



2024

Pearl B. Larsen Parent & Teacher Association (PTA) Testimony to the Committee of Education and Workforce Development

PRESENTED BY: LISA TERRY AND LA VAUGHN BELLE
AUGUST 30, 2024

Pearl B. Larsen PTA Board:
Kimberly Moorehead, President
Roxanne Walters-Warbington, Vice-President
Lisa Terry, Secretary
Zandra Ramtahal, Treasurer

Pearl B. Larsen Parent & Teacher Association Testimony

Good morning Honorable Senator Marise C. James and members of this committee. La Vaughn Belle and I, Lisa Terry, would like to thank you for the opportunity to discuss critical issues impacting teacher instruction and learning at Pearl B. Larsen. Our school truly embodies its mission to provide a world-class, high-quality education to every student in a safe, healthy, comfortable environment utilizing the cooperative efforts of students, parents, the school, the community, and the world. Today we are here to request that the 35th Legislature requires the VI Board of Education (VI BOE) and the VI Department of Education (VI DOE) to bring our school back in compliance with Title 17 by taking the following actions:

1. Update the annual school assessment to include missing maintenance projects.
2. Require a Sep 10 distribution of the \$250,000 for teacher instruction and learning.
3. Execute timely and expeditious hiring and deployment of open positions no later than Sep 16. If international teachers will take months to arrive, please seek temporary, certified backfills from nearby locations like Puerto Rico.
4. Provide timely and accurate communications on infrastructure issues within two hours.

To support compliance with Title 17 at Pearl B. Larsen and the safe operation of our school, specific requests are as follows:

1. Add a line item to indicate that Pearl B's bathrooms will be repaired. At a minimum, we would like for door locks to be repaired, functional soap and paper towel dispensers installed to combat against communicable diseases spreading, sufficient toilet tissue dispensers and toilet tissue provided throughout the year. Students have reported having to hold the door while their peer uses the restroom or having to guess how much toilet tissue is needed before using the restroom due to toilet tissue dispensers being located outside of the bathroom stall.
2. Add a line item to repair the music room, which has an unsafe bandstand and broken/missing ceiling tiles. Sadly, our music teacher is teaching in the library or computer lab.
3. Add a line item to fix the internet connectivity. In fact, the DOE's IT staff have indicated on numerous prior occasions that the internet is working; the internet currently has very limited or no connectivity in the school. Parents often have to wait until our admins and teachers go home to use their own internet to get replies. Teachers cannot use cutting edge technology to prepare our students.
4. Update the status of all broken/damaged floor and ceiling tiles as incomplete until the job has been completed.
5. Although demolition of the playground has begun, there is no update on when a new playground will be installed, and we would like to request that teachers / students / parents / guardians be involved in the process to vote on a playground that best fits our needs.
6. Parents/guardians for the entire school should be notified with accurate information via email, text, and social media within two hours if an infrastructure issue occurs no matter the number of students impacted. Recently, due to WAPA, the water pressure was impacted, and the alternate source, the cistern, had a pipe that needed to be repaired. Numerous parents/guardians, students and teachers publicly indicated that the school was without clean water, and many complained on the day of the event of unsanitary conditions such as clogged toilets, inability to use a clean restroom, etc. Yet, parents/guardians received an incorrect statement the day after the event that "Pearl B. Larsen PreK-8 School has running water." (See appendix for full statement and timing.) This statement was incorrect, and parents/guardians should have received notification within two hours, so they could have decided how to support their children during a major safety hazard, especially given the communicable diseases in today's society and the importance of hand-washing.

In addition to maintenance, Title 17 gives the VI BOE jurisdiction to provide for the proper administration of funds. Last year, our schools did not receive \$250,000, because funds were not allocated in time. Again, Pearl B Larsen is starting the school year with \$250,000 in funds for teacher instructional activities, and there is no date or information being provided about when these funds will be administered and if they will be administered no later than September 10 to provide usage opportunities throughout the year. Most importantly, at Pearl B, uncertified teachers are being leveraged to fill the gap of our school missing seven vital teachers/staff including:

1. A Granny pre-k teacher,
2. Two 1st grade teachers,
3. A 7th grade teacher,
4. A librarian,
5. A nurse (Legislature needs to change the model so LPNs report into a RN), and a
6. Technology teacher (waiting on an international teacher to arrive)

Parents/Guardians also cannot search the VI DOE's website to see which teachers are not certified. It is also not clear what type of incentives are being offered to promote certification or hire teachers/staff (i.e. nurses). It is important to be transparent about when the roles will be filled and how long our students will be impacted by not having certified teachers/staff in place.

