the beginning of the school year sure thank you thank you for the question um much of those students are students in grades pre-k through second to third grade those students were given workbooks that was that was compiled by the district and they've been working with the teachers in completing those workbooks we had several workbooks that parents brought them in and there were the teachers made the various assessments. Students were integrated on work that was submitted. So for those students who didn't have a device, they were working from workbooks. Also, some of our students who don't have a laptop were actually using their SELUS tablets and doing their asynchronous learning via their SELUS program. Much of those students were in the third and fourth Thank you very much for your answers, Madam Chair. Thank you very much for the leniency.

1:30:20 Thank you, Senator Payne. Commissioner, did you get the information that was requested by Senator Vele? Yes, the office is getting that data for the Senator, ma'am. As soon as you get it, could you please just give me a cue so I could get the information. Thank you. Senator Gittins, you're recognized for your seven minutes. Please recognize Senator Gittins' mic, please.

1:30:51 Thank you, Madam Chair, and good morning to all compliments of the season. Thank you, testifiers, for your testimony this morning. With the limited time, I just want to get straight. Let me first say that, you know, though COVID-19 brings uncertainty and some anxiety to everyone, I continue to say that we should turn our challenges into opportunities and opportunities for transformation. But we cannot do so if well-paid individuals are constantly out to lunch.

- 1:31:33 And that's the appearance that we're getting. It may not be the whole team, but we have to get all the parts moving. I feel like we're stuck back in April and May, earlier of the year. We know COVID-19 started around Friday the 13th in March, but I could remember sitting here and asking repeatedly the same question over and over, what would a typical virtual day look like for our students? And here it is. Look at where we're at now in December, and we're faced with this. Again, remember the five P's. Prior planning prevents poor performance. Commissioner, do we have school social workers? If so, how many per district?
- 1:32:44 We do have school social workers, Senator. How many per district? I will get the exact number per district, Senator. Thank you. As I'm getting the other data. Okay. Go ahead. Go ahead. Okay. I'll await that information. School, social workers per district. In the meantime, are you aware of any hardship in renewal of licenses, etc. at this time? Are we in jeopardy of losing any of these social workers to expired licensure? Yes, Senator.
- 1:33:30 We do have some of our social workers in jeopardy of losing their licenses. First, back in September. No, no, no. Hold that information. I don't want to run the time. However, at some point, you could let the chair and the rest of us know why it's a hardship and what are you doing to address that hardship. Now, do you have truant officers in place? No, Senator.
- 1:34:00 None. Okay. Did you budget for any truant officers? No, Senator. Okay, so we see why the already overburdened police department is now being tasked with knocking on doors for truancy. Were all our students provided with a laptop device or Wi-Fi for this virtual learning? No, Senator. We didn't have enough devices to give to our students. That was established back when COVID hit. So I ask that question because I want to make sure or I want you guys to not be overworking for no reason and sending people to knock on people's doors if you know that they don't have a laptop or a Wi-Fi and wondering why they haven't locked down yet.
- 1:34:59 All these things need to be taken. What's not true? I'm saying I am asking the question to make sure that that is not happening. I'm not telling you that is happening. Stop jumping to the defense. I am a supporter of the Department of Education. Let me ask you to your statement, your testimony. You stated on page two that as part of our preparation to reopen schools, the VAID will engage in a safe school reopening tabletop exercise. When will this take place and for what period of time?
- 1:35:42 uh senator that will take place on december 18th and it will be um a day within that that specific partnership would be within that date that discussion december 18th and a one day uh tabletop exercise with with that specific group yes okay uh and you also stated that with the partnership of vitima and fema that the department will engage in discussion with uh with two uh new york schools i believe it is um excuse me that is the tabletop exercise oh that is a tabletop okay so but you said that you will do it so uh you haven't uh touch base with those school districts yet um that's a specific that's a specific uh discussion that we're having with schools who have already districts who have already started to bring students back to their campuses um senator so that discussion with those two schools have that occurred this is more of an in-depth discussion with best practices from what they've learned having you know been in a high um area with high positives of covid and having gone through that process that we're about to engage in thank you um there's a lot of shuffling going on if if the others who are not testifying could mute their devices uh we'll greatly appreciate that uh lastly uh the um you also spoke about conducting a series of professional development for for school administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staffers. At what point do you have time to conduct these trainings while we're having all this virtual challenge?
- 1:37:49 Yes, Senator. Both superintendents can speak to the time they carved out to have these trainings with their staff. Good morning, Senator Gittins. Those workshops and trainings are held after the students leave for the school day. I'll ask Deputy Superintendent Arisola Herman to speak more to that. Good morning, Senator. Deputy Superintendent Arisola Herman. Our professional development calendar range from uh after school to some afternoon and even some partial midday sessions for teachers most recently we conducted on november 20th an entire day of professional development where our students engage in asynchronous activities or activities that their teachers assigned to them and our entire staff was receiving professional development this was as a result of district walkthroughs and discussions with principals and teachers where they were asking for additional instructional activities or support in implementing the virtual learning. Thank you. Also, in addition to what Ms. Herman Agni mentioned, we also have embedded about five or six days. Testifiers, please identify yourselves when you're speaking. Please identify yourselves please this is dr jorgen st thomas st john school district all right superintendent in addition to what miss hermano mentioned we also have about six days embedded into the school calendar that we focus on professional development for the entire staff the last occurring of course

- 1:39:37 on november 20th but we use the time after school to engage our staff in professional development in a host of activities and they have really been doing well in both districts thank you madam chair if i may ask this last question whether or not they have a help desk in place in both districts to assist students parents and teachers if there's any technical difficulty with the devices that they've received thank you madam chair Superintendents or commissioner, I'm not sure who's responsible for that.
- 1:40:22 The soaps will respond. Yes. It looks different in each district. Superintendent McGregor, all of the parents have the access to their teachers, they have access to the school administrators and those those concerns are directed to our district i.t personnel um dr bastian or mr herman can drill down a little more and how the specifics of that works good morning senator deputy superintendent herman deputy superintendent herman um i i prefer for the Saints the deputy the superintendent has responded it's fine we don't need a drill down we the basic question is whether or not there is a help desk to support parents and teachers students I think that's the question so if there's there isn't a help desk then the question is more so what is that process I would like to hear from superintendent Dr. Jorgen as to what process we have in the St. Thomas St. John District. Again, if any, again, that should be an edict coming down from the State Office of Education to the respective districts around this situation with issues with assistant teachers, again, parents, et cetera, with issues that they may be experiencing with connectivity, the devices, et cetera. So give me one minute, let me allow Superintendent Juergen to respond and then we can go back to you. Thank you Dr. Juergen, St. Thomas St. John School District.
- 1:42:12 In this district we have a group of individuals in every school that were trained initially in the beginning of the school year and those numbers have been issued to our parents. also have a district support team that provides support to parents and schools can i add that in addition to that the process that has been laid out um includes the school itself has a team like i expect dr yorgen said that's response to student needs if in fact at the school level they are unable to assist then it comes to the district we have a part-time staff member that is on new to this um into that team as it relates to technology and we also have um trying to hire two additional full-time staff through our covet funds so we are working on increasing the number of support in that area thank you uh deputy powell uh uh deputy Deputy Superintendent, you may proceed, St. Croix District.
- 1:43:19 Senator, I just wanted to add to what Superintendent McGregor stated by saying. Could you give your name again, please? Please give your name for the record. Deputy Superintendent Atlee Herman, St. Croix District. What I wanted to add to what the Superintendent stated was that our help desk, our IT help desk also collects tickets. we've put in place an online support system where parents, we shared, for example, issues with Schoology, we shared a Schoology support email. And in terms of our MiFi, a MiFi device goes down, the school team contacts us and we return it to VAIA or we instruct the parents to return it to VAIA because VAIA is aware of assisting them directly. So we are working with our IT to create a unified help desk, but each school has a help support system for parents.
- 1:44:10 So thank you for your responses, but if my memory serves me correct, when we met, I want to say it was the August meeting, the commissioner represented that there was a one-way health death system, and then the information would be disseminated to the district. So did you abandon that process, Commissioner Berry-Benjamin? Could you give some more context?
- 1:44:38 I'm not sure what your reference in the last meeting that we had where we discussed exactly what's happening with our students and the online and the supports we talked about a help desk and you said that there was a help desk um on the state office and the information will be is usually sent out to the districts I particularly remember us having that discussion so I'm asking you is that still in place or in fact there's something that's being done differently now because based on what we're hearing it sounds that it's something that's being done different well like i can't speak to the others because i honestly don't have it in front of me and i don't recall having those specific words the way you said it i know we have a help desk at the state office for our teachers and we are putting in place remedies to make sure that our students and parents have the support that they need i gave that directive despite your previous comments and both super in both districts came up with a plan respective to what works for their district and they're within their right to do so they just described the process within each district and we also have data professional development we have as one of our professional development to share with our parents and students how they can receive tech support um this month to remind them of that process and it's ongoing PD for them and awareness for them I can't speak to the others date and I won't respond to that until I have the facts on it I don't recall that conversation sender please excuse me I don't know that it's really about the August date it's about whether or not you had a help desk on a state level because that's what you represented for teachers yes yes there's nothing
- 1:46:27 more or nothing yes thank you the districts deal with students and they have for this for students okay thanks um senator francis you're recognized for your point of information please recognize the mic of senator francis uh thank you very

