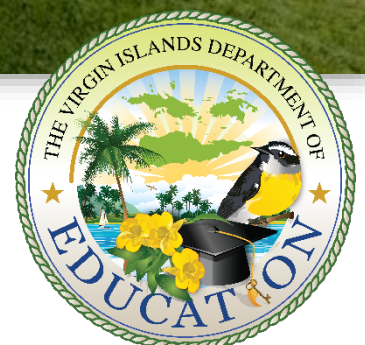


REFORMING, REBUILDING, AND REBRANDING PUBLIC EDUCATION

VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION DISASTER PROJECTS TESTIMONY BEFORE THE 35TH LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON DISASTER RECOVERY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLANNING

PRESENTED ON NOVEMBER 6, 2023
DR. DIONNE WELLS-HEDRINGTON, COMMISSIONER





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November 2, 2023

Honorable Senator Milton E. Potter
Chairman of the Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure and Planning
Capitol Building
PO Box 1690
St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands 00804

Sent electronically via senatorpotter@legvi.org

Dear Honorable Senator Milton Potter,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony about the Virgin Islands Department of Education's updates on our disaster projects to the 35th Legislature Senate Committee on Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure, and Planning.

This handbook provides testimony and accompanying information. Thank you for your continued support and attention regarding the progress and plans to rebuild a stronger VIDE.

Sincerely,

Dionne Wells-Hedrington, Ed.D.
Commissioner

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STATEMENT BY COMMISSIONER

Good morning, Disaster Recovery, Infrastructure and Planning Committee Chair, Senator Milton Potter; Vice-Chair, Diane T. Capehart; committee members Senators Franklin D. Johnson, Alma Francis Heyliger, Kenneth L. Gittens, Marise C. James, and Carla J. Joseph; non-committee members present, and everyone listening and viewing today. I am Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington, and I have the privilege of serving the students and families of the Virgin Islands as the Commissioner of Education. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to provide updates on our disaster projects and the future footprint of the Virgin Islands Department of Education.

I want to take a moment to commend you and the committee members for your continued partnership with the department and the goals ahead. This body has been highly supportive and responsive as we work towards improving public education in the territory. At the VIDE, our efforts focus on Reforming, Rebranding, and Rebuilding Public Education in the territory.

With me this morning are members of my leadership team: Victor Somme III, Assistant Commissioner, and Chaneel Callwood, VIDE Architect.

CURRENT STATE OF THE SCHOOL FACILITIES

Over the summer break, our dedicated maintenance team has been working diligently to address potential issues and implement necessary upgrades. We believe it is crucial to maintain a conducive and safe environment for our students' growth and development. The Department has established a petty cash system where Maintenance Directors in both districts can access fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000.00) for emergency repairs at our sites. That funding is housed at the Superintendents' offices, where they make the funds accessible to our maintenance directors. This process has helped the department in expediting emergency repairs to VIDE facilities.

The Operations division is also scoping out services to solicit service contracts with local vendors so that if we have an immediate need, for example, air quality testing or mold remediation, that awarded contractor could be tasked and respond to the situation immediately to remediate. The establishment of the School Maintenance and Construction Bureau is on the way. The post for the Executive Director is on both the Division of Personnel's and VIDE's websites. To date, there are seven (7) applicants. Once the interviews are conducted, and the selected individual is hired, preparations will begin to transition the unit. The Maintenance and Operations personnel costs and operational budget have been moved under the Bureau's codes. The Maintenance Directors were delighted to see the increase in local funding given to the division with the bureau's establishment. Historically, the Maintenance unit has received \$2,000,000.00 territory-wide. The available funding has now increased to \$5,000,000.00 territory-wide. In addition, the Bureau has received a one-time amount of \$7,500,000.00 and reprogrammed Public Finance Authority funding totaling \$3,417,978.25.

