

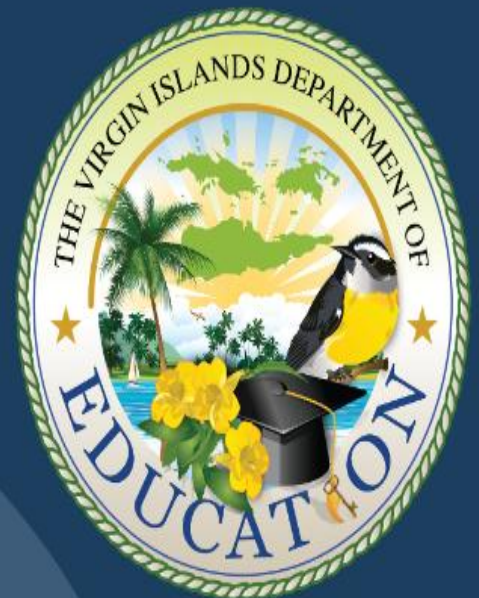
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TESTIMONY

Prepared by:

Dionne Wells-Hedrington, Ed. D
Commissioner

March 25, 2026



Dionne Wells-Hedrington, Ed.D.
Commissioner

GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION



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March 25, 2026

Honorable Kurt Vialet, Chairman
Committee on Education and Workforce Development
Capitol Building
Post Office Box 1690
St. Thomas, Virgin Islands 00804

Sent electronically via kvialet@legvi.org

Dear Senator Vialet:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee on Education and Workforce Development on behalf of the Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE). We appreciate the Committee's invitation to provide testimony regarding the proposed redistricting of the Territory's public schools for the 2026–2027 school year.

The Department welcomes the opportunity to present its position on the proposed redistricting plans for both districts, including the anticipated impacts on students, families, educators, and school communities. Our testimony will address key considerations such as enrollment and facility capacity, transportation, program accessibility, implementation timelines, and potential fiscal implications.

Enclosed for your review is the Department's comprehensive testimony and supporting documentation. We appreciate the Committee's continued partnership and commitment to supporting the students and schools of the Virgin Islands.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dionne Wells-Hedrington".

Dionne Wells-Hedrington, Ed.D.
Commissioner

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 3 |
| Commissioner’s Statement | 3 |
| Redistricting Plans for 2026-2027 School Year | 4 |
| Transportation Cost for Redistricting | 9 |
| Timeline for implementation of redistricting plan | 9 |
| Impact on Educators and School Staff | 10 |
| Parent Impact | 13 |
| Effects on access to academic programs | 13 |
| Department’s Role in the Approval or Oversight Process | 16 |
| School Closures in Both Districts this Summer | 17 |
| Conclusion | 17 |

Introduction

Commissioner’s Statement

Good morning, Chairperson Kurt A. Vialet, Vice Chair Senator Avery L Lewis; other committee members, Senator Marise C. James, Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff, Senator Franklin D. Johnson, Senator Kenneth L. Gittins and Senator Carla J. Joseph; other members of the 36th legislature; listening and viewing audience. I am Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington, and I have the honor of serving as the Commissioner of Education for the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on the proposed redistricting of the Territory’s schools.

Joining me today are members of my team:

- Mr. Victor Somme III, Assistant Commissioner
- Dr. Symra Dee Brown-Gumbs, Acting Insular Superintendent – STTJ District
- Dr. Carla Bastian-Knight, Insular Superintendent – STX District
- Andrea Shillingford, Deputy Superintendent- STX District
- Ms. Nicole Jacobs, Director of Human Resources
- Rena Francis, Coordinator of Pupil Personnel Services

Additional VIDE personnel are on standby to provide detailed insights into specific areas if needed. Again, thank you for your unwavering support and the opportunity to testify today.

The Virgin Islands Department of Education supports the proposed redistricting plan as a necessary and data-driven response to longstanding enrollment imbalances, shifting population patterns, aging infrastructure, and increasing operational costs. The current system is no longer aligned with where our students live, how our schools are utilized, or what it costs to operate efficiently. If no action is taken, the Territory will continue to face overcrowded classrooms in some areas, underutilized facilities in others, and escalating transportation costs that reduce instructional time and strain already limited resources.

Redistricting Plans for 2026-2027 School Year

The Virgin Islands Department of Education supports the proposed redistricting plan as a necessary and data-driven response to longstanding enrollment imbalances, shifting population patterns, aging infrastructure, and increasing operational costs. The current system is no longer aligned with where our students live, how our schools are utilized, or what it costs to operate efficiently. If no action is taken, the Territory will continue to face overcrowded classrooms in some areas, underutilized facilities in others, and escalating transportation costs that reduce instructional time and strain already limited resources.

The Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) recently announced plans regarding the reorganization of schools on St. Croix, specifically involving John H. Woodson Junior High School. Initially, the department considered relocating the John H. Woodson students to Eulalie R. Rivera K-8 School for the 2026–2027 school year. However, after further discussion and review, VIDE determined that a larger, district-wide redistricting effort is necessary.

The VIDE bears the responsibility of implementing redistricting with the goal of ensuring fair and equitable services to all the students we serve, reduce transportation cost as well as establish an efficient transportation plan decreasing the amount of time students spend traveling to and from school. Redistricting focuses on what is best for our students and what is best for our school communities.

Over 30 years ago, the St. Croix District underwent a major redistricting. Since that time, we have experienced the closure of five schools (Charles H. Emanuel Elementary School, Evelyn Williams Elementary School, Elena Christian Junior High School, Alexander Henderson Elementary School, and the Arthur A. Richards K-8 School), a major decline in the student population as well as population shifts across residential neighborhoods. As we are once again at another crossroad where we are excited to bring the Arthur A. Richards K-8 School back online and regrettably arrived at the tough decision to close the John H. Woodson Junior High School.