much madam chair uh just quickly i know that uh senator bailey had requested some information um and i've had a similar discussion with the st quarry district i'm wondering if superintendent um mcgregor have that information readily available that he could at least give him a perspective on and the information that he requested thank you very much madam chair senator francis um superintendent mcgregor the numbers that i have for my district is 157 paraprofessionals um kg third grade teachers is 80 i'm trying to get the breakdown specific to grade levels but i but from kg to third grade is 80 teachers and from kindergarten to third grade students is 1878. and senator francis um that's the last piece of brick the broken down data that we were waiting on and that's why you didn't signal the chair to let her know that we have the data we have everything else except the broken down if you'd like for both districts one time i can i can give you that and then when the breakdown comes we can share that thank you do you want me to report on the st thomas john school district yes you may in the st thomas john school district we have 1624 students in grades pre-k through third we have 84 teachers in grades pre-k through third

1:48:28 we have a hundred paraprofessionals however 42 of those of that hundred are special education assigned so most of them are assigned to one student with a visually impaired audio impaired so it's a total of 100 power professionals 42 of them are assigned to special education 58 are regular power professionals Thank you, Mr. Juergen. Mr. McGregor, how many are assigned to special education out of your numbers?

1:49:11 Superintendent McGregor, I could give you that breakdown. Just give me a minute, and I'll get it to you. All right, thank you. I would like for each superintendent to provide us clearly what does a truancy visit look like in their respective districts? Senator, for Gregory, I got the number for special education power professionals. It's 45.

1:49:46 45? Okay. Thank you. Who would like to begin? What does a trans-visit look like in your respective districts? senator we have made every attempt to locate all of our children when we recognize that there are attendance issues we've asked our teachers to make those necessary reports those students that haven't showed up to school this year we needed to find out why in some cases those students did not show up because they've already transferred to another district but didn't necessarily withdraw properly so the district really did not know where they were what we've done what we've been doing is trying to locate those students that are seen as no shows Now, we are getting ready to look at the task force to move on to addressing those that are considered...

1:50:58 Mr. Juergen, one of my colleagues have a point of inquiry, so I have to stop you because I have a point of inquiry from Senator Janelle Kayserou. Okay, please recognize senator sarah's mic one two thank you madam chair superintendent juergen good morning the the the chair morning the chair one of the woman of the committee is asking you what does that process look like how many truant officers have you deployed um who have you targeted have you targeted the elementary students what does the process look like the answers are so theoretical in nature are you not given a direct response we know it's the hope of a Department of Education to find out there to reclaim all of their students but what does the process look like this week what is your benchmark of your 254 truant students who have you targeted who do you have on a high school level who do you have attacking the ell population what does it look like that is what i believe the chairwoman is asking you for a definitive response okay okay thank you senator i just needed to explain one thing and that is we we haven't even gotten to the task force and the truant numbers yet we're look we're still on the no shows list but the process for that we've put together, we've assigned the students that were assigned to the no show list and what we are doing, we've put together a team of district individuals to include monitors, attendance counselors, guidance

1:52:49 counselors, our student service director, along with members of the VIPD and we're simply taking the addresses and showing up to the homes to be able to find out if the children that are listed as no-shows are in fact still in our district so that's what we've been doing now let's say again just just a quick we're in December today is December December 11th the marking period ended we said November 5th the first marking period and we understand all the explanations but in all of the explanations and i'm not trying to be adversarial but accountability is the word of the day today and where you still don't have a plan you're telling me oh we're trying and we we have a no show list and we have to get together all the people and this is what the answer sounds like you still have yet to outline the plan what is the plan i would just that's how we're asking for the plan mr mcgregor do you have a plan uh sir good morning um so the server i want to i want to first say that the there's a there's a systematic plan um in place um to address attendance issues first of all if a student is absent for three consecutive days the teacher then makes a referral to the school's guidance counselor uh the school's guidance counselor at the time makes the attempt to contact the parent to find out what is the issue surrounding the student not coming to school if the school guidance counselor is not successful or is it a repeat

1:54:43 offender it does it then goes to the school's attendance counselors we are five in the district that work very closely with the schools to address um absenteeism within our schools so again the attendance counselors along with counselors school administrators i know i know school administrators that go into the community that go into the neighborhoods go knocking on doors and then of course there are referral me to to human services um so that human services could try

again to intervene with some of the absenteeums some of our students thank thank you mr mcgregor is that um pre or post that is pre-covered that is covered i mean how many referrals have we made to the department of human services we can we can get that information mr. Dr. Yergin how many referrals have you made to the Department of Human Services I can get those numbers for you senator yeah we would like to get them before the meeting ends so these are important numbers and this is exactly where we're having this discussion today we need a plan we're not perfect and of course you know the argument will always be that that we are in unprecedented times but I believe that it's also important for us to really figure out how how we are going to address the issues and this is why we wanted to have this meeting because usually one of the things that we found as of late is that when we have these meetings that's when things get done it's the it's the fact we've seen it over and over and that with Department education alone it's just in general it's been happening vendors are being paid as a result just whatever issues brought up here that's when action takes place senator veille you are

1:56:51 you are acknowledged for your point of inquiry thank you so much madam chair dr juergen there's no way in december you could be having a no-show conversation no show occurs in the first two weeks of school and you deal with those numbers so there's no way that you could still be having a no-show conversation now uh secondly don't the attendance counselors have access to power school yes they do so isn't their job to monitor attendance so a teacher don't need to even send a complaint to the counselor because they have direct access where they're supposed to be monitoring student attendance on a daily basis and they could populate a report that show exactly how many days a student is absent and then begin to make the requisite phone calls isn't that the way it works senators senator that is the way it works our attendance then then we need to make sure that our attendance counselors are doing the job So wherever those students are, the 250-something, whatever number, they should have a report to you as to how much times they call whoever is assigned to a particular school, how much times they call that individual, what have been the next steps of the curriculum services. The virtual world is different. We have students that are just not signing on, some lying to the parents. And I know that we have a lot of issues, but I am hoping that today it doesn't become a back and forth or adversarial but we're able to come up with concrete solutions as to how we can move forward and these hiring answers all the time it just doesn't work get down to where we're actually touching the students oh we have a disc we're working on no show if you're working on no show then your district ain't doing what it's supposed to do long and short if you're still working on no show now something wrong with all the registrars mr migrator you're working on no shows right no thank you thank you uh yeah you may respond um

1:59:10 dr jorgen i just i just wanted to mention that we have the same timeline that we use as as in pre-COVID, after 10 days, we start to work on our no show list. The same procedures apply. But I find that in this virtual world, it's just what the senator has mentioned. Some students are just not logging on. And so the district is really just trying to do everything that we can to make sure that we find all of our students. Student attendance is an area of concern.

