



THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



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**TESTIMONY BY
SHARON ANN MCCOLLUM
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
June 1, 2016**

Good morning, Honorable Chairman Forde, members of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development (CEWD), other Senators present, as well as, persons in the listening and viewing audiences. I am Dr. Sharon Ann McCollum, Commissioner of Education and I am present today to provide testimony on the 2015-2016 end of school year activities and our many successes. Among the specific topics that my support staff and I are prepared to discuss in detail today are the administration of Smarter Balanced Assessments; summer programs, including Kinder Camps, enrichment programs, summer school/credit recovery and Children Defense Fund Freedom schools VI; the financial and operational status of the School Lunch Program; school facility summer maintenance and repair projects; the status on the hiring of School Maintenance Workers pursuant to Act No. 7758; the status of salary increases; and the status of negotiations with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Locals 1825 and 1826. Today, I am accompanied by:

Charmaine Hobson-Johnson, Assistant Commissioner

Anthony D. Thomas, Chief of Staff

Debra Gottlieb, Deputy Commissioner, Fiscal and Admin Services

Mr. Vaughn Hewitt, Deputy Superintendent, St. Croix District

Mrs. Racquel Berry-Benjamin, Deputy Superintendent, St. Thomas-John District

Ms. Nicole Jacobs, Director, Division of Human Resources

Mrs. Alexandria Baltimore Hookfin, State Director, Assessment

Ms. Belinda Sanderson, State Director, Special Nutrition Programs

Mr. Joseph Sibilly, Territorial Director, Maintenance and Plant Operations

In response to Senator Forde's request that the Department of Education provide an end of the school year report, I submit the following:

The Department of Education is the largest government agency with over 2,400 employees who service and support over 14,000 children, through 56 activity centers. In an organization this large and multifaceted, we can expect to have countless advances and perplexing impediments. Therefore, we believe that our year in review can be summed up in this statement. VIDE has experienced catastrophic challenges,, made tremendous progress and attained meaningful successes. We can state unequivocally that the team we have assembled at VIDE confronted these challenges head-on, and through their unwavering commitment to succeed on behalf of our children; we can state that VIDE has overcome with profound success.

Through the power of collaboration the Department of Education has developed community partnerships with non-profit groups, for profit organizations and governmental agencies, creating an environment rich in academic and practical opportunities for our children within our territory, the wider Caribbean and the global community.

ADMINISTRATION OF 2015-2016 SMARTER BALANCED ASSESSMENTS

The Smarter Balanced assessment system is designed to support high quality teaching and improve learning for all students. The interim assessments are one of three major components of the system and allows educators to monitor student progress throughout the year. In our efforts to address the need for this body to understand our challenges and share our successes with Smarter Balanced Testing each Senator in this legislative body was invited an invitation to attend a Smarter Balance Practice testing session, that invitation remains open. In fall 2015; 6,422 students enrolled in grades 3-8 and 11 completed at least one interim assessment block. As a result, students gained

exposure to the types of questions and became better familiar with navigating through the testing platform. Additionally, the administration of the interim assessments provided valuable information about the Territory's readiness to administer the large scale summative assessments.

The testing window for the Spring 2016 Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments began on March 14, 2016 for students enrolled in grades 3-8 and opened on April 11, 2016 for students enrolled in grade 11. In preparation for the opening of the end of year assessment, User Acceptance Testing (UAT) was conducted at each school across the territory from January-February 2016. In February 2016, the State and District Assessment Office provided training to school assessment teams on the procedural and policy guidance to implement the Smarter Balanced summative assessments. Great emphasis was placed on the security of assessment items and confidentiality of student information to maintain the validity, reliability, and fairness of the results. The testing window will remain open for all tested grades until June 17, 2016.

Since testing began as of May 26, 2016, over 87% of students enrolled in grades 3-8 and 11 have completed the Spring 2016 Smarter Balanced Assessments. Schools across the territory have reported a better online testing experience which can be attributed to improved technical support provided by the vendor help desk and onsite support provided by the IT and Assessment Office. The testing time for students to complete the English language arts and mathematics assessments was also reduced by one hour compared to the spring 2015 administration. As problems occurred most were resolved within a few hours, our IT division quickly mitigated and resolved obstacles associated with these testing issues for a smooth student experience.

STATUS OF SUMMER SCHOOL CREDIT RECOVERY PROGRAMS -- PLATO SOFTWARE CONTRACT

I am honored to share with this legislative body that VIDE will provide summer programs Territory-wide that encompasses student from grades K-12. Our approved Consolidated Grant Application (CGA) funding has been received, and we are in the process of renewing our Plato Software contract.