Parents/Guardians at Pearl B want to do more than simply join a monthly PTA meeting to discuss issues, and we are prepared to take the following actions:

1. Seek transparency on the issues for our Pearl B community and protection of our teachers if any semblance of retribution appears as a result of stating the facts
2. Manage a system of volunteers so that our library can be opened
3. Continue to donate toilet tissue, soap dispensers, and other learning resources - blocks, clocks, etc as needed
4. Offer IT experts who can help VIYA and the VI DOE to fix internet connectivity
5. Fundraise to provide interim playground equipment and other school needs such as mentoring and school programs

In summary, at Pearl B, we are asking for four immediate actions:

1. Timely and expeditious installation of the playground, repair of the music room, a fix for internet connectivity and repairs to bathrooms plus all other items denoted on the VI DOE's repair list
2. Distribution of the \$250,000 for teacher instruction & learning no later than Sep 10
3. Timely and expeditious hiring and deployment of our seven open positions no later than Sep 16. If international teachers will take months to arrive, please seek temporary, certified backfills from nearby locations like Puerto Rico.
4. Accurate, timely communications should be provided by the VI DOE to parents/guardians within two hours of an infrastructure issue

Thank you in advance for quickly addressing these issues that significantly impact the future success of our students at Pearl B Larsen.

APPENDIX I – VI Department of Education Maintenance Projects Posted on 8/8/24

Music room and bathroom repairs must be added, and ceiling tile repairs should not be marked as complete until done. In addition, a date should be provided for all items per Title 17. The primary requested date is for the playground installation.



Virgin Islands Department of Education
SCHOOL MAINTENANCE PROJECTS
St. Croix District

SCHOOL	MAINTENANCE DESCRIPTIONS	COMPLETED	PENDING
PEARL B. LARSEN	Clean all A/C units throughout School	Y	
	Repair Ceiling light	Y	
	Replace/change out ceiling tiles	Y	
	Install Ceiling fan	Y	
	Replace/change out floor files	Y	
	Install window units	Y	
	Playground Demolition	Y	
	Perimeter Fencing		In progress
	Camera Installation		In progress
	Playground Installation		In progress
	Roof Repair		Solicitation

APPENDIX II – Conflicting Social Media Communications on Water Issues

This is only a sample of statements. Numerous students/parents/guardians supported East Gyu’s post and confirmed the accuracy of it publicly and offline. The PTA will work with the entire parent body to strongly defend any teacher against retribution when he/she state facts.

3:28

Virgin Islands Department of Education

13h · 🌐

To address any public concerns or misinformation, please be informed that Pearl B. Larsen PreK-8 School has continuous access to running water. Due to a temporary disruption in WAPA's potable water service, our maintenance team switched the school to its cistern water supply. WAPA crews are actively working to restore the regular water service.

We assure you that the school remains fully operational with complete water access. The Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) understands the critical importance of water in our school facilities and is committed to making necessary adjustments as challenges arise. The well-being of our students and faculty remains our top priority.

8-21-24

Virgin Islands Department of Education

PLEASE NOTE:

THE PEARL B. LARSEN PREK-8 SCHOOL HAS RUNNING WATER. THE SCHOOL WAS SWITCHED TO CISTERN WATER ACCESS AS THERE WAS A POTABLE WATER SERVICE INTERRUPTION AFFECTING THE AREA. WAPA CREWS HAVE BEEN ACTIVELY WORKING ON REPAIRS.

11 shares

Like Copy Share

East Gyu

Aug 21 · 🌐

Reality is reality and the facts are facts. To whom it may concern and the powers that be, here are the words from a teacher at Pearl B. Just because an alert bulletin doesn't say, doesn't change the fact it all started yesterday .

Everyone have they two cents looking in from the outside. They are not the ones having to deal with students waiting for hours to use the restroom until they could not hold it anymore. So guess what? We let them go to the restroom and used hand sanitizer to clean their hands. Could they flush? No. Wash hands? No. So of course the restrooms were stink for hours. Over two. At this point why would ppl lie. Yes a team was able to rectify the issue eventually. And we are grateful for all who played a part. But please stop making seem like the school is running perfectly. The water issue did start yesterday!

East Gyu

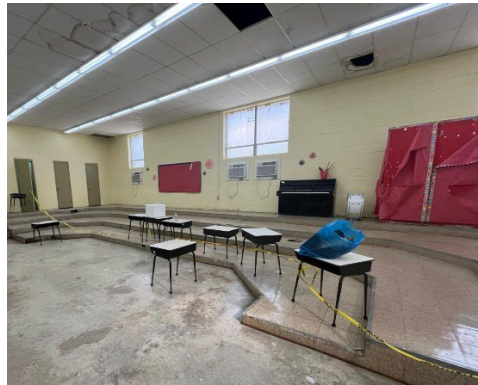
APPENDIX III – Pictures of Bathrooms and Music Room

Issue	Picture
<p>Bathroom – see paint on the ceiling from summer 2024 paint job and broken wall dispensers</p>	
<p>Bathroom Ceiling Tiles</p>	
<p>Broken toilet and tissue dispensers</p>	
<p>Out of order Men's and Women's Bathrooms that were broken in May (picture taken in early August)</p>	

Music Room Bandstand



Beautiful but Condemned Music Room



Music Room Ceiling Damage



Music Room Broken Floor Tiles