1:59:45 It is an area of concern that we are working to address. and when when you see that we have the task force it's because many of these students are still not logging on and we want to make sure that all of them are in school thank you thank you mr jorgen let me say um let me say that let me ask you when the school year begins and you have no shows at what point is a student considered a dropout student 45 days after okay so this that's pre or post covid because if we are having a discussion about no shows are these no shows from the beginning of the um marking period i'm some of them most Senator, most of those students have logged on for a period of time there in the beginning and then there's this long streak of absences and that's why we have, you know, really been trying to find out what's going on and we're having our meetings with them to ensure that, you know, some we realize we're sick, some of other valid reasons.

2:01:06 But we're looking at all of those factors to be able to better serve these students. The same procedures that were in place prior to COVID exist. However, and I just want to stress that I think that because of COVID and because the students are at home and it's a different type of learning, there needs to be an increased effort paid towards making sure that our students are engaged. And how do you intend to do that? I think that's what we're trying to flesh out here today. I mean, you hit the nail on the head. The question is, how does the Department of Education intend to do that? And that should be coming, I mean, there should be that collaboration between the districts, the two districts and the state.

2:01:56 The state is a commissioner. And we need to hear, we know the challenges. I mean, we have to keep it real here. So we live in a community that where we have these types of challenges, of course. I mean, it's not your fault that students are not showing up. But the question is, how do we plan to address it in a meaningful way? What is that plan? What is that process? How does that look? That is the issue. And that is where the frustration is coming in today because we have yet to hear. So yes, we know that we are in the middle of a pandemic. We know that our students have been home since the beginning of this school year. And we know that there are challenges around no show and all of those things that are not so good. But the issue is, what is the plan? What is that strategic plan? What is the strategy to address it? That is nothing

more and is really nothing less.

2:02:55 But I'm going to move on because I have to make sure that I don't get in trouble with my good Senate President. Senator Francis, you're recognized for your seven minutes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and good morning to everyone. I'll tell you that these numbers that we're hearing and the data that's being shared with us today is very, very concerning and should be concerning to everyone. We still have 18% of our students that are without a device. which again um presents some challenges in terms of what are they learning uh at a point that um right after our first marking period um i wanted to ask um mr mcgregor or commissioner in respect to the wi-fi vehicles that you have how are those deployed and where are they deployed how many do you have first of all and where are those deployed before superintendent mcgregor responds because those are specifically in his district um i just want to provide the update on the special education numbers in the saint thomas i'm sorry i'm sorry you're on my time right now commissioner um you can save those on the day sorry respectfully i apologize i apologize go ahead superintendent thank you um senator um to answer your question regarding the white the wi-fi vehicles we have two um vehicles in the in the district of st croix um senator we had to do some reprogramming of the the funds that were associated with those two wi-fi vehicles uh those monies will be um put back to fund a program when we get through this pandemic. The issue was is that both vehicles have to be parked up. They have access to 10 laptops. That would cause a grouping of people to be able to access the bandwidth from those vehicles.

2:05:05 And of course, during COVID, you know we don't want to have any groupings of students. So what we did is we were able to do a revision of those funding so that we could be able to procure the 1,000 Mi-Fis unit that we have throughout the community. So it was more beneficial to have the funds used to fund the Mi-Fis as opposed to just the two Wi-Fi vehicles. Okay, understood. But Wi-Fi usually allow for individuals to be at various locations. so i'm not sure how the grouping would have impacted you have the individual within the different rooms are still able to access it but i accept your response mr um and i'll move on from there in respect to the attendance rate and uh and i'm very troubled by the fact that at the elementary level um you know those were where you recorded the the lower um attendance rate what have you gleaned from that data and how are you addressing that anomaly oh well the decision to to bring those students back in school um was what we what we gleaned from from from the data superintendent mcgregor that we realized that we really have to get those students back in school and that's why uh as a district in in in our working sessions with our school principals we were able to identify uh that we have enough power officials in the district to be able to um bring those students back full time five days a week for full day of school um it's a little difficult um when students are working from from workbooks um especially in grades kindergarten to to third grade uh because now the interaction with the teacher is doing is through a telephone call and they're actually going through the work telephonically

2:07:05 and sometimes parents you know not able to to be there when they need to be there they're not answering the phone or they're saying they're busy we could give you a whole laundry list of excuses that we get from some of some of the parents who don't don't want to engage in the process So, Senator, yes, it's a concern to all of us. And that is why we're bringing those students back as a priority beginning in January. So let's talk a little bit about, and for you to help me to understand, and both superintendent, moving from the red phase to the yellow phase and the hybrid model, what retrofitting is being done in the school and what would that look like come January 25th and thereafter? in terms of the classroom preparation, any plexiglass screens, you know, how are we addressing the particular issue except for the sanitization that I'm hearing that's happening on the Wednesday and then at the end of the week. What else is being done to retrofit our classrooms to assist with the hybrid? Superintendent McGregor, I will start, and Dr. Bashan, my deputy superintendent, is the one who has her hand physically in that every single day, so I'll give her the opportunity to respond to the question.

2:08:23 Good morning, Carla Bashan, Deputy Superintendent St. Croix. The St. Croix District have explored several options when it comes to the cleaning and sanitizing of our campuses. Thus far, we have met with all our school administrators and we've come up with a strict plan for our custodians that have them working around the clock to ensure the cleanliness of our spaces for our faculty, staff and students. district is currently in the process of procuring contracts that will um deal with the deep cleaning and the sanitization of our facilities and as we get those they will supplement the work that our custodians will be doing in the day so any contracts that come into the district we're looking for them to take place after the school day has ended because we want to maximize every day and use every day as an instructional day to make sure we bridge the gaps that we lost with the virtual learning what about the classroom what what about the classroom retrofit um are you deploying plexiglass shields are you how are you creating the separation speak to that please plexiglass has been procured for all of our classrooms from pre-k to third and for our teachers desk we have have procured a l-shaped plexiglass bifold um partition that would be placed at each teacher desk uh symptoms dr jargon this power can report for the same damas indian school district similarly good afternoon the chapel deputy superintendent similar similarly um the plexiglass have been procured for teacher desks in all of our schools also we have for pre-k to third population we've

ordered about 3 000 um of the plexi for the student decks desks and we've also ordered um the hand sanitizer um touchless devices for bathrooms for classrooms and for common areas and time we have um wash stations that are also coming in we have bottle

2:10:28 water bottle dispensers where children can use their own water bottles to get water um we our custodians will be more involved in that cleaning on those wednesdays um and the other days however on the days where the students in the classroom we have a little less um support so we have purchased make sure we purchase enough of the clorox wipes and other um cleaning supplies that we're going to have available um in the classrooms for everyone to be able to clean down their areas we also will have a lot of more of the deep cleaning opportunities to occur at the end of the school day so we uh it's a similar um we've been in common um communication working to collaboratively with the department of operations and we're procuring the same items very well and um my time i've been called but i i want to make sure that we're understanding that we're talking about procurement and that installation i want us to really work towards installation and making sure because we're like 30 days out if we're talking about doing this in um in january you know so we need to make sure that we're not just procuring but in fact that the installation so that we could ready ourselves uh for the opening of the school if i may add um the sinkhole district of course with your assistance we were able to partner with um one of our community partners and provide to us those touchless water systems it is the goal of the the St. Croix District to have majority of our items installed by a deadline in December. December 22nd is the number we continue to spit out in all of our meetings on the St. Croix District and with the Maintenance Department. And with that vendor that you turned us over, their willingness to assist, we're currently awaiting that shipment. And once that shipment arrives, that will be installed also across the district. Very well. Thank you for that. And of course that's our corporate partner Home Depot that we often partner with that