Here are some of the maintenance activities and improvements that have been completed or are currently underway utilizing the funding allotted to the Maintenance Divisions in addition to reprogrammed funding through the American Rescue Plan:

1. **Enhanced HVAC System:** Our ventilation and air conditioning systems are being inspected and cleaned to ensure optimal performance for everyone.
2. **Electrical and Plumbing Upgrades:** We have conducted a comprehensive review of our electrical and plumbing systems, including inspections of wiring, outlets, fixtures, pipes, and faucets, to identify and resolve any potential issues that could disrupt day-to-day activities.
3. **Renovated Classrooms:** We have refurbished several classrooms, creating a fresh and inspiring atmosphere where students can thrive academically. The renovations included new flooring, upgraded lighting fixtures, restrooms, and air conditioning.
4. **Painting and Repairs:** A fresh coat of paint has been applied to various areas throughout the school premises, including classrooms, hallways, and common areas, to create a more vibrant and welcoming atmosphere. Additionally, repairs, such as fixing broken windows and walkways and replacing ceiling tiles and window operators, are taking place.
5. **Safety Upgrades:** The safety of our school community is of utmost importance to us. Therefore, we have conducted thorough inspections and made necessary improvements. This includes the installation of additional fire safety equipment, such as smoke detectors and fire extinguishers, as well as improved emergency exit signage and evacuation plans.
6. **Landscaping and Grounds Maintenance:** Our outdoor spaces play a significant role in providing a pleasant learning environment. Our landscaping team has worked diligently to maintain grounds and trees while ensuring pathways remain safe and well-maintained.

Kitchens

Kitchen upgrades will equip the districts to respond to COVID-19 and other pandemics by improving health conditions in the kitchens where we prepare food for students. Plans were placed out for bids to renovate school kitchens at Rivera (contractor selected), Markoe, as well as at Central, Woodson, Gardine, Muckle, and Ricardo Richards. Construction is expected to be completed by July 2024. The projects include repair/replacement of the kitchen hoods.

A Task Order for an architectural firm to design renovations to kitchens in the St. Thomas/St. John District at schools that will not be modernized or replaced during the first wave of projects. A list of kitchen equipment needed has been prepared. Plans will include the required electrical, plumbing, gas, and other code upgrades necessary to support the installation of the new equipment to code at those campuses that need modifications to receive the equipment. The equipment may be ordered while the kitchen renovations are placed out for bids.

Fencing

Fencing will be installed/repaired to control the movement of students, staff, and visitors to campuses during COVID-19 and other pandemics. St. Croix district fencing is out for bid, and the St. Thomas/St. John district fencing solicitation is at the Department of Property and Procurement and should be out for bid this fall. The following schools will receive fencing and/or retaining walls in the St. Thomas/St. John District - Boschulte, Edith Williams, Kean, Gomez, Sibilly, and Muller. The list of schools receiving fencing in the St. Croix District are Education Complex, Larsen, Rivera, Woodson, Andrews, Markoe, Gardine, Muckle, Ricardo Richards and STX Central. See Table 1 for projects funding.

