

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT

BILL NO. 36-0069

Thirty-Sixth Legislature of the Virgin Islands

March 28, 2025

An Act amending title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 9, subchapter 1, section 82, subsection (a) by changing the age a child begins kindergarten from five years of age to four years of age

PROPOSED BY: Senator Alma Francis Heyliger

WHEREAS, children at the age of four demonstrate significant cognitive development, marked by improved language skills, problem-solving abilities, and curiosity, and starting school at this age can harness their enthusiasm for learning, providing a foundation for academic success;

WHEREAS, educational institutions play a crucial role in identifying and addressing developmental delays or learning difficulties and, therefore, starting school at age four allows for timely intervention and tailored support, maximizing the potential for overcoming challenges before they become more pronounced;

WHEREAS, school serves as a platform for developing essential socialization skills, such as cooperation, communication, and conflict resolution; therefore, commencing education at age four encourages the early cultivation of these skills, setting the stage for healthier interpersonal relationships throughout life;

1 **WHEREAS**, research suggests that children vary widely in their developmental
2 readiness for school, with some children showing readiness for structured learning
3 environments at age four, indicating that they are equipped to benefit from the educational
4 experience and thrive academically;

5 **WHEREAS**, initiating formal education at age four can contribute to bridging learning
6 disparities among children from different socio-economic backgrounds, and early exposure to
7 educational resources and experiences can help mitigate the gap in academic achievement that
8 often emerges before age five;

9 **WHEREAS**, an early start to education can foster a positive attitude towards learning
10 from an early age, and engaging children in educational activities at age four can establish a
11 lifelong love for learning and increase the likelihood of higher educational attainment;

12 **WHEREAS**, starting school at age four can promote increased parental involvement in
13 their child's education, and parents are more likely to be engaged in their child's early education,
14 participating in school activities, and reinforcing learning at home;

15 **WHEREAS**, the transition from early childhood settings to formal schooling can be
16 smoother at age four, as children are generally more adaptable and resilient during this phase,
17 and this adjustment period is crucial for building confidence and a positive attitude towards
18 schooling;

19 **WHEREAS**, a comprehensive education encompasses not only academic learning but
20 also physical, emotional, and creative development, and initiating school at age four provides
21 more time to integrate these aspects into the curriculum, fostering well-rounded individuals;

22 **WHEREAS**, many countries have adopted a lower starting age for formal education with
23 positive outcomes, and by aligning with international practices, starting school at age four can
24 help prepare Virgin Islands children for the challenges of an increasingly interconnected world;

7 *Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:*

10 **BILL SUMMARY**

12 **BR25-0487/March 19, 2025/SLR**