In the St. Thomas/St. John District, VIDE will have four (4) Secondary Schools providing summer programs for students requiring credit recovery. These programs will commence on June 27, 2016 and conclude August 5, 2016. Students in grades 7-12 will have the opportunity to receive no more than two classes for credit recovery. These schools include Addelita Cancryn and Bertha C. Boschulte Junior High Schools, Charlotte Amalie High School (CAHS) and Ivanna Eudora Kean High School (IEKHS). Additionally, VIDE will have summer enrichment programs for students in grades 1-6 at five (5) Elementary Schools: Gladys Abraham, Ulla F. Muller, Jane E. Tuitt, Lockhart, and Joseph E. Gomez and Kinder Camp for kindergarteners at Lockhart Elementary School commencing on June 27, 2016. Twenty First Century Programs will be in operation at Addelita Cancryn, CAHS and Sprauve on St. John. Beginning on July 5, 2016, all students will receive breakfast and lunch for the remainder of the weeks enrolled in the program.

In the St. Croix District, VIDE will have five (5) secondary schools providing summer programs for students requiring credit recovery. These programs will commence on June 27, 2016 and conclude August 5, 2016. Students in grades 7-12 will receive no more than two classes for credit recovery; the schools include Elena Christian, John H. Woodson, and Arthur A. Richards Junior High Schools, Central High School (CHS) and Educational Complex High School (ECHS). Additionally, VIDE will have summer enrichment programs for students in grades 1-6 at eight (8) Elementary Schools: Pearl B. Larson, Juanita Gardine, Lew Muckle, Ricardo Richards, Alfredo Andrews, Alexander Henderson, Eulalie Rivera, and Claude O. Markoe Elementary School. In addition, there will be enrichment services provided for students who do not meet the prerequisites for Credit Recovery in the secondary schools.

Furthermore, the Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools VI Summer Program will be piloted at five of our Territory's public schools: Julius E. Sprauve School on St. John; Lockhart Elementary and Ulla F. Muller Elementary Schools on St. Thomas and Claude O. Markoe and Juanita Gardine Elementary Schools on St. Croix. A total of 125 students, ages five to eight will be serviced. Each student participating in the summer program will receive a healthy breakfast, lunch, afternoon snack, reading materials and cultural education.

FINANCIAL AND OPERATIONAL STATUS OF SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM

VIDE has made remarkable progress towards establishing a sustainable school food program. I promised the Committee on Education and Workforce Development tangible results when the leadership team and I came to request funding allocations to support the School Food Authorities (SFA) through the end of the 2016 fiscal year. The funding amounts requested were vetted through Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and submitted by the Lieutenant Governor's Office as a proposed bill amending Act No. 7758 providing additional appropriations of \$2.2 Million for food, \$263,494 for milk, and \$350,000 for supplies. Nevertheless, as you are aware, VIDE DID NOT receive the funding amounts requested in our appeal to this legislative body. To date, the SFA received a funded line item appropriation of \$1,841,152 for food and \$263,494 for milk. Realistically, we received \$358,848.00 less for food than requested and nothing for supplies. Further compounding our financial challenges are the spate of unbudgeted emergencies encountered this fiscal year, as a result of our aging facilities, at a cost of \$160,000.00 for the replacement of our main freezer unit located at the St. Croix SFA warehouse.

We anticipate the need for additional funds August 1, 2016 to facilitate the opening of the new school year. VIDE has developed a collaborative operational approach between the Commissioner's Office, the Special Nutrition Division with newly appointed Director Ms. Belinda Sanderson, the Superintendents' Office and the SFAs from which the appropriate operational oversight and financial accountability can be now measured and achieved. We have authorized the purchase, and planned schedule installation by June 30, 2016, and implementation for the 2017 fiscal year, of the NUTRIKIDS software program that encompasses menu planning and nutritional analysis, menu forecasting and costing, recipe enhancement, purchasing and inventory management, production records preparation, and warehouse management. This program links each division within SFA, and the Commissioner's office, Special Nutrition, and Superintendent's Office increasing organizational and divisional communications, instantaneously promoting financial accountability, operational efficiency and appropriate managerial oversight.