Table 1: Kitchen and Fencing Projects Funding Report

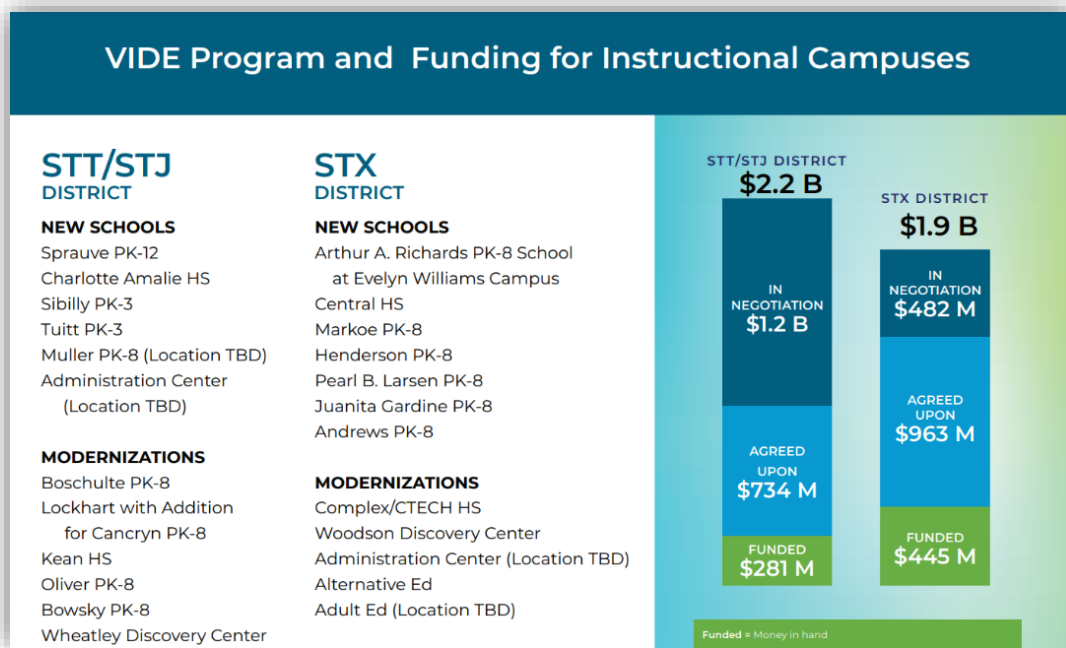
KITCHEN AND FENCING PROJECTS FUNDING REPORT				
FACILITY	DESCRIPTION OF WORK	STATUS	FUNDING SOURCE	AMOUNT
STX Central HS	Kitchen Renovations and Equipment Installation	Purchase order issued in September 2023	ARPA	\$1,682,640.00
Junita Gardine K-8				
Lew Muckle ES				
Ricardo Richards ES				
John Woodson JHS				
Claude Markoe ES	Kitchen Renovations and Equipment Installation	Construction is in progress and on schedule for completion on or before July 2024	ARPA	\$447,328.00
Eulalie Rivera K-8	Kitchen Equipment Installation	Construction contract pending	ARPA	\$165,500.00
Fencing at Various STX Schools	Construction of fences and perimeter walls	Out for bids.	TBD	-
Fencing at Various STTJ Schools	Construction of fences and perimeter walls	RFP written and waiting to be sent out for bids	TBD	-
Total				\$2,295,468.00

By prioritizing these maintenance activities, we aim to provide a safe, comfortable, and nurturing environment within our school. We firmly believe that a well-maintained facility enhances the overall learning experience for our students and promotes the highest standards of education. Attached, you will find the detailed work for each of our sites, as well as where they are in the process. Maintenance remains ongoing, and we will continue to ensure that our environment is safe and secure.

DISASTER RECOVERY PROJECTS/NEW SCHOOLS

The Virgin Islands Department of Education continues to work with FEMA to attain the needed funding, projected to be over \$3 billion, for new and modernized schools. Local funds are being leveraged to undertake Early Start Projects that support building the new Arthur A. Richards PreK-8 and rebuilding Charlotte Amalie High School. The early projects include the CAHS 9th Grade Center at Wheatley, Arthur A. Richards Demolition, Evelyn Williams Demolition, and Abraham Center for CTECH & Adult Education.

Figure 1: VIDE Program and Funding for Instructional Campuses



Capital improvements are made on a cycle as shown in Figure 2 below. The initiation phase was done over 18 months by VIDE with the New Schools Construction Advisory Board comprised of Senators, VIDE leadership, unions leaders, community members, parents and students. The board continued to work with the educational facility planning and design firm, DLR Group, for six (6) more months to complete the planning. The Educational Facility Master Plan, approved by Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. in June 2020, shows the right-sized footprint of the future with space for 40 years of growth.

Figure 2: Construction Life Cycle



The Department is building capacity for future growth over the next 40 years and has provided a chart that compares the current student population and the projected capacity of the schools. Indeed, in both districts, the capacity of the master plan is exceeded by what we are building. Current enrollment is 10,166 students, and we plan to build it for approximately 14,375 students.

FINANCIALS

Permanent Work: The VIDE is working with the Program Management (PM) firms to develop implementation timelines. Approximately \$6 million in permanent projects have been completed, and more than \$186 million in projects are under construction. Design-build teams for the New Central High School, the New Charlotte Amalie High School, and the Boschulte PreK-8 Modernization have been selected, and the contracts are being prepared by the Department of Property and Procurement. Design is in progress for the Henderson, Markoe, and Lockhart campuses (See Addendum A).

