

**THIRTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS  
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE  
DEVELOPMENT**

**The Honorable Marise James,  
Chairperson**

**March 23, 2023**



Good afternoon to the Honorable Marise James, Chairperson of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, members of the Committee, other members of the 35th Legislature, other testifiers, and my fellow Virgin Islanders. For the record, I am Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington, Commissioner of Education. Accompanying me today to present this testimony are:

- Mr. Victor Somme III, Assistant Commissioner;
- Dr. Yvette McMahon-Arnold, State Director for Instructional Development; and
- Dr. Lauren Larsen, St. Croix Social Studies Coordinator.

Respectfully, please allow me to explain the variance this testimony presents from Bill No. 35-0055. Assistant Commissioner Somme, Deputy Commissioner Charleswell, VIDE Legal Counsel, Alvincent Hutson, Esq., and the VIDE curriculum team met virtually with the honorable Franklin Johnson, Senator, on Monday, March 20, 2023, to receive clarification on the bill. After discussing the bill's intent, possible impacts, and live on-line presentations from Drs. McMahon-Arnold and Larsen, Senator Johnson respectfully requested the same presentations for the Committee on Education and Workforce Development. Initially, there was agreement to table the bill in order to meet with the Policy, Rules and Regulations Committee of the Virgin Islands Board of Education, the Virgin Islands Department of Education, and the Office of Senator Franklin Johnson, to work on perfecting the bill. This meeting remains scheduled for Monday, March 27, 2023. The Department will take a position on the bill upon completion of our collaborative efforts with all pertinent stakeholders.

The Department is tremendously grateful to Senator Johnson and this Committee to allow us to share work done this far to advance standards, curriculum and the teaching of Virgin Islands History and Virgin Islands-centric Civics. This update by Drs. McMahon-Arnold and Larsen will discuss the recently completed development of new standards for Social Studies within the Virgin Islands

Standards of Achievement for Social Studies (VISA-SS). This work was guided by the definition of social studies as follows:

“Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.”

(Definition of Social Studies from the National Council for the Social Studies presented in the Draft Virgin Islands Standards of Achievement for Social Studies *p.1*)

A review of the introduction given in the document provides a clear explanation of the process utilized to develop the standards. The Department conducted an internal and external review of the standards for feedback. Presented in a spreadsheet, the feedback shows what was said, how it was treated, and the justification for the action taken in addressing the feedback.

VISA-SS was presented to the Virgin Islands Board of Education for review and approval on Wednesday, June 30, 2022, with a follow up presentation on Saturday, July 9, 2022. The Department was tasked to provide a statement to explain what is perceived as a lack of attention for Virgin Islands History in the document. To address this perception, the Department revisited the difference between **Standards** and **Curriculum**. The Virgin Islands Curriculum Framework document, June 2021, provides definitions of both.

**Standards** are clear and concise statements that describe what a student needs to know at a specific stage of development. They refer to the minimum requirements of what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade level. The standards address a foundational framework of what is to be learned. The goal is to ensure all VIDE students focus on a common set of standards and are provided opportunities to learn at the highest possible level. While the standards address what is to be learned, they do not address how learning experiences are to be designed or what

instructional resources are to be used; is the curriculum does so. (Virgin Curriculum Framework, 2021, pp. 4-5).

**Curriculum** consists of the components that provide for the delivery of instruction to include content area standards, textbooks, and other instructional resources, print and digital, as well as videos, lessons, assignments, and assessments. The overall purpose of curriculum is to focus on and connect the work of classroom teachers to standards, assessments and classroom practices to increase student achievement. (Virgin Curriculum Framework, 2021, p. 5).

With submission of VISA-SS to the Board of Education for review and approval, a few key points were highlighted as follows:

- VIDE's ongoing curriculum work continues to see the terms being used interchangeably which leads to misunderstanding, both internally and externally of what is presented in the document.
- The submission speaks comprehensively to social studies taking into consideration the body of knowledge that is considered social studies.
- The document presents standards as defined above, not a curriculum, also defined above.
- Given our rich Virgin Islands History and Culture, VISA-SS presents standards specific to Virgin Islands History and culture at every grade level and course throughout the document.
- Specifically, grade 4 is grade and age appropriate for Virgin Islands History while grade 9 is the standalone course requirement in accordance with the Board's graduation policy.
- An implementation plan is in draft to support the next phase of this work.

At a July 28, 2022, special meeting, the Board voted to approve the VISA-SS draft. During the August 29, 2022, board meeting, the VISA-SS was fully approved by the Board. In its correspondence, the Board directed the Department to make additional resources by local and Caribbean authors and historians. Specific to local resources, this work started several years ago.

### **Virgin Islands History Resources**

To support the development of Virgin Islands History resources, the Department finalized a professional services contract on August 29, 2022, with the publishing company CodeMantra to

leverage the customized publishing of the Virgin Islands History workbooks for grades 3-8 and a customized Virgin Islands-centric Civics textbook. The customized projects will present locally produced instructional resources for teachers and students. Prior to the contract with CodeManta, VIDE entered into a licensing agreement with Houghton Mifflin Harcourt to secure the licenses to the templates on which CodeMantra will port the locally developed content.