VIDE has engaged in collaborative approaches with a plethora of agencies including but not limited to, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), Virgin Islands Department of Agriculture, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Department of Property and Procurement and local farming hubs to increase the

financial and operational viability of the School Food Authorities. I would like to formally thank Director Bowry, Commissioner Robles, Commissioner Bennett and United States Department of Agriculture Mrs. Dombroski and her team for their unwavering support of our leadership team and the School Food Authorities.

VIDE has begun the search for a territorial dietician, a territorial nutritionist, and a Program Supervisor for the Department of Education SFA. Additionally, VIDE senior leadership has engaged the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to conduct personal knowledge-based development strategies with an emphasis on executive leadership oversight of the financial and operational management of the School Food Authority. Through these collaborative efforts with our Territorial Training Manager, the Institute of Child Nutrition (ICN) will be in the Territory to provide annual training we have designated as a mandatory training activity for the 2017 school year for our directors, supervisors, warehouse staff, and kitchen staff including managers, cooks, and food service workers for the SFAs. ICN will conduct training on a plethora of relevant topics including a financial management and an inventory management tracking course for directors, kitchen managers, program supervisors and warehouse managers; and food safety in schools for all staff including drivers, laborers, food service workers, cooks and warehouse staff on June 23-24, 2016 in the St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix Districts.

The collaborative engagements we have discussed will provide the adequate knowledge required, the necessary techniques, and the technical understanding to assist VIDE in, the implementation of financial management best practices, adequate operational oversight of the SFA program and the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP). Nevertheless, the initial successes concerning the SFAs are overshadowed by our financial challenges!

We are proud to say we have not had any disallowed meals. We have identified funds to carry major kitchen renovations this summer. We are seeking your approval of our reprogramming request:

Senators, although VIDE has initiated the development of the appropriate collaborative operational structure for success, the SFAs financial crisis will continue until the entire infrastructure is completely developed with sufficient local appropriations and the proper resources. Our leadership team has sought to reprogram funding through the Public Finance Authority (PFA) to purchase the required updated kitchen equipment

providing the staff with the resources to properly function. Until this much needed equipment is acquired and installed the cost of supplies will continue to increase, food presentation and service will be unappealing to our children, and our kitchen staff will feel unappreciated and unmotivated. The 31st Legislature should expect to receive a request for approval from the PFA to reprogram existing funding for the purpose of procuring the much needed kitchen equipment. Your expeditious approval of the funding reprogramming request will allow VIDE to continue to develop the type of infrastructure needed for a 21st century School Food Authority.

STATUS – SUMMER MAINTENANCE AND REPAIRS

The task of addressing the maintenance and repairs required to operationally maintain our depreciating schools are overwhelming and financially perplexing. To date VIDE received a maintenance budget in the amount of \$1,888,000.00 for school repairs and maintenance summer projects for the Territory. Our Maintenance Division has identified maintenance and repairs costs for our Territory's schools, they call a wish list at a cost of approximately \$7,000,000.00. As the legislature is aware, the cost of repairs and maintenance projects for our Territory's schools perpetually exceeds our appropriated budget. Nevertheless, our leadership team will ensure that each of the thirty-one (31) schools in the Territory benefit from the available funding and receive some of their required repairs and maintenance.

The depreciative state of our Territory schools and the required repairs and maintenance are well documented. Our projects have to be fiscally prioritized, and include but not limited to; roof repairs, air condition replacements, bathroom renovations, electrical upgrades, painting, mandatory water testing, and general repairs and maintenance. Additionally, collaboration with the Department of Interior, Office of Insular Affairs (DOI-OIA) through the Army Corps of Engineer's procured the expertise of Helber Hastert & Fee, Planners and in conjunction with VIDE's repair and maintenance activities will commence summer maintenance projects and repairs of our Territory schools. At this time scopes of work are being finalized. To be followed by requests from proposals, after which we anticipate work to commence.

VIDE will conduct the preparatory activities for the upcoming school year; these projects include landscaping, janitorial activities, kitchen equipment servicing, painting and pest control applications. The recent unbudgeted emergencies incurred by the Maintenance Division costs VIDE \$139,000.00 and includes the purchase and installation of two (2) electrical transformers, two (2) generator repairs, air condition replacements and roof repairs.

STATUS –HIRING OF MAINTENANCE WORKERS-PURSUANT TO - ACT NO. 7758

Beginning April 4, 2016, Pursuant to Act No. 7758 VIDE has hired a total of fifteen (15) maintenance workers Territory-wide; seven (7) in the St. Thomas/St. John District, and eight (8) in the St. Croix District; We would like to personally thank Senator Gene Forde and this body for funding the new maintenance positions.

