



# THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **U.S. Department of Education Approves VIDE’s Plan to Spend \$138 Million in American Rescue Act Grant Funding to Support Ongoing Pandemic Recovery, Student Success**

ST. THOMAS, USVI – In a two-page letter dated November 23 and addressed to Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin, U.S. Department of Education (USDE) Secretary Miguel Cardona wrote that he is “pleased to approve the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Education’s (VIDE) American Rescue Plan-Outlying Area State Educational Agency (ARP-OA SEA) Implementation plan, which “will help ensure that schools in the U.S. Virgin Islands can continue to reopen safely; support sustained access to in-person instruction throughout the summer and into next school year; and address the social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs of students due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), particularly those students most impacted by the pandemic.”

Cardona offered Berry-Benjamin his commitment to a timely release of the funds.

“The Department is committed to working in partnership with VIDE so that your ARP-OA SEA funds are quickly put to work to ensure students have sustained access to in-person instruction, as well as the comprehensive supports they need to recover fully from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic,” he said. “As you implement this plan, we expect you to continue meaningfully engaging with stakeholders and the public and revising your plan, as necessary, to best meet the needs of students, parents, and educators.”

Berry-Benjamin said the approval of VIDE’s 56-page ARP-OA SEA Implementation plan is a significant step forward in the Department’s commitment to large-scale transformation of the Territory’s public education system.

“The Virgin Islands Department of Education is deeply appreciative to our partners in Congress and education at the USDE for generously making available funding that has allowed us to safely continue teaching and learning during the pandemic,” she said. “We intend to use these funds solely for the benefit and overall well-being of students, and to further establish an effective, 21<sup>st</sup> century public education system that meets the needs of all Virgin Islands students.”

While Cardona praised the VIDE’s ARP-OA SEA Implementation plan, saying it is “consistent with all ARP-OA SEA grant terms and conditions,” he cautioned approval does not determine that all information included in the plan “complies with Federal civil rights requirements, including Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.” He pointed out that “it is VIDE’s responsibility to comply with these civil rights requirements.”

In closing, Secretary Cardona wrote, “Ongoing engagement with all stakeholders is vital to ensuring that implementation of your plan is transparent, effective, equitable, inclusive, and best meets the needs of the U.S. Virgin Islands. The thoughtful, evidence-based, and timely use of ARP-OA SEA funds will have a lasting impact on our Nation’s schools and help to address the inequities in resources, services, and opportunities available to our students.”

Cardona’s letter, along with VIDE’s approved ARP-OA SEA Implementation plan, is posted on the U.S. Department of Education’s [website](#).

Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act I and II funding in the amount of \$73 million was previously made available to the VIDE at the height of the pandemic in 2020.

*The Bryan-Roach Administration is investing in the Territory’s people, infrastructure, and future through transparency, stabilizing the economy, restoring trust in the government, and ensuring that recovery projects are completed as quickly as possible. Visit [www.transparency.vi.gov](http://www.transparency.vi.gov).*

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