### **Virgin Islands History**

Dr. Lauren Larsen, St. Croix Social Studies Coordinator, continues to lead a team of teacher-leaders to develop content for grades K-8 representing grade-appropriate workbooks complete with pictures representative of the Virgin Islands. To date, workbooks, along with tables of contents, teacher resources, and scope and sequence have been published for grades K-2. Content for grades 3-8 have been developed, vetted, and is now ready for alignment with the new VISA-SS. A draft table of contents for the customized workbooks for grades 3-8 is to be revised and updated this summer. This draft table of contents has an embedded Virgin Islands history curriculum and will be aligned to the proposed VISA-SS upon final approval by the Commissioner and adoption by the Board. In addition to aligning each lesson with the National C-3 Framework, each lesson will also be aligned to VISA-SS. The workbooks under development (grades 3-8), similar to the workbooks already completed (grades K-2), will include an embedded curriculum for the various lessons that emphasize important elements of Virgin Islands history and culture. **Virgin Islands history is not taught in isolation but in context of the wider world to give the students perspective on the world around them and the opportunity to compare, contrast and analyze the social, political, physical and economic factors that have impacted the Virgin Islands.**

### **Virgin Islands-Centric Civics:**

The development of a Virgin Islands-Centric Civics course has been more recent as required by Act No. 7934, proposed by Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr. Dr. Larsen has played a lead role in this work

bringing expertise and experience to the project. The project features the rich history and legacy of our Virgin Islands government. Over time, several discussions ensued of two (2) options to infuse Virgin Islands content into an existing Civics textbook or to pursue a standalone resource. Curriculum workgroup members expressed the desire to move forward with the option to embed the local Virgin Islands content into an existing civics text instead of a standalone resource. Similar to the Virgin Islands History workbooks, customization is again required that will combine locally developed Virgin Islands content and pictures.

The two initiatives, Virgin Islands History Workbooks and Virgin Islands-centric Civics, complement each other. Through the purchase of licensed course templates from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and Professional Services contract with CodeMantra, the Department will collaborate to incorporate locally developed resources into student workbooks for e-publication initially and print ready deliverables. Both initiatives require customized publication of locally developed resources to support Virgin Islands History and Virgin Islands-centric Civics. Of note, the Virgin Islands History K-8 workbooks are already embedded with a Civics component and will feed seamlessly and naturally into the Virgin Islands-Centric Civics component. Without a doubt, building from PreK- 8 Virgin Islands History will feed into the high school civics course and also complement the existing 9th grade Virgin Islands History course. Both projects utilize our local teachers to include retirees who provide time, experience, and expertise.

Collaboration is essential to this joint project; it speaks to an iterative process between CodeMantra and the VIDE. From prior experience with published Virgin Islands History K-2 workbooks, this iterative process requires a number of conference calls, emails, etc. as drafts of the workbook are exchanged, marked-up, revised, and finalized. Below is the Scope of Work to be undertaken by CodeMantra once the contract is fully executed. It is important to note that a Purchase Order is already approved for this work.

## **Update**

The Virgin Islands-centric Civics initiative is in its final stage of review and work on the iterative process for Virgin Islands History for grades 3-8 has started. Dr. Larsen and a team of educators meet on Saturdays at Ricardo Richards Elementary School; this work is supported through per diem.

## **Obligated Expenses:**

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt: \$400,000

CodeMantra: \$363,000 (digital access to Schoology) Print ready cartridges

## **CodeMantra Scope of Work**

- Collaboration required around the integration of six (6) workbooks for 6 different grades
- Publish workbooks for grades 3-8 to be housed on the Department's Learning Management System, Schoology
- Civics integration of local content into the existing HMM national Civics text
- CodeMantra will provide digital content and print ready cartridges
- CodeMantra will epublish locally developed teacher resources
- VIDE will provide all content and pictures to represent the local Virgin Islands content
- Terms of the contract allow for the rights to host student texts and teacher resources on VIDE's network, thereby giving VIDE sole ownership
- Ongoing communication throughout the life of the contract through virtual meetings, email, conference calls, and telephone calls

## Funding for Virgin Islands-centric Civics Textbook and Virgin Islands History Workbooks

ACT/ BILL NO.	FUND	INITIAL AMOUNT	CURRENT BALANCE	SOURCE	NEEDS	OTHER
Act 8365/Bill No 33-0377	Civics Education Initiative Fund	\$175,000.00	\$175,000.00	General Fund	Social Studies Curriculum Development	Flexible Use
Act 8359/Bill No 33-0407	Virgin Islands History Textbook Special Appropriation	\$500,000.00	\$87,000.00	Available until expended	Social Studies Curriculum Development	
Act 8359/Bill No 33-0407	Civic Education	\$131,250.00	\$43,750.00	Available until expended	Social Studies Curriculum Development	

### Funding Needs for Continuing Both Initiatives:

- Resources to print Virgin Islands-centric Civics text (9-12) and Virgin Islands History (3-8) workbooks/consumables
  - Option: textbooks distributed year after year
- Stipends for local educators to work on the content and resources
- Provide ongoing training (train-the-trainer) for local educators
- Purchase of K-2 workbooks for both districts

### Social STUDIES Proposed Budget Civics and VI History Initiative

Estimated Costs 22-23 school year	ESTIMATED	ACTUAL	DIFFERENCE
Wages/Per Diems (both projects)	127,000.00		127,000.00
2000 Civics Text Book Printing	190,000.00		190,000.00
WorkBook Printing (2 grades)	153,000.00		153,000.00
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>470,000.00</b>		<b>470,000.00</b>

At this time, Dr. McMahon-Arnold will navigate you through the #goopenusvi microsite which houses, as an online repository, all things standards, curriculum, instructional materials, educational resource, etc. The awesome work produced by Dr. Larsen and his team is located on a Microsoft



OneDrive application, and he will provide a live demonstration of this work. Afterwards, my team and I remain available for questions. Thank you!