GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

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Edfest VI 2026 Launches Week of Transformative Professional Learning

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The Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports officially opened EdFest VI 2026 which brings educators together for a week of professional learning focused on strengthening teaching, inspiring excellence and transforming education across the Virgin Islands.

The opening of EdFest VI, formerly known as the Summer Institute session took place on Monday, August 24 at the Multi-Purpose Sports Complex and marked the beginning of the ministry's annual professional development initiative for educators. The newly reimagined EdFest VI reflects a renewed approach to professional learning, with greater emphasis on collaboration, engagement and practical strategies that educators can translate into their classrooms and schools.

Deputy Chief Education Officer Mrs. Heida Selwood emphasised that the transformation being pursued across the education system ultimately takes place through the daily interactions between educators and their students in her welcoming remarks.

Mrs. Selwood said, "Transformation can sound like something distant and enormous, but education is transformed one classroom, one relationship and one decision at a time.".

Mrs. Selwood also highlighted the critical role educators play in ensuring that investments in education translate into meaningful outcomes for students stating, "The true transformation happens when those resources reach the hands of a caring, committed educator."

Minister for Education, Youth Affairs and Sports Honourable Sharie B. de Castro used her address to situate EdFest VI within the Territory's wider efforts to strengthen the education system and prepare students for success beyond the classroom.

"We are building an education system that prepares a child not simply to pass an examination, but to live a life of purpose and impact," Honourable de Castro said. She also highlighted progress across several areas of the education system, including the Territory's performance in the 2026 Grade 2 OECS assessments, improvements in CSEC results, student achievement in robotics, the introduction of

H. Lavity Stoutt Community College's first bachelor's degree programme and continued investment in educational infrastructure and resources.

While celebrating the progress made, Honourable de Castro encouraged educators to resist complacency and continue building upon the gains achieved.

"The Virgin Islands must be willing to set the standard, to innovate, to lead, to build what does not yet exist," Honourable de Castro said.

Feature presenter Mr. Colin Gunthrope of Unlimited Potential further challenged educators to recognise the influence they have on the lives and futures of the children entrusted to their care.

"The future of the Virgin Islands walks into your classroom. Not an academic future. A real future," Mr. Gunthrope said, reminding educators that the students entering their classrooms are future ministers, teachers, entrepreneurs, athletes and leaders.

A central focus of Mr. Gunthrope's presentation was the importance of "upstream thinking," encouraging educators to look beyond a student's immediate behaviour and examine the underlying circumstances contributing to challenges before they develop into larger crises.

He urged educators to maintain clear expectations while preserving the dignity of the students they serve, stating, "Correct the behavior. Do not diminish the child."

Mr. Gunthrope also reminded educators that every classroom delivers both a written and an unwritten curriculum. While the written curriculum develops knowledge, skills and standards, he said the unwritten curriculum communicates safety, worth and belonging through an educator's presence, tone and response to students.

EdFest VI continues through Friday, August 28, under the theme, "Igniting Innovation. Inspiring Excellence. Transforming Education." The week also advances the Ministry's wider "Future-Focused, Student-Led" direction, with professional learning centred on translating new knowledge and strategies into meaningful improvements in teaching and learning.

Following Monday’s opening, EdFest VI continues with professional development sessions covering areas including curriculum delivery, classroom management, assessment, inclusive education, educational technology, STEAM, literacy, mathematics, safeguarding, student wellbeing and subject-specific instructional practices.

The week’s programme provides educators and school leaders with opportunities to engage in interactive and hands-on professional development, collaborate with colleagues and explore strategies that can be applied within their respective classrooms and schools throughout the 2026–2027 academic year.

Through EdFest VI 2026, the ministry is seeking to ensure that professional learning extends beyond the training environment and translates into consistent practices within classrooms and schools across the Territory.

The Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports remains committed to transforming teaching and learning and equipping educators with the knowledge, strategies and support required to develop confident, capable and future-ready students throughout the Virgin Islands.

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