Early Start Projects: Local funds have been leveraged to start projects early, including the New Arthur A. Richards School Demolition, Evelyn Williams School Demolition, Charlotte Amalie High School Demolition, Gladys Abraham Campus Modernization for an adult CTECH Skills Center and Adult Education, and Charlotte Amalie High School 9th grade Annex at Wheatley (See Table 2).

Table 2: Early Start Project Funding Report

EARLY START PROJECT FUNDING REPORT				
FACILITY	DESCRIPTION OF WORK	STATUS	FUNDING SOURCE	CONTRACT AMOUNT
Arthur Richards JHS	Demolition	Completed	FEMA PA	\$3,805,562.00
Evelyn Williams Campus	Demolition	Completed	FEMA PA	\$2,349,861.00
Charlotte Amalie High School	Demolition	In Progress	Local to be reimbursed by FEMA PA	\$6,879,158.92
Abraham Modernization	Modernization	In Progress	Local	\$9,844,797.79
Wheatley Modernization	Modernization	Phase I Completed; Phase II pending funding	FEMA PA	\$3,450,287.47
Total				\$26,329,667.18

Interim Projects: In order to improve health and safety over the next 18 months, federal funds from the American Rescue Program (ARP) are being used for kitchen renovations and installation of kitchen equipment, fencing at schools throughout the territory, and generators (See Addendum C).

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

The VIDE held two meetings of the New Schools Construction Advisory Board, a meeting in St. Croix (Pearl B. Larsen School) and a meeting in St. Thomas, (CAHS 9th Grade Academy) that provided updates to stakeholders and a preview of designs for several schools. As we move into the implementation and execution phases, staff and consultants are using best practices to ensure that construction is carried out to the highest standards

within budget. Schedules will be developed in the fall after more FEMA fixed-cost offers are received. Additionally, the Department continuously does performance monitoring to identify systemic repairs and other needs for the facilities that are waiting to be modernized. Refer to Addendum B for the project status report and additional information.

1. *Replacements are planned for the following sites:* Charlotte Amalie High School, Ivanna Eudora Kean High School, Sprauve PreK-12 School, St. Croix Central High School, Arthur A. Richards PreK-8, Alexander Henderson PreK-8, Claude O. Markoe PreK-8, Alfredo Andrews PreK-8, Juanita Gardine PreK-8, Pearl B. Larsen PreK-8, Ulla F. Muller PreK-8, Jane E. Tuitt PreK-3, E. Benjamin Oliver PreK-8, St. Thomas Administration Center (Curriculum Center), and St. Croix Administration Center.
2. *Modernizations are planned for the following sites:* St. Croix Educational Complex and CTECH High School, Bertha C. Boschulte PreK-8, Herbert E. Lockhart PreK-8, Joseph Sibilly PreK-3, Yvonne Milliner-Bowsky PreK-8, Guy H. Benjamin Community Center, John H. Woodson Discovery Center, Wheatley Discovery Center, Theodore Dunbavin Alternative Education Center, Edith Williams Alternative Education Center, Gladys Abraham Adult CTECH Center, St. Croix Adult Education Center.
3. *Critical Systemic Repairs at the remaining VIDE facilities:* Lew Muckle, Ricardo Richards, Eulalie Rivera, Joseph Gomez, St. Croix School Lunch Warehouse, St. Croix Procurement Warehouse, St. Croix Headquarters, Jarvis Annex, St. Thomas School Lunch Warehouse, St. Thomas Headquarters, and St. Croix Curriculum Center, will receive systemic repairs until they are shuttered, and their occupants have merged into the new/modernized facilities.

CHALLENGES

Timely payment is the backbone of a construction program. The Department has worked with the supporting agencies to ensure that vendor payments are paid within 45 days of the submission of payment certification forms. We will continue to ensure that, as a department, we track payments from the date received to the date the vendor is paid. To assist, New Schools holds a weekly implementation meeting to provide updates and discuss issues. The Implementation Meeting is attended by several agencies, including but not limited to ODR, VIHFA, DPW, and VIDE. VIDE also finds support from the Office of Disaster Recovery Summits and uses these as opportunities to dialogue and partner with other agencies.