STATUS – SALARY INCREASE IMPLEMENTATION

VIDE’s Human Resources and the Fiscal and Administrative services Divisions are working expeditiously to process NOPAs and complete this enormous task. As of May 26, 2016, VIDE has had personnel who have received their pay increases at ten schools.

STATUS-NEGOTIATIONS WITH AFT, LOCALS 1825 AND 1826

Currently VIDE and AFT, Locals 1825 and 1826 conducted a Pre-negotiation meeting on Friday May 6, 2016, on St. Croix. As per ground rules, we are not allowed to discuss details.

SUCSESSES

The Department of Education has experienced it’s share of financial hardships, operational inefficiencies and set-backs. However, we have had some major accomplishments that are worth mentioning.

- ✓ **Jazz At Lincoln Center:** A collaboration with Dion Parsons, VIDE and the Lincoln Center that will allow our talented music students in the Territory the

opportunity to meet and learn from international performers and actively participate at the Center...

- ✓ **V. I. Youth Ensemble & Artist In Residence Programs:** The Mentoring through the Arts of Music Program was significantly expanded during the 2015-16 school year as Dion Parson and the United Jazz Foundation formerly partnered with the Department of Education to provide top jazz students on St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John specialized training from world-class jazz musicians.
- ✓ **Teacher of the Year:** Ms. Monique Mari Motto meets with President Obama in Washington DC
- ✓ **HALL PASS:** It is important to note that the design and construction of the Hall Pass set was completed in-house at the Department of Education through a wonderful collaboration between the Office of Public Relations, Division of Maintenance and Plant Operations, and the Division of Engineering. The Department of Education airs Hall Pass, a weekly half-hour television talk show on WTJX that serves as a dedicated time to discuss matters surrounding public education in the Territory.
- ✓ **Movie Theater and Ferry Boat Advertisements:** The Department of Education has entered into a long-term agreement with Caribbean Cinemas and Transportation Services to broadcast promotional advertisements on its movie screens and ferry boats in both St. Thomas and St. Croix for a period of 12 months, from September 2015 to September 2016. Our collaboration with the Movie theaters and Ferry Companies is another example of our media campaign to get the message out...
- ✓ **Literacy Initiative:** RFP completed and selection process underway to select a vendor to assist in addressing our k-3 literacy challenges.
- ✓ **Ipad project:** promotes the use of apps to bring relevance to algebraic theorems, introduced to St Croix. Journal article presented at Harvard May 23, 2016.
- ✓ **Teacher trainers:** JeuneProvost and Ericilda Herman: This year teacher training was on the evaluation systems. Provost did a new teacher induction program where she provided training to new teachers on the evaluation system.

Classroom management. Instructional technology. Instructional strategies. (Small grouping/differentiated instruction. Assessment, project based learning. Student engagement. Common core standards).

- ✓ **Science Technology Engineering Arts and Mathematics (STEAM):** Collaboration between the United States Navy, VIDE and local businesses, assisted in our very first SeaPerch Robotics Competition being held in the Territory on April 9, 16, 2016; Our students were able to travel and compete in their first National SeaPerch Robotics Competition held in Louisiana on May 20-21, 2016 at Louisiana State University.
- ✓ **Students 365 Accounts:** All secondary students will have 365 office accounts for the upcoming fiscal year for effective collaboration and effective online platform for students. New Implementation of Aruba Wireless Infrastructure to support mobile devices for students' teachers, and staff.
- ✓ **Summer reading challenge:** 2nd year book distribution begins June 1. VIDE gave away over 10,000 books to the territory children last year and expect to give away 10,000 + books this summer.
- ✓ PAR Project (JESS, Gomez and BCB); New Math Series Pilot (Tuitt and Dober); 4th Grade Math Initiative (EBO and Lockhart)
- ✓ Christmas educational gifts# given??
- ✓ # of books to be given away this summer
- ✓ **PBIS:** Our initiative is to improve school climate through implementation of the Improving Education through Positive School Climate (IEPSC) program. This program is outlined in the School Climate Transformation Grant (SCTG) focusing on Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS).
- ✓ **Response to Intervention:** is offered through the Office of Special Education as a means of providing interventions to students who are below grade level in their performance in reading and math.
- ✓ **FARM** (fathers as role models) initiatives for all elementary schools. NAF programs.
- ✓ **Multi Year Calendar**

This concludes the Department of Education's testimony to the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, and we are ready to respond to any of your questions at this time.