



# **VIRGIN ISLANDS BOARD OF EDUCATION**

## COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



### **TESTIMONY**

Dr. Kyza A. Callwood, Chairman  
June 17, 2024

**GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS  
VIRGIN ISLANDS BOARD OF EDUCATION**



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Good morning, Honorable Marise C. James, Chairwoman of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, committee members, other members of the 35th Legislature present, and the listening and viewing audience. I am Dr. Kyza A. Callwood, Chairman of the 21st Virgin Islands Board of Education, also known as VIBE or the Board. Joining me in the St. Croix Chambers is Winona A. Hendricks, Chairperson of the School Plants & Facilities Committee and Associate Executive Director Samanta Prentice. Thank you for inviting us to share VIBE's assessment of the 2023-2024 school year and our recommendations to improve the quality of education for the upcoming school year.

First and foremost, I would like to extend heartfelt congratulations to all promotees and graduates across the Territory. Your hard work and dedication have prepared you for the next exciting chapter of your lives. For those of you venturing off to pursue higher education, career and technical training, or military service, we wish you a safe journey. Represent the Virgin Islands with pride and excellence!

**Annual School Management Accountability Report (SMAR)**

Each year, the Virgin Islands Board of Education is mandated to prepare a School Management Accountability Report (SMAR). This report is shared with the Legislature, the Governor, the Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE), and other stakeholders. This year, we present a robust and thorough assessment, despite significant changes following the passage of Act 8717, which established the Bureau of School Construction & Maintenance in April 2023.

**Key Changes and Responsibilities**

Act 8717 transferred all responsibilities related to school facilities to the newly formed Bureau of School Construction & Maintenance. The Board now focuses on evaluating public-school curricula, instruction, and administration. We remain committed to ensuring that our schools are safe, healthy, and conducive to learning, and we seek your support to expedite repairs and maintenance before the August 2024 school reopening.

**2023-2024 SMAR Report Focus and Methodology**

In the absence of the Bureau, our Board members reviewed VIDE's 30-day maintenance projects alongside directors of maintenance and school personnel. Detailed information on maintenance achievements and challenges due to funding,

**MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of the Virgin Islands Board of Education is to provide leadership and oversight, set policy, and advocate for continuous improvement of the Public Education System of the Virgin Islands of the United States.

**VISION STATEMENT**

Each child is provided with the best quality education, which guarantees academic excellence, promotes our history and culture, and builds strong local and global communities.



contract delays, or planning issues was shared in our February 12, 2024, testimony before this Committee.

On the curricula and instruction front, the SMAR aims to present data-backed recommendations for policy development, decision-making, and critical curriculum changes. This year, we piloted an assessment in one K-8 school and one high school per district. Using an academic checklist, we tested curriculum effectiveness through visits, observations, and discussions involving key educational stakeholders, including the Department of Education, the University of the Virgin Islands, the Regional Educational Laboratory of the Northeast and Islands (REL NEI), school-based parent associations, and student organizations.

### **Findings and Recommended Corrective Actions**

Our academic walkthroughs and Data Chats revealed that current curriculum and instructional practices are not adequately supporting positive Smarter Balance outcomes or student success across core subjects, especially in technology usage and skills. No effective accommodations or modifications have been identified for improving outcomes for students with disabilities.

Reviewing school profiles and site-based data, we found that many students are performing below standards, particularly in English and Math, though Science showed some promise. This data is crucial for setting proficiency goals in Reading and Mathematics, reducing dropout rates, and improving career readiness indicators.

Despite these challenges, no official state release has alerted the community to the severity of the situation, nor has a roadmap for accelerated changes been presented. The Board petitions VIDE to share a state-led plan to improve Smarter Balance Testing results, including a curriculum and instructional focus and the necessary resources. Individual school plans must align with this state plan and other territorial initiatives, particularly in Mathematics, ELA, and Science.

### **VIDE Action Items**

VIDE must demonstrate curriculum alignment with Smarter Balance testing to improve instructional quality. Key issues to address include:

- Low and declining test results due to internal and external factors.
- Poor test outcomes despite classroom mastery of subject matter.
- Lack of reliable internet access.
- Disparities in standardized testing.
- Prioritizing classroom instruction over standardized testing.

Assessment results should guide curriculum and professional development decisions. Teachers should be integral to developing and analyzing assessments to ensure alignment with curriculum standards and improve instructional strategies.

### **Legislative Concerns and Recommendations**

We urge the Legislature to allocate funds to:

- Enhance security and safety measures at school sites.
- Develop and maintain an inter-agency online tracking database.
- Conduct ongoing environmental monitoring of school facilities.
- Provide teacher education scholarships and incentives to address the teacher shortage crisis.
- Reform student loan policies to reduce the financial burden on college students.
- Increase support for early childhood education programs.