2:12:24 assist us with some of our education endeavors and we're also working with them in the St. Thomas district to do a similar similar retrofit here so that we could have sanitization station within the respective schools in the St. Thomas and John district as well I'll thank you very much I'm Madam Chair for the time thank you Senator Francis very quickly Commissioner with the because I know we haven't really talked about the protocols around students, teachers, paraprofessionals, etc. returning back to the classrooms in January. What are the protocols around individuals getting sick, particularly teachers and paraprofessionals? How is the department planning to address that once that reopening takes place yes as part of guidance of the Department of Health all of a once a student or teacher has shown symptoms or reasons for for us to take action the students and teachers will be placed in an isolation room if they don't have an immediate transportation to remove them from the campus according to the health department we cannot make contact with them on behalf of the students so the protocol is to immediately contact the parent and the parent then picks up the child and contacts the department of education the department of health then proceeds with testing and contact tracing if necessary based on the test results they go through a series of questions and the same is true for our adults on our campuses the isolation room on each campus if the adult has a vehicle they immediately leave the campus and again we report from the department of education to the department of health the individual's name to make sure that they actually call we cannot call on their behalf to make sure that they actually call and the documentation um carries out the department of health has been guiding us clearly we've had cases in our community to date however once we return to school if it is that we have positives the department of health will then guide and say this site needs to be closed based on a b c d that's what's been happening we've asked repeatedly

2:14:41 and that's what's going to happen once our students and adults get on our campuses so when you say close are you saying that if there's an issue you're talking about like permanent closure or closure for a period sanitizing and getting back to the business of the students in the buildings right it's for a period of time but that is determined by the guidance of the health department all right thank you uh senator janelle soro you're recognized for your seven minutes thank you madam chair um i want to start i would like to start with the truant numbers 254 for this district specifically uh dr yorgin a mocking period is first of all does luck Lockhart and Cancran School have an attendance counselor?

2:15:34 Repeat, please, Senator. Does Lockhart slash Cancran School have an attendance counselor? Cancran School does not have an attendance counselor. Okay, so let's go to the... Because you're indicating that you gave me a whole plan that includes the attendance counselor, but one of the largest cohorts in this district does not have an attendance counselor. so your truant numbers are 254. what is that breakdown elementary how many junior high high school i can get the breakdown to you okay um off the top of your head the majority of those numbers fall where? Between 1st and 6th and 8th to 9th grade. it falls in the transitional grades yes naturally okay so if the marking period is 45 days and according to your definition of truant based on your testimony which is a student who has been absent for 20 days that means these students have missed half the marking period not necessarily because the 20 days may have also spilled over into second marking period so your data combines this is a problem with the data and your numbers and coming from a department of education where you actually have a division that deals with vivis your data should be a little more accurate like you're if

you're going to tell us you have 254 true and tell us and which grade level you have the the issue with truancy and then if you're going to say that that is your definition of 20 days how many students have been absent for more than 20 days in the first marking period and to date how many have been absent for more than 20 days the the data is

2:17:58 yeah it comes from the times school started to present so of this 254 do we know how many fall in the ell population i do have those numbers broken down i can get them to you senator is there a lot of students in the ell population that fall within a truant category yes yes senator okay what is the reclamation plan for the hispanic haitian all population what's that plan that plan entails the involvement of our ell coordinator and our attendance counselors you don't have an attendance counselor for the largest school so how what is the plan i don't i don't but the school is still reporting that information okay so what's the plan so every week we get the attendance report from our schools we're monitoring it and from that we are reaching out to our parents mr yogan let me tell you let me tell you my frustration today because i have been consistently asking about the all population in sociology it is called the presence of absence so our students are going to be absent to us in this entire period but they will become present when we see them engage in destructive activity and in our criminal justice system it's called the presence of absence so i'm asking i expect you to tell me mr yogin the plan is old school you know where the hispanic children are we know what a haitian population is i'm expecting to tell me we went to the bars in savannah and we went to the salons in savannah we put flyers down in spanish indicating if your child has been absent this is a hotline number to call i expected you to hit up the bars in brookman road to find him in bovoni we know where they congregate and if they are absent from school i promise you they are in the same community they frequent louis de taylor we know there's a barber shop next to the one by Catholic Church. So that is what I expected for you to hit the

2:20:22 ground and say, listen, we sent a reclamation team through the ELL coordinator to find one of the two something that we can't find, that we have in our database, we were able to reclaim 80 something, more than half. That is a plan. And it doesn't require a PhD. It requires creativity and common sense and care it requires editing of our thinking so I have to be disappointed and people think that we always coming for education I don't have chicken or child but I care so I'm asking and I have a lot of questions today but that ELL population I am expecting you and I'm giving you the plan right now get your team together find the people who are bilingual and find the areas because I promise you when you hit one you're gonna hit ten because when I went to school with him if you if you were a principal they all hang out in the same area of the school together they don't intermingle like that you can find them moving on how are we the electives music education was a software purchase for the music education students hello so are you referring to me yes mr yagen or anybody in education the music education they were supposed to have some software in the last hearing the the commissioner indicated that it was not ordered as yet today has it been ordered is

2:22:11 it here has it is it being used we haven't received the software as yet senator okay so our electives because we have us we have some good music programs in this district and in st croix so we haven't had the software ordered st john st thomas st thomas st john district do we have a special education coordinator yet we do not have a special education coordinator as yet but we do have interviews for the third time occurring uh next week on tuesday on tuesday so how are we who's who's dealing with special education which i indulged on madam chair how are we was who's dealing with that plan and not miss grifford miss grifford and saint croy this district we have our supervisors and also they report to miss powell miss powell okay i just wanted to enter on creativity when you come down that he also said that we have three supervisors three supervisors that have taken the lead as well in conjunction with my support okay and madam i just want to add some creativity and And I know the governor has a cabinet meeting today or tomorrow, whenever or yesterday. But the bottom of Main Street have an Inidenba library that's been shuttered for years.

2:23:43 And you have, if you look at the data based on the census, the downtown district has a low socioeconomic population. And if we took some of our money to retrofit the Inidenba library that's three stories high and made it a virtual center, where the students of Savannah or wherever could wake up in the morning and report to a plexiglass cubby and engage in virtual learning. These are the things that we have to engage. Like, you know, you talk about cross-curriculum within education. Departments have to have a little level of crossing. The Ene-Ambar library is shuttered and not used, and in a time of need, buildings can't continue to be shuttered, but then you're indicating to me in this testimony that you don't have enough space so they have to come to school for two days and one day and two days someplace else we have to be a lot more creative in our leadership madam chair thank you for the time Thank you Senator Saru. Senator Benta, you're recognized for your seven minutes.

2:25:03 Thank you Madam Chair. Good morning to the listening audience. We wanted to testify as good morning colleagues i'll start off uh commissioner if you may how many students today are without computers i know you're ordering some more what does that number look like for for those students who don't have. Senator Benta, good morning, Senator Benta.