What is redistricting? Redistricting is when the school district assesses its current population, available resources and needs and redraws the schools' residential boundaries to determine which residential areas feed into a particular school. Analysis of the data reveals overcrowded and underpopulated enrollment in classrooms and schools. For instance, the Eulalie R. Rivera

PK-8 school population is 22% higher than that of the Juanita Gardine PK-8 School. The Alfredo Andrews Elementary School kindergarten population far exceeds that of the Lew Muckle Elementary School. The St. Croix Educational Complex High School enrollment surpasses that of the St. Croix Central High School by 18%.

Current Enrollment as of 3/19/26

| St. Croix District | 89 | 304 | 394 | 386 | 378 | 363 | 401 | 350 | 392 | 369 | 415 | 396 | 392 | 372 | 5,001 |
|------------------------------------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Alfredo Andrews Elementary | 12 | 66 | 71 | 63 | 66 | 62 | 62 | 51 | | | | | | | 453 |
| Juanita Gardine | 12 | 28 | 29 | 23 | 35 | 31 | 35 | 19 | 39 | 38 | | | | | 289 |
| Claude O. Markoe Elementary | 13 | 42 | 57 | 61 | 65 | 53 | 62 | 62 | | | | | | | 415 |
| Eulalie Rivera | 14 | 51 | 74 | 68 | 63 | 51 | 63 | 74 | 60 | 71 | | | | | 589 |
| Lew Muckle Elementary School | 14 | 38 | 62 | 65 | 44 | 55 | 61 | 54 | | | | | | | 393 |
| Pearl B. Larsen | 14 | 38 | 49 | 59 | 50 | 42 | 60 | 35 | 65 | 47 | | | | | 459 |
| Ricardo Richards Elementary | 10 | 41 | 52 | 47 | 55 | 69 | 58 | 55 | | | | | | | 387 |
| John H. Woodson Junior High | | | | | | | | | 228 | 213 | | | | | 441 |
| St. Croix Central High School | | | | | | | | | | | 193 | 155 | 149 | 152 | 649 |
| St. Croix Educational Complex High | | | | | | | | | | | 222 | 241 | 243 | 220 | 926 |

The enrollment data clearly illustrates a mismatch between student distribution and school capacity across the district. For example, certain campuses are operating with significantly higher student populations, while others have available space that is not being fully utilized. These disparities place uneven pressure on staff, resources, and facilities, while also contributing to inefficient transportation patterns. The redistricting plan is designed to correct these imbalances by aligning student placement more closely with residential patterns and available capacity.

Bus Transportation for students to and from school is cumbersome and one of the most expensive costs for the department. The transportation challenges are a result of school closings and overpopulated classrooms in some schools. For instance, the closing of the Evelyn Williams Elementary School resulted in students being enrolled at the Alfredo Andrews Elementary School and the Claude O. Markoe Elementary School. At the close of the Alexander Henderson Elementary School, students were enrolled at the Arthur A. Richards PK-8 School. Subsequently, Arthur A. Richards PK-8 School was destroyed by Hurricane Maria. For immediate relief, students in grades PK-6 were enrolled in the Eulalie R. Rivera PK-8 Schools; students in the 7th and 8th grades were enrolled in the John H. Woodson Junior High School. As a result, students who reside in the Estate Paradise, Estate Williams Delight and Estate Carlton are bussed to the Claude O. Markoe Elementary School, while students from Estates Whim, Concordia (West), and Campo Rico are transported to the Eulalie R. Rivera PK-8 School. Simply put, students are not attending the school closest to their residential address, and busloads of students are passing each other daily. Those buses traversing our highways translate to miles which equals cost and time which impacts instructions.

In 2024, the Virgin Islands Housing Authority celebrated the renovation and reopening of the Walter I. M. Hodge Pavilion. That housing community includes 248 apartments. In 2000, the Louis E. Brown Villas completed phase III of their development; the Villas contain 232 apartments. Conversely, around 2003, the Ralph D. Chabert Housing community was completely vacated. Most of the John F. Kennedy Terrace apartments have been vacated. The closing of major housing communities in the town of Christiansted, and the opening of housing communities in the district of Frederiksted has resulted in a major population shift to the western end of the island. The Junita Gardine Pk-8 schools have realized a drastic drop in enrollment while the Claude O. Markoe Elementary School and the Eulalie Rivera School's population increased.

The VIDE is celebrating the reopening of the Arthur A. Richards PK-8 School at the Estate Paradise location. The newly built schools will yield additional classrooms in the district of Frederiksted. The Arthur A. Richards PK-8 schools have twenty-four (24) state-of-the-art instructional classrooms and will house approximately seven hundred twenty (720) students. Many of the other rooms on the new campus are flex built, which gives us the opportunity to repurpose the spaces.

The John H. Woodson Junior High School, which was built in 1982 and is the last standing and only junior high school on the island. The school, which is the home of the Warriors, has served the community well and celebrates many accolades including its Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Accreditation. However, in keeping with the goal of implementing the K-8 model, the John H. Woodson Junior High School will not be used at a junior high school for the 2026-2027 school year. Additionally, the school structure has weathered many storms and challenges and at this time can no longer be used or sustained as a school. As such, students who are enrolled and were slated to attend the John H. Woodson Junior High School for the next school year will attend one of the PK-8 schools.

Redistricting affects all schools on the island. The redrawing school district boundaries reflects the shifts in population and other demographics and reallocation of resources. Students shall attend school based on the residential boundary lines that feed into the various schools. The reshaping districts will now afