

Good morning, my name is Raven Phillips, and I served as both the Chairperson of the Education Committee and the Chairperson of the Steering Committee during the Virgin Islands Youth Policy Summit in December.

The proposals presented by my committee were marked by one quality that I always bring up when speaking about the summit: solidarity. I witnessed an alarming amount of solidarity in the room, which was both a positive and negative thing. It was positive unity had been created between 61 high school students from across the territory, but it is negative because that unity related to serious issues that needed to be addressed.

The first issue from the Education Committee that we all bonded over was the Common Core State Standards and the Smarter Balance Test. Students at the summit agreed that the implementation of the Smarter Balance Test and Common Core State Standards was very haphazard and rushed. Ill feelings toward Common Core Standards are also shared by students and legislators in the mainland.

The Education Committee acknowledged that BILL NO. 31-0154 mandates that a committee will evaluate the effectiveness of the Common Core State Standards and Smarter Balance Test, but we call upon the Legislature to amend this bill, so that if the committee finds the test and standards ineffective, they should be terminated throughout the territory.

Next, we spoke about the issue of our inadequate teaching staff. We used "Inadequate" as an umbrella term for three main problems: quantity, quality, and their teaching methods. Every student in the room had a horror story relating to either being unable to take a class because it had no teacher, taking a class being taught by a teacher who was not certified to teach it, or being dealt unwarranted disrespect from their teacher.

The Education Committee acknowledged that teachers were recruited from other islands, and we agreed that it was a good attempt at a solution, but something more should be done to improve the teaching staff in the territory.

We call upon the Legislature to create a bill that will establish a Teacher's Support Fund. This fund can appropriate money towards ensuring that teachers have a livable income, issuing tests that ensure that teachers are properly certified before entering the classroom, and toward providing auxiliary classes such as sensitivity training, and English language classes, which can improve teaching methods.

If these issues are not addressed, the consequences will be detrimental to the future of the Virgin Islands, the students. Thank you.