- 2:25:35 The 130 students in the St. Thomas, St. John District at this point does not have laptops. laptops our superintendent mcgregor i know your number change and it's going to change can you update me on your your number sure uh commissioner and senator benta right now we have a 612 students that has indicated they are in need of a laptop we now have a shipment of 730 chromebooks at the dock as soon as that get cleared we're hoping to get those chromebooks in those students hand early next week okay senator bender to be sorry senator bender to be clear the 130s that i just mentioned in the st thomas and john district it's not that we issued laptops to all of our students we're talking who does not have a device some of our students are using their own devices we have once the shipment comes in in december that 130 will be satisfied and when the remaining shipment comes then we will take back the ones that we distributed earlier and allow those who are using their own to put those aside and give them the from the 6 000 that each district have just for clarity thank you so of the 612 on the st quarry district of mr mcgregor uh is it the same thing that's taking place for them where they have loners until the others come in some of those students are using especially the third and fourth grade students they're using a cellist tablets uh where they they're having their learning asynchronous learning through a cellist tablets and for the most part those are our kindergarten through uh second grade where they've been learning from um workbooks um that
- 2:27:29 was developed by the district uh they're getting their math they're getting their their english language arts their science and even via history they're getting um teachers communicate with this population of students via phone and they walk through their assignments with the student okay thank you for that okay thanks so all students are accountable accounted for as far as receiving a daily education Yes, in some shape or form, whether it's direct instruction by the teacher, whether it's asynchronous using a cellist's tablets, or whether it's by workbooks developed by the district.
- 2:28:13 Thank you. I want to just touch on the truancy, not solely just certain action, but the intervention program, which pretty much goes into assisting the students and family as well. and I heard several comments made there have been some attempts to have the parents come in otherwise the apprehension for the parents to engage do we anyone have an idea why parents would not engage on being a part of the program for their child anyone can answer that Senator, the reasons vary, but we understand it really is a difficult time now for parents. Many of them have to work, and so figuring out what they're going to do with their child. Some of them don't have the support system to be able to care for children during the day.
- 2:29:15 So all of those factors come into play. the department we're trying to meet parents where they are and provide them with whatever support we need to keep students engaged i know you have a senior yes sir yeah also to test it i've been in the school system long enough uh to know that unfortunately there's a small there's small packets of parents that when the child leave home in the morning the parent don't even see the child because they know the child go on the bus so the child get the breakfast in school some of the the parents don't even sit in the chair when they leave in the morning so now to have you know to wake up to now get involved in education and and that's unfortunate and that and that is something that we need to address uh however that's small pockets the majority of our parents um you know they do call us when there's issues so we know that they're they're they're engaged and we really appreciate the engagement we don't when a parent call us we don't look at it as a complaint we look at it as a parent who is engaging in the process and we try to resolve the issues that they have but it still has small pockets i could tell you that students come to school and the parent don't even see how they get dressed or how they leave the house when they go when they catch the bus or even if they have breakfast and that's why we provided the things transportation breakfast for some students unfortunately but that's that's the truth okay thank you for that the special education and i want to touch on the hearing impaired students first and then we go to the other side of it how are we actually getting to the hearing appeared first how are we addressing those students thank you i have district special education director director griffin on the line and she can give you the details how that works good morning charles serrano griffith district director of special education in the st croix school district good morning senator um in response to your question specifically to hearing impaired is difficult to answer um simply because in the st croix district we do not have a population of hearing impaired students that we serve that require specialized learning um so that is where we are so far as as that if there are any parents
- 2:31:34 that reach out to us that need assistance with american sign language or interpretation in any way shape or form we do provide that i will make one correction i have one student that does um have um hearing impaired services but he uses um he uses a visual a visual device to be able to access that information and we are we have that that student has the device at home to be able to to accessing his instruction and get what he needs through our special education services. And that's on the district of St. Croix. Any on St. Thomas, St. John?
- 2:32:14 I cannot speak to St. Thomas, St. John at this time, sir. And the self-contained students, how are we handling them? Okay, so the students that are in the self-contained environments, they total approximately 108 students. And they are receiving their services virtually like all other students are, so their service providers log on, interact with them either in

small group within the classroom time or in set individual times throughout the course of the week that is scheduled with the families to be able to provide those services. and of course i want to go back to the uh previous question for the someone from the st thomas district to be able to provide some information on the hearing impaired portion of it as well if there's someone there miss miss power can actually speak to the number of students if you can grab that number from me miss power but what we are doing in the st thomas st john school district we have time sort of retrofitted our dover campus to be able to accommodate testing and services from the special education service providers uh with the students so uh the testing and the services that they offer can occur at the lenordoba campus and we have um outfitted that space with the proper plexi um so that the service provider can interact with the student at that site. So those students are going somewhere to be addressed. That's what you're saying. There's someone assigned a St. Thomas and John where

2:33:59 they go to a site rather than online. Yes, but most of it is still done virtually. However, for the testing to continue we have outfitted our Dover campus to be able to accommodate students coming in um based on the appointments that that they said good afternoon good morning um it's probably here i just wanted you to know that we have three students that are hearing impaired in our district and we have our um a teacher that's assigned to work with those students who assist them with the instruction and works with their classroom teacher and as Dr. Juergen stated um the students are receiving the services virtually our students that needs um evaluations are the ones that come into the building for testing and so um but those students within the plan are coming back to the campuses because we do know that they are very vulnerable and they need some direct support and so we are working diligently to provide those supports for them in some cases in most cases they'll be able to come in for the entire week because they are already in small numbers and so specific to the self-contained students we're going to be bringing them back in and the students that are mainstream will continue to be virtual depending on their grade level however students that are in need of additional supports even if we have to make special appointments for those students and we also started our after-school program specifically for that population that has already begun and so these students are also receiving services after school thank you i think i get

2:35:44 my quite a question but i'm sure just one if i may uh i know there was a discussion of wednesdays will be a day off on st thomas for education for the system and then on st corey it's five days a week so i'm just trying to understand what may be the reason for the wednesday and then St. Croix, it's our five days. Well, in the St. Thomas St. John School District, you have a separation of two cohorts. And so because the same set of children are coming in on consecutive days, so Monday, Tuesday, another set of children are now coming in for Thursday, Friday.

2:36:24 So there's a need to offer a deeper cleaning from one cohort to the next on the Wednesdays. So St. Croix would not require the same for cleaning? Good morning, Senator Benta. As mentioned earlier, the St. Croix district will be taking the same cleaning approaches, just that we're utilizing our custodians throughout the day. And as we procure the contract for the nightly, daily cleanings, that's how it will occur in the St. Croix district. we're having the same cleaning done we're just using a different approach. Thank you Madam Chair, what a value at the time, but thank you for your answers respectively as well. Thank you Madam Chair. Thank you. Senator Benta, Senator James you're recognized for your seven minutes. Thank you Madam Chair, good morning to the people of the US Virgin Islands, to Dr. Jurgen, that's where the yeah so do you think that is necessary moving forward that we have parents update the emergency contacts and in addition to that include more emergency contacts with this truancy issue that we are facing here i think it's absolutely important for our emergency contacts to be always maintained but we just updated our emergency contacts because you know parents the department had to update our contacts and addresses because parents were being issued the um the snap card so many of our our addresses and contact information have been updated but so many of them so how many emergency contacts do you ask for for each student

2:38:25 i think it's about four four and you're still having a hard time getting through to the main source which is the parent of the child in some cases the parent and all four of the emergency contacts you can't reach a parent in some cases and i'm assuming that email addresses are included as well email addresses are included we do use email addresses as well and if we know that a particular child is in a certain neighborhood we know that we have our feeding stations out in the communities and so our monitors are also out there looking for our students okay on the virgin islands department education website i see that you have there a parent reopening of school survey a teacher survey and a student survey results can you speak to what is being done with these information that have been collected the information that was collected senator has been used in us designing our plans at various stages uh especially at the beginning of the year when we were offering parents options so we did use that information in our planning and some of it is still very relevant so i'm glad to mention that because on the department of education's website as well there's a pdf document by name a guidebook for the safe reopening of the usvi public schools virtually and it was uploaded on august 19 2020 so ever since this guidebook has been in place i'm assuming that there have been some changes in the plan and if so can you speak to when it will be revised and when we can see an updated guidebook offered to the public

