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Territory-wide Principals' Meetings Lay Groundwork for Department's Transformation

ST. THOMAS, USVI – Virgin Islands Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington recently hosted a four-day listening tour dubbed, “State of the Union,” to meet with principals of the Department’s 24 schools in a collaborative effort to drive student success.

The in-person meetings, held Jan. 24-27, were the first of their kind in the Department’s recent history, allowing principals to openly share on topics, such as student test scores, enrollment numbers, graduation rates, school safety, technology and maintenance needs, student mental health and wellness, staffing needs and morale, parental involvement, and more. As part of the presentations, each principal outlined plans they intend to implement to address their school’s needs.

“I want you to set aside the titles of everyone in this room and be completely transparent in your presentations,” Wells-Hedrington told the school leaders at the start of their presentations. Joining her for the sessions were Department state and district leaders, Board of Education officials, Government House representatives, members of the 35th Legislature, and an education consultant.

Wells-Hedrington said the meetings were a priority for her to hear firsthand the needs of the schools, provide support, and to hold school leaders accountable for producing the desired outcomes for students. Each school has received a budget of \$250,000 and will be provided with

an annual budget through the Consolidated Grant Application. She said the funding is designated for the implementation of plans to improve student scores and overall learning.

“We are placing the responsibility of teaching and learning back into the hands of the schools,” she said. “Each school has received adequate funding that should be used to implement plans that will benefit students. This is an important part of the Department’s transformation into an institution that truly serves students.”

Principal Barbara McGregor of Juanita Gardine PreK-8 School, expressed her gratitude to Wells-Heddrington for the one-on-one gatherings.

“I have been in Education for more than 30 years and this is the first time we have had an opportunity to do something like this,” she said. “Thank you for making yourself available to us.”

Wells-Heddrington will convene a second round of meetings in May to evaluate the effectiveness of the plans put into effect at the schools.

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