### **Jurisdictional Authority**

VIBE requests legislative authority to:

- Open and close schools in conjunction with the Department of Education.
- Amend 17 V.I.C. § 24(3) to establish a clear deadline for auxiliary agency reports.
- Mandate the Commissioner of Education to present a "State of Education" report to VIBE before school reopening.
- Hold an annual legislative hearing to address SMAR findings and recommendations.
- Grant VIBE the power to hire, certify, and monitor district superintendents and deputy superintendents.

### **Other Legislative Concerns**

We recommend addressing:

- Digital equity and access.
- Comprehensive mental health support in schools.
- School safety and cybersecurity measures.
- Data privacy protections for students.
- Legal reforms to increase penalties for sexual assault of minors.
- Confidential reporting systems for suspected abuse.
- Improved inter-agency coordination and oversight.
- Regular audits and inspections of schools.

### **Conclusion**

The Virgin Islands Board of Education advocates for the development of a Virgin Islands curriculum through a collaborative process involving state leadership, school personnel, parents, and other stakeholders. This curriculum should include a comprehensive collection of pedagogical resources accessible in various formats. The Board recommends aggressive marketing and implementation of the Virgin Islands Department of Education curriculum standards to ensure that expectations, outcomes, and effective practices are adopted to improve teaching and learning. The Board encourages the community to actively engage in the educational process by utilizing the electronic resources (links, websites, etc.) available or requesting copies of the curriculum standards. By doing so, community members can gain a deeper understanding of the educational benchmarks and goals set for our students. This transparency fosters a collaborative environment where educators, parents, and community stakeholders can work together to ensure that the highest quality of education is delivered. Your involvement and insights are invaluable in shaping a robust

and effective educational system. The Virgin Islands Board of Education supports an instructional framework emphasizing positive learning environments, clear shared outcomes, varied content, assessments with feedback, and complex thinking as part of the daily practices that shape what, how, and why students should learn, know, and do. Additionally, soft skills should be prioritized to enhance students' abilities in communication, public speaking, teamwork, critical thinking, creativity, coding, financial literacy, understanding artificial intelligence, social justice, and mental health awareness.

We commend all administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents, and the School Plants and Facilities Committee, along with VIBE staff, for their contributions. Your hard work ensures that our students are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and resilience needed to navigate and succeed in an ever-changing world.

Chairwoman James, thank you again for allowing the Virgin Islands Board of Education to provide testimony. We stand ready to answer any questions.

## **APPENDIX**

**Smarter Balance Profiles by District**

## Section I – Assessment Proficiency Rate 2022-2023 Data

Districts/Schools	2022-2023							Enrollment
	Dropout		Cohort Graduation Rate	Attendance Rate	Assessment Proficiency Rate			
	Amount	Rate			ELA	MAT	SCI	
<b>St. Thomas-St. John District</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>76.8</b>	<b>91.9</b>	<b>16.1</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>33.1</b>	<b>5,094</b>
Jane E. Tuitt Elementary School				89.0	11.8	7.4		169
Joseph Gomez Elementary School				98.8	11.3	4.2	41.7	420
Joseph Sibilly Elementary School				92.4	44.4	32.6	50.0	231
Lockhart Elementary School				92.4	11.7	3.9		298
Ulla F. Muller Elementary School				91.6	10.4	3.0	30.4	420
Yvonne E. Milliner-Bowsky Elementary School				87.6	12.6	6.5	30.6	428
Julius E. Sprauve School				95.0	9.0	2.8	34.0	202
Addelita Cancryn School	5	1.3		92.6	10.4	2.5	26.9	686
Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School	2	0.6		92.4	13.8	4.5	23.8	507
Charlotte Amalie High School	30	2.9	77.4	89.5	29.7	3.0	37.1	1,031
Ivanna Eudora Kean High School	19	2.7	76.7	92.5	35.7	8.4	44.8	702
<b>St. Croix District</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>79.5</b>	<b>89.3</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>31.3</b>	<b>5,072</b>
Alfredo Andrews Elementary School				84.9	17.1	5.3	40.7	460
Juanita Gardine				84.0	9.2	2.4	16.9	321
Claude O. Markoe Elementary School				87.1	11.1	3.4	28.3	383
Eulalie Rivera	1	0.7		86.2	20.3	7.9	34.1	619
Lew Muckle Elementary School				90.0	14.0	4.7	32.7	342
Pearl B. Larsen				91.1	13.1	7.0	27.3	443
Ricardo Richards Elementary School				88.0	35.1	17.6	56.9	407
John H. Woodson Junior High School	7	1.3		91.5	11.5	3.7	23.9	538
St. Croix Central High School	26	3.6	81.6	90.7	26.1	2.9	34.3	726
St. Croix Educational Complex High School	17	2.0	79.0	93.9	33.9	8.1	34.5	833
<b>Virgin Islands</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>78.0</b>	<b>90.6</b>	<b>16.9</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>32.2</b>	<b>10,166</b>