- 2:40:17 uh the guidebook senator thank you so much commissioner barry benjamin the guidebook will be uploaded in for the second semester we're still operating in the first semester and so that plan that is currently there applies it will not change until it's time to transition okay thank you everything looks good on paper in theory based on what I'm seeing here I'm just asking that you guys truly follow through with the plan one thing that stood out for me is the part of the guidebook that speaks to support it support services and it made mention of school councillors being trained to address the overall wellness of students ever since the implementation of this guidebook and uploading it on the website how many training department of education has put in place for the school councillors regarding addressing the overall wellness of students Good morning, Senator, Deputy Superintendent Erisola Lee Herman, St. Craig District.
- 2:41:17 In our district, we have trained our counselors and provided them coaching. We've provided training from Insight Psychological Services. We've provided training and direct coaching around how it affects them academically through HMH. And we have recently procured and provided a mental health technician course to our counselor sue uvicp thank you and i see there that the department of education held a series of meetings or conferences or something like that right something like that yes senator so now we're transitioning into the in the new year which is 2021 when will we see a series of meetings like this again because i think these discussions are necessary um we don't want to assume that everybody's on board and because everyone is distant and is no longer in one classroom setting or in one building i i see i feel a need for more of these mini conferences or sessions so how when when you when we see the next one for the department of education for our parents and teachers senator good day commissioner berry benjamin um training schedules for our staff uh will go out to the staff for next year upon our return currently we have training for all staff members as you know occurring through the month of december that that schedule is not advertised because it's not for public consumption it is for our employees um i must say though that a lot of our training started before we went to a virtual model we continued throughout the virtual process but we were opening on a hybrid model and began all of the training back before school started
- 2:43:06 during the first month of school a lot of intense training occurred and it's only because we're on a virtual model we clearly didn't implement the in-person school so when our teachers come back and we did announce at that time that when we return for the second semester our goal is to open on a hybrid model. So really, there's no shift in professional development. There's no uniqueness or different type of training needed. Repetition and reoccurring of past trainings that occur is what we're looking at. And when we get those final dates, we will share them with you, Senator. But I must say that, you know, say one, say two, we are all about professional development. And we've been providing to the point where many of our teachers have been reporting that the unions have reported to us that the teachers are saying it's too much professional development they don't have time um for a b c d because it's constant pd but that is expected because i said we're going through a learning curve it's new for all of us and despite the perceptions and the positions of some the department is doing its part to make sure we get through this learning curve as best we can so thank you for your support senator thank you You know, I've been continuously asking about the shortage of nurses in our schools. What is being done to address the shortage of nurses in our schools, especially moving forward, where we plan to have our students come back into the school?
- 2:44:34 Good question. Yes, Senator, you know, the only thing that we can do with the respect to nurses is to continue our communication with those institutions that graduate nurses. For example, the University of the Virgin Islands and others. The nurses from abroad, traveling nurses, majority of them take the offers at the hospital because, of course, it pays more. That's one of the reasons many of them go that route. It takes all of the challenges that we're having with our teacher shortages, reasons for individuals not coming from abroad to work in the Virgin Islands, whether it be salary, whether it be maybe things they've heard about a GERS system, whether it be lack of incentive packages, that still remains our issue.
- 2:45:23 However, what we are making sure to do with the Department of Health and other health guidance is to ensure that our students have, number one, the temperature checks as they come into the gates. If it is that our students get sick and ill on the campus, our school nurses don't administer medicines. they don't um if it's if it's if it's extreme then of course they we call the hospital we transport them to the hospital um if it's a minor sickness or illness the the student usually goes to the nurse's office the parent is called thank you commissioner don't do any extreme measures with our students thank you commissioner i i thank god every day that i have a wife because there were many times where i'm on the senate floor and the school would contact me saying i have to go and pick up my daughter and i can only imagine for individuals who do not have that same structure at home so i'm hoping that we address the issue of shortage of nurses in our school because i know for sure uh there was a situation where lumuckle does not have a nurse and i think the same thing with wanita guardian elementary school i'm very concerned about those two schools and i know it was i know your time has been called so i wouldn't i wouldn't provide explanation i know your time has been called it's your time but i there's a response i'm fully aware of that once the chair woman um cut me off then i will stop but she hasn't cut me off so madam chair with

your indulgence so wait can you just tell me and i still have time can you please tell me what is being done with the lumocco elementary school and the wanita guardian elementary school when it comes to the nurses what what has been done recently to address having some nurses in those schools what attempts anyone sir sir james i i just wanted to be uh superintendent mcgregor the two schools

2:47:22 are lumako and ulali rivera wanita guardian does have a does have a school nurse okay so address those two schools what has been done recently what attempts senator um this is no more than recruiting and again we only advertise uh positions that we have funding for similarly to nurses and teachers these are all all the positions in education are priority and they we advertise for these positions and we wait and hope and pray that we can um for lack of a better term convince and encourage uh applicants to to work on time now my time has been called my modern chair i just want to ask this one last question i want to ask commissioner rachel berry how often does the department of education communicate with the internet service providers regarding bandwidth and the improvement of internet service in the u.s for the knowledge um to my knowledge senator that is actually regularly sometimes multiple times in a day because of of just just to keep everyone connected and what comes out of those and it's every day because it varies on on the different sites that we have what come out what what comes out of those meetings what is the takeaway what is being done um senator my director of of communications, I'm sorry, IT would have to respond to the specifics with the meetings, but based on what you said, it sounds as if you're referring to formal meetings versus the everyday engagement for connectivity to ensure connectivity keeps up and running.

2:49:04 Commissioner Berry, with all due respect, no matter what kind of meeting you want to call it, I just want to know the takeaways from the meetings, please. And you can answer that on the chair's time. Thank you. Senator, if you could restate your question more so I could really understand the specific that you're asking. What are the takeaways from these meetings and what is actually being done by the Internet service providers to improve connectivity in the U.S. Virgin Islands? Oh, we need my millennial colleague to call Mr. Attorney Tambolt.

2:49:38 senator um again i'm i'm assuming that you're talking formal meetings on a day-to-day basis the the it division if they if it's via the need to to speak with if it's broadband they need to speak with that happens on a daily basis and just to make sure the connectivity occurs as it relates to improvement of commissioner barry without due respect you said you want to let the it director answer, can you please follow up with the IT director, please? Senator, I indicated to you that he's not on the line. I would have to have him respond to it, but he's not on the line. That's exactly what I said.

2:50:17 Maybe you didn't hear when I said that. Okay, thank you. Thank you, Senator. James. And you don't usually shake your head. Senator Vele, you're recognized for your seven minutes. Please recognize Senator Vele's mic.

2:50:55 Thank you, Madam Chair. I know it took a lot, all of you just now, to not respond. And I could have seen the words coming out of your mouth, but you decided to hold it back. That's good. First, let me say that we're not dealing with an easy situation. I mean, the whole world with this virtual learning has just sent everything out of whack. But we've been dealing with it for much, and we need to make decisions moving forward as to how we're going to be able to re-engage our students.

2:51:34 And there have been a lot of studies recently that speak to students' mental health who are in this virtual learning situation for a long period of time to include an increase in cases of depression among students. So I have been pushing for months for us to do exactly what you're attempting to do now, so I applaud you. And like I said before, I'm hoping that out of this meeting we get some possible new ideas.

2:52:09 As you know, there's a lot of educators, I'm sure, are texting everybody in reference to their concerns. But I must say that while the public school students have been home, the private school students have been in school. St. Mary, St. Joseph, St. Patrick's, Free Will, Country Day, Good Hope, Antilles, All Saints, St. Peter and Paul, Montessori, they've all been in school. And I've told my friends and colleagues who have children in the public school that we can't allow the system to give the private school students a competitive edge so I'm glad what you guys are doing I applaud what you're doing I applaud St. Croix for that 5-day schedule St. Thomas it does not make any I can't understand the rationale and let me tell you why St.

2:53:12 St. Thomas, 1,624 students, 84 teachers, 19.3 students per teacher. St. Croix, 1,878, 23 students per teacher. Yet St. Croix is going on five days and you're going on some two-day schedule. You then said that one of the issues is space. I read where St. Croix, in the event that Arthur Richards is not open, is going to be used in the complex. What happened to Adlita Cancrain modular units? What happened to Bortabashulta that's a junior high school, all of those classrooms?

2:53:56 What happened to classrooms at Eudora Kent, classrooms at Charlotte and Mali? Commissioner, I do not believe that it is right for you to allow the St. Thomas district go on a two-day schedule when the numbers are the same. It's a cap out and you can't have one district going five days and the next going two days and in the middle of the week you have deep

cleaning when the St Thomas district have cleaning companies and St Croix district have never had cleaning companies. So I'm asking you to equalize a schedule based on the data and if you don't something is wrong because the data is the same and the students are the the teachers are the individuals who are teaching those classes so I implore the St Thomas district to be more creative and not this we don't have space and you have schools that are closed schools where students are not going to be going there and you're saying you don't have space Your teacher-student ratio is less than St. Croix, but yet you're going for two days. How are we going to actually test these students and smarter balance when the systems and scenarios are totally different?