The Administration has made funding from the line of credit available to pay for work on projects in the fixed cost offer stage, up to 9 months away from obligation. The line of credit will be reimbursed from the FEMA Project Worksheet (PW) after it has been obligated.

The VIDE thanks you for the opportunity to give updates today. We are excited for the opportunity to discuss our progress thus far with our disaster recovery projects. We stand ready to respond to any questions or concerns you may have.

Addendum A: Summary of FEMA Support for Disaster Projects

VIDE FACILITY MASTER PLAN IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE		
STX DISTRICT		
CAMPUS	FUNDING STATUS	UPDATE / PROJECT PHASE
Adult Education	Obligated	Funds will be used to make temporary repairs to the facility and relocate to a new site.
Andrews	Obligated	Conceptual Site Plan developed.
Arthur Richards	Obligated	Construction in Progress
Central HS	Pending PDMG Project Review	Design-build procurement in progress.
Education Complex HS	Fixed Cost Offer	Schematic design is in progress. This property will be repaired.
Emanuel	Pending FEMA CRC Project Development	This property has been transferred to DPP. Funding will be re-allocated to Complex or other new school / modernization projects in St. Croix.
Rivera	Fixed Cost Offer	A new addition will be built at Andrews to house the school.
Gardine	Pending FEMA Project Review	Conceptual Site Plan developed in the master plan.
Henderson	Obligated	Schematic design is in progress.
Larsen	Fixed Cost Offer	Conceptual Site Plan developed in the master plan. A test fit for a school on the south portion of the site has been done.
Markoe	Fixed Cost Offer	Schematic design is in progress.
Muckle	Pending FEMA Project Review	A new addition will be built at Andrews to house the school.
Woodson	Fixed Cost Offer	Site plan and concepts prepared in the Master Plan. This property will be restored and modernized.
Ricardo Richards	Pending FEMA Project Review	A new addition will be built at Andrews to house the school.
STX Alternative Education School	Obligated	The Dunbavin campus will be restored and modernized.
STX Curriculum Center	Pending Large Project Review	The district offices will be incorporated into the new Administration Center.
STX Headquarters	Pending Scope and Cost Development.	Funds will be used to build an Administration Center at a new location.
STX Procurement Warehouse	Obligated	The warehouse will be incorporated into the new Administration Center.
STX School Lunch Warehouse	Obligated	The warehouse will be incorporated into the new Administration Center.
STX Special Education & Maintenance Plant	Obligated	The offices and warehouse will be incorporated into the new Administration Center.
STX VIDE Contents	Pending FEMA CRC Project Development	FEMA is reviewing the application for funding.
STT/STJ DISTRICT		
CAMPUS	FUNDING STATUS	UPDATE / PROJECT PHASE
Abraham	Obligated	Construction In Progress using local funds and Adult Education will also be relocated here.
Adult Education Center	Obligated	This property will be shuttered. Funds will be re-allocated to other new construction / modernization projects in the St. Thomas/St. John district.
Boschulte MS	Obligated	Design-build procurement in progress.