## Column 1 – Dropout Rate for High Schools and Junior High Schools

Dropout rates are recorded in PowerSchool, with reasons specified for both official dropouts (who completed withdrawal forms) and unofficial dropouts (students who did not attend school or were frequently absent). The deadline to report dropouts for a school year is September 31<sup>st</sup> annually.

- St. Thomas/St. John District: Overall dropout rate was 2.2% of district enrollment, with 56 students dropping out. High schools had the highest dropout rates:
  - Charlotte Amalie High School - 30 dropouts
  - Ivanna Eudora Kean High School - 19 dropouts
- St. Croix District: Overall dropout rate was 2.1% of district enrollment, with 51 students dropping out. High schools had the highest dropout rates:
  - St. Croix Central High School - 26 dropouts
  - St. Croix Educational Complex - 17 dropouts

## Column 2 – Cohort Graduation Rate

The cohort graduation rate represents the number of students in a graduating class who begin 9<sup>th</sup> grade and complete 12<sup>th</sup> grade together. This rate can be affected by retention, dropout, medical, or other reasons. St. Croix Central High School had the highest cohort rate in the territory.

- St. Thomas/St. John District:
  - Charlotte Amalie High School - 77.4%

- Ivanna Eudora Kean High School - 76.7%
- St. Croix District:
  - St. Croix Central High School - 81.6%
  - St. Croix Educational Complex High School - 79%

#### Column 3 – Attendance Rate

The accepted rate for school attendance is 95%. Rates below this benchmark indicate truancy and chronic absenteeism directly related to missed instructional days and inadequate academic achievement.

- St. Thomas/St. John District: Joseph Gomez Elementary School and Julius Sprauve School met or exceeded the goal with attendance rates of 98.8% and 95.0%, respectively.
- St. Croix District: All schools in the district were below the expected attendance rate. The closest was St. Croix Educational Complex High School with 93.9%. Efforts are needed to address truancy and chronic absenteeism.

#### Column 4 – English Language Arts (ELA) Achievement Level

Achievement levels are below standards, near standards, met standards, or exceeded standards. The chart shows the percentage of students who were proficient or advanced in ELA.

- St. Thomas/St. John District:
  - Joseph Sibilly Elementary School (highest proficiency rate) - 44.4%
  - Ivanna Eudora Kean High School's - 35.7%
  - Charlotte Amalie High School - 29.7%
  - Junior high school rates were in the teens.
- St. Croix District:
  - Ricardo Richards Elementary School - 35.1%
  - St. Croix Educational Complex High School - 33.9%
  - St. Croix Central High School - 26.1%
  - Alfredo Andrews Elementary School - 20.3%
  - All other elementary and junior high school rates were in the teens

#### Column 5 – Mathematics Achievement levels

Achievement levels are below standards, near standards, met standards, or exceeded standards. The rates below indicate the percentage of students who were proficient or advanced in mathematics.

- St. Thomas/St. John District: Joseph Sibilly Elementary School had a rate of 32.6%. All other schools had single-digit rates.
- St. Croix District: Ricardo Richards Elementary School had a rate of 17.6%. All other schools had single-digit rates.

#### Column 6 – Science Achievement levels

Achievement levels are below standards, near standards, met standards, or exceeded standards. The rates below indicate the percentage of students who were proficient or advanced in science.

- St. Thomas/St. John District:
  - Joseph Sibilly Elementary School had a rate of 50.0%
  - Joseph Gomez Elementary School had a rate of 41.7%



- Adelita Cancryn had a rate of 26.9%
- Ivanna Eudora Kean High School had rate of 44.8%
- Charlotte Amalie High School had a rate of 37.1%
- Other schools had double-digit rates between 20-30%
- St. Croix District:
  - Ricardo Richards Elementary School had - 56.9% proficiency rate, Alfredo Andrews Elementary School had 40.7%, St. Croix Central High School had 34.3%, and St. Croix Educational Complex High School had 34.5%. Other schools had achievement levels in the teens, 20s, or 30s.

#### Column 7 – School Enrollment

Enrollment data shows smaller enrollments for elementary schools, while junior high and high schools have enrollments ranging from 400 to 1,000 students.