2:55:17 How are we going to be able to evaluate exactly what is taking place when one group have five days in person and the next group have two persons? Are we administering smarter balances here, Commissioner? Commissioner, we're the first. Can you relook the schedule, please? Noted, Senator. And yes, we are still mandated to have Smarter Balanced assessments. And this was a directive from...

2:55:46 So the federal government has not given us a waiver for this year? No, Senator. We're still in the process of fighting this good fight with respect to that. so we have requested a waiver senator we um we we what do you mean if we requested we've written about it and there's no there's there was a no that we're that we have to assess we've written to the state department about it and they said that assessment is taking place so we and what they did was so we did request a waiver yes we requested that testing does not take place okay because if we look at the if we look at the numbers were not given to any state it was states just requesting that against testing rather okay because looking at the numbers just with attendance we we're going to to fail in our categories because our attendance um just isn't there under this virtual learning um something quickly i want to get on the record your social workers and licensure is the board of social work licensure actually operating and licensing um social workers are they actually active senator yes um that's a short answer yes okay so have you been able to resolve the issues in reference to the social workers that are facing termination if they don't become licensed by a set date um yes senator and this is from as of september 2020 this isn't now correct there's an assumption out there that the department did not make employees aware of their license expiring by

2:57:40 the way it's not the department's responsibility to do so it's a courtesy which we have done um but we did receive notification from the department of personnel back in september telling us that our employees will not be able to continue work unless they renew their license and we followed suit and followed up with our employees since then um it's really the responsibility of the employees to be sure that their certifications and licenses are in order okay and um one more question grading and mr juergen did you hear my concerns and reference to you two days one day after two this i i i did hear your concern senator and i think you only spoke to physical space so i don't know so so what else what else do you want me to speak to the the use of the power professionals is a big part of that plan senator no it's not that we don't want our children tell me how they use a professional wait you have a hundred paraprofessionals tell me how a big part of the plan involves those hundred individuals if you take out the 32 you're down to 68 you're telling me that every teacher needs a full-time paraprofessional every day is that what you're saying senator the paraprofessionals are being used to split the class in half and then the teacher remains with one half of the class and the paraprofessional remains with the other half but the numbers are just not there to to split the class in half that does not mean that the plan is definitive we'll continue to look at it from every angle but i want to make it clear that i want our children and every

2:59:26 every single class that you have need to be split in half you don't have class with class load of 11 12 students no senator not in k through third not in k through third i would like to see you have you have power school i would like to see the enrollment of students k to 12 through the district i'd like to see that even out to that 19.3 ratio that's not exactly accurate if you have a school let's take one of our smaller schools civilly school there are two paraprofessionals assigned to that school two and and you need to be creative if you need to send additional paraprofessionals there we have covered monies if we need to hire additional paraprofessional hire them but do not come with the two they do listen there's so many students from uvi i know who are creative and actually teaching the public school children and providing um online learning on a regular basis from other locations there's so many there's so many creative options dr juergen you always have you always doctor hold up this my time you always have an excuse every time you ask a question you have an excuse as to why you can't be creative and produce at a certain level. A parent can't work two days a week. Parents have to stay home for the kinder to third.

3:01:02 They can't work two days a week. At St. Croix, there will be some mental and some economic relief because we're assuming normalcy. That is when they are able to acquire all of the basic information necessary to be successful students. If you don't get by third grade, rest of your educational life is gone these children have been out of school for almost a year if you're coming the hurricane is a year and a half going on two years how are we going to develop these basic skills virtually for kindergarten students that's sleeping sometime want to play want to do all type of stuff if mr mcgregor could get done you could get it done you could get it done not the grading system i'm going to you could get it done but if the

commissioner want to accept complacency from you then that's up to you that's up to the commissioner the grading system i'm not going to finish just give me one last yes 50 50 is participation so if i turn on the computer every day i'm halfway there 50% participation and we still have a number of incompletes high school students that receive are incomplete that's no credit they got to take it over and some of it ain't really the department fault I expected the department to say we call in parents and they're hanging up the phone parents are cursing our staff when we're telling them to get online I expect for I cry to be out there for this community to take education seriously and for you guys to just tell

3:02:48 the truth as to all the crap that happening as to why parents ain't doing their part. Just tell the truth. You got a hole in and tie in your hands. Thank you. Thank you Madam Chair. Thank you Senator Vele for your passionate plea for the children of the Virgin Islands and the passionate plea to get parents to get on board thank you um it's what we need senator saru you're recognized for your point of information thank you madam chair just to go back to the social workers who received a letter from hr threatening their positions we already know social workers are already short staff the committee on rules and judiciary met yesterday to move nominees for the board of um license for social work so they admitted that there's an issue right now with getting licenses through for social workers so i wanted to put that madam chair you hear me over there i wanted to put that information on the record that the board nominees were passed yesterday for the board of social work they they they lacked a quorum they lacked members they had trouble um they indicated that it was trouble issuing licenses and i think if the department of education reached out and worked with the other agency dlca in the whole licensure process then that would have not resulted in a letter coming from hr threatening to fire the social workers which are already short staff within the department of education I WANTED TO PUT THAT ON THE RECORD. THANK YOU.

3:04:41 THANK YOU, SENATOR SARU. I AM GOING TO HAVE TO ADJOURN THIS MEETING IN A FEW MINUTES BECAUSE WE DO HAVE SESSION COMING UP. AND, OF COURSE, THIS COULD HAVE ALL BEEN AVOIDED as far as us having to shut down our meeting because unfortunately we had to subpoena the department of education leadership here in order to get the information as it relates to what's truly happening in the territory but before we um and i know that my colleagues have a number of questions but i i'm going to have to shut down the meeting i really don't want to get in trouble with the senate president but let me just ask because i know we asked for an update around the federal dollars and in looking at the u.s department of education website uh around the case in particular we saw that the department of education received some 19.9 million dollars and the office of the governor received some 6.2 million dollars and this is all around the the U.S. Department of Education and the University of the Virgin Islands received some six point some three point six million dollars and I further note that the funds that was spent to date and this is since September so I'm trying to get an update reflect that the University of the Virgin Islands spent about three million of their 3.6 and the overall territory actually spent three million of the 30s the 29 million so I'm trying to get an update from the Department of Education today that was a September report what's the status of what was spent and I'm not asking for what is obligated what has been spent to date because I note in the report you spoke about obligations but we're trying to get what has been truly drawn down from the federal government to date around the cares act stabilization funds good good afternoon senator the amount that has been drawn to date for the cares funds is one million seven hundred ninety

3:07:00 eight thousand four hundred eight dollars and 43 cents and what are the plans to so is it that the and what is obligated in total in total obligations we have ten million sixty six thousand three hundred and sixty dollars so what's the status of the other half of the money the programs um the districts are working on spending their funds that they have remaining um as it relates to the cares senator how does the reopening of school impact these funds districts um please provide an update with the remainder of your your fund suspend and the equipment and supplies that are being used to reopen schools we how does it in the district has used those funds to purchase the things that were mentioned earlier from miss how well can you give the balances please yeah um so based on our uh our plans of what we have to pro um purchase um we have only about 1 million that's going to be left for services tied to contractual services for cleaning um nevertheless we have ifbs out for 77 000 um we have in procurement about okay so so desha uh miss powell let me let me put it in better perspective so there's about 10 million dollars left on the table that's not obligated

3:08:53 based on the state um office response so what i'm trying to get is of that 10 million i'm certain that a portion belongs to each district and i'm not certain if any of those funds were channeled through the state so in your district of the up what is the unobligated amount and what do you intend to do with the unobligated amounts okay so basically we have everything pretty much um in the process of being spent um except we just hired a covid program assistant and her salary probably averages 150 000 between two years with fringe 46 350 plus fringe times two years we also have a few part-time members of that team maybe about 50 000 um outside of that our money is pretty much spent um we have several purchase orders that we just received and we have about like i said about 200 000 being processed so our district in

particular um we actually need money. We don't have any more money. Thank you. Um, yeah, we don't have any money.