Bowsky ES	Obligated	Conceptual Site Plan developed in master plan. Schematic design is now needed.
Cancryn JHS	Fixed Cost Offer	Schematic design started in Fall 2023 in conjunction with Lockhart.
Charlotte Amalie HS	Pending FEMA Project Review	Design-build procurement in progress. Demolition will begin after abatement is completed.
Charlotte Amalie 9th Grade Center at Wheatley Phase I	Obligated	Phase I construction is complete.
Charlotte Amalie 9th Grade Center at Wheatley Phase II	Pending FEMA Initial Project Development	Contractor will resume begin work on Phase II when funding is obligated.
Dober	Pending FEMA Project Review	This property will be shuttered and remain in VIDE inventory.
Edith Williams Alternative Education Academy	Obligated	Schematic design started in Fall 2023.
Evelyn Marcelli Annex & Jarvis Annex	Obligated	The offices at Jarvis Annex will be relocated into the New Administration Center. Funds will be re-allocated to other new construction / modernization projects in the St. Thomas/St. John district.
Gomez	Pending FEMA Project Review	Oliver school will be modernized to serve Gomez students. This property will remain in VIDE inventory.
Gramboko	Obligated. Pending FEMA Approval of New Version	VIDE has developed Architectural plans in conjunction with the VI State Historic Preservation office and the plans are being modified to suit a rented location. The STT/STJ Curriculum Center will be temporarily housed at rental property until the VIDE STT/STJ Administration Center has been permanently built at a new location.
Guy Benjamin Center	Obligated	Design will begin after the PM firms assist VIDE to issue an RFP for on call Architecture & Engineering services.
Kean HS	Pending FEMA Peer Review	Conceptual Site Plan developed.
Lockhart	Obligated	Schematic design started in Fall 2023.
Muller	Pending FEMA Project Review	Conceptual Site Plan developed.
Oliver	Pending FEMA CRC Project Development	Planning phase.
Sibilly	Obligated	Design will begin after the PM firms assist VIDE to issue an RFP for on call Architecture & Engineering services.
Sprauve	Fixed Cost Offer	Design is 30% complete. Work will continue after the land swap is completed.
Tuitt	Obligated	Conceptual Site Plan developed.
STT Curriculum Center	Obligated	DPP is working on land acquisition on VIDE's behalf. Design will begin after the PM firms assist VIDE to issue an RFP for on call Architecture & Engineering services.
STTJ Headquarters	Obligated	The headquarters will be relocated into the New Administration Center.
STT School Lunch Warehouse	Pending FEMA Project Review	The warehouse will be incorporated into the new Administration Center.
STT VIDE Contents	Pending FEMA Initial Project Development	FEMA is reviewing the application for funding.

Addendum B – Project Status Report

PROJECT STATUS REPORT				
NEW CONSTRUCTION				
PROJECT	TYPE OF WORK	IMPLEMENTATION GROUP	STATUS	COMMENTS /PHASE
Arthur Richards PreK-8 at Edith Williams Campus (1,070 students)	New Build	Traunch 1		Construction in progress
Central High School (1,195 students)	New Build	Traunch 1		Contracting
Charlotte Amalie High School (1,500 students)	New Build	Traunch 1		Contracting
Sprauve PreK-12 (460 students)	New Build	Traunch 1		Design
Henderson PreK-8 (575 students)	New Build	Traunch 2		Design
Lockhart PreK-8 Addition (575 – 1070 students)	New Build	Traunch 2		Design
Markoe PreK-8 (1,070 students)	New Build	Traunch 2		Design
Larsen PreK-8 (575 students)	New Build	Traunch 2		Pending design notice to proceed
St. Thomas Administration Center	New Build	Traunch 3		Pending land acquisition
Andrews PreK-8 (575 students)	New Build	TBD		
Gardine PreK-8 (1,070 students)	New Build	TBD		
Kean High School (1,195 students)	New Build	TBD		
Muller PreK-8 (1,070 students)	New Build	TBD		
Sibilly PreK-3 (150 students)	New Build	TBD		
Tuitt PreK-3 (150 students)	New Build	TBD		
MODERNIZATION				
FACILITY	TYPE OF WORK	IMPLEMENTATION GROUP	STATUS	COMMENTS
Abraham Adult Education / CTECH	Modernization	Traunch 1		Construction of Phase 1 in progress
Boschulte PreK-8 (1,070 students)	Modernization	Traunch 1		Contracting
Wheatley Discovery Center	Modernization	Traunch 1		Phase 1 is complete. Phase 2 in FCD permit
Complex / CTECH High School (1,500 students)	Modernization	Traunch 2		Design
Williams Alternative Education Center	Modernization	Traunch 2		Design
St. Croix Administration Center	Modernization	Traunch 3		Pending land acquisition
Bowsky PreK-8 (575 students)	Modernization	TBD		
Oliver PreK-8 (575 students)	Modernization	TBD		
Woodson Discovery Center	Modernization	TBD		

(on track, time-sensitive, at risk)