3:10:06 Senator, deputy superintendent Herman here of our 7 million 784,000 167 funds. We have 2 million 860,000 \$36 remaining of which 1 million 536,000 \$457 is allocated for our non-public schools. And then of the district funds, \$1,320,579 has been allocated for our professional service contracts, which includes our cleaning services, the remaining of our operating supplies, which are any additional supplies that we basically to supplement the order that we already submitted with PPEs and cleaning, and then additional equipment for our schools.

3:10:55 Thank you for your responses and thank you to the Department of Education. I am going to have to shut down the meeting like I indicated earlier, but I will close by saying that based on the discussions that we had today, it is most definitely, I'm being distracted, I'm sorry. It's most definitely in our face that there is much to still occur around how we are educating our children in the Virgin Islands during this whole COVID time. And we are really asking that the Department of Education, you know, recenter, refocus. So when we have these discussions in the future that we will get information coming out of the department that we can feel comfortable with. And we're not always going to agree, but I believe that what's important is the responses and what we get back from the Department of Education as it relates to what they're doing. You can only do your best, and I know many of the people on the call, and I know that we didn't hear your best today. So what's important is that we go back and recenter, and it's not about the one-upsmanship. It's none of that. It's about how do we really secure the future of the children of the Virgin Islands. We can't think about what's happening today. We need to think about, well, we have to think about what's happening today, but that cannot be our center focus. It has to be, so how is this going to impact our future? And I think one of my colleagues talked about that earlier. We really have to think about that, that when we are no longer here, what are the people going to say about the work that we did during the time that we were here? Are we going to see reduced crime in the territory? You know, are we going to see individuals in secure jobs in the Virgin Islands? And that's your job at this particular point. We really expect you to do more. And it's not about, like I said, one-upsmanship. It's about really us working together, and I'm going to ask that. We really work together. This is my last meeting for the Committee on Education and Workforce Development in the 33rd legislature and it is my hope that we work together in the 34th and we really get things done as it relates to our children and when you come before the legislature in the future that the responses are responses that are satisfactory. I sat where you sat. So if I appear frustrated today, it's because I am. And one last thing that we didn't cover is the school lunch portion. We did note that there was some issue around school lunch here in the, I think it's the St. Thomas St. John District and as well as St. Croix, I saw that there was something that came out around school lunch.

3:13:49 So if you could get a very quick update because we have to start our session. Mr. McGregor, you can start. Thank you. Thank you, Senator, for having us here this morning. I know I heard the word subpoena a couple of times, but I wasn't served with any subpoena, so I'm here at Free Will this morning just to engage you with updates concerning the Sinclair District. Thank you very much. School lunch. School lunch, sir. That's what we're talking about. We got to stay focused. We want to turn the focus, but we're focusing. School lunch, because you see, again, it goes back to what I said earlier we want to talk about the one-upsmanship school lunch I thought you were wrapping up and I got distracted a second but Dr. Bastien is my lead on the school lunch so she could talk to her okay so good morning um bachelor and deputy superintendent the saint croix district we have experienced some difficulties with our school lunch program and those issues surround of course our covid 19 issues with um some of our faculty and some of our food service workers and bus drivers making contact with covid positive individuals that are not part of the wide school lunch program so just taking the necessary safety precautions we did close down the williams delight feeding program and those individuals who came in contact with perhaps a covid positive individual at that site are going through the quarantine process as recommended by the Department of Health assistant commissioner some can provide a whole a comprehensive report and that feeding initiative but that's where this thank you for your update Dr. Bastien, Superintendent Juergen?

3:15:46 In the St. Thomas, St. John District, our... We can't see you, Superintendent. I don't know if your camera is off, but we can't see you. Thank you. Okay, in the St. Thomas, St. John School District, our kitchens do work closely together. They get commodities from each other. And in one of our locations, we did have an individual test positive. And so we closed that site and the other sites have been closed effective today and we anticipate that they will be open as soon as we go through the procedure of contacting those that were in close proximity so that they can follow the guidelines as with anyone that has contacted or suspect that they have tested positive. Okay, thank you for your updates. Excuse me.

3:16:46 Chairman, Fred Gregory, I just wanted to add up to yesterday, the department engaged in a very rigorous activity with the Department of Health in regards to the different issues that we're experiencing at our feeding sites. And we are following the recommendations to a team by the Department of Health just to limit the exposure to the individuals who come to receive meals and those other food servicing um employees that those individuals have to come in contact with so we are in contact we had a meeting yesterday and we have one I think this afternoon again to address the issues um with the

commissioner health and her team at vide feeding program thank you for your responses or next week and the st john's site is presently open thank you and um commissioner we're going to give you 30 seconds to wrap up thank you uh senator fred honorable senator fred gregory and other members of the committee on education and workforce development thank you for having us here today um the ide team thank you very much um yes i was subpoenaed mr mcgregor you may not have been I found I thank you for the laughter I was subpoena but what I would say is I asked for collaboration from this this body I to look forward for the 34th legislature and partnering similar to you Honorable Senator Fred Gregory it's the only way thank you very much I do look forward to collaboration in the name of the children of the Virgin Islands thank you thank you Commissioner and I want to wish you well and it is my fervent hope that the recommendations and the advice that

3 : 18 : 34 was shared here today that um you know we take them into very serious consideration because at the end of the day I believe all of us want the same thing uh madam clerk do we have any um to the chair requests Senator Kurt Valey requested from the Department of Education the total enrollment of students in K in grades K through third in the st. Thomas st. John district I think he received the information is that it great thank you again I want to thank all my colleagues that were here to participate in this very important meeting and again I want to thank the Department of Education and the Commissioner and her team for coming and just be reminded that the legislature has a responsibility to ensure that it is in fact carrying out its oversight responsibility and we expect to to get the information that we asked for and again there are times when the departments cannot come but for department for a department to say that they are absent they're not available for the entire month of December that is not acceptable and this is why we're here today but again I want to thank you and I'm looking forward to us working together I consider the Department of Education my family and I will do whatever I can on this side to support the department's initiatives so again this committee and of course I want to thank all the essential staff employees who participated and assisted us we're making today possible the committee on Education and Workforce Development is adjourned for the 33rd Legislature. Thank you.

3 : 20 : 39 I'll see you next time.

People named in this transcript

SUSPECTED, and a finding aid only. Names were matched by machine against the spellings used across all 426 of our transcripts, and the title is the one used in the room. Being named here is NOT evidence that a person attended or spoke · only that the name was said. Speech recognition mishears names, so a spelling may be wrong even where no alternative is offered.

9x	Dr. Stefan Juergen heard in this transcript as: Juergen, Juergens, Jurgen
5x	Senator Kenneth L. Gittens heard in this transcript as: Gittins, Gittins', Kenneth L. Gittins
4x	Senator Kurt A. Vele heard in this transcript as: Vele
4x	Senator Marvin Blyden heard in this transcript as: Blyden, Marvin Bleden
4x	Senator Novelle Francis heard in this transcript as: Francis, Novell E. Francis
3x	Commissioner Barry Benjamin heard in this transcript as: Berry Benjamin
3x	Senator Kurt Viallet heard in this transcript as: Kurt Valey, Kurt Viallee
2x	Senator Fred Gregory the surname alone also matches: Donna A. Frett-Gregory; Donna Frett-Gregory
2x	Senator Giovanni James Sr the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Marise C. James; Neville James heard in this transcript as: Giovanni James
2x	Senator Janelle K. Saro heard in this transcript as: Saru
2x	Senator Kurt VLA

- 2x **Senator Kurt Veilley**
heard in this transcript as: Veillet
- 2x **Senator Marise C. James**
the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Giovanni James Sr
heard in this transcript as: James
- 2x **Senator Steven D. Payne Sr.**
heard in this transcript as: Payne, Steven D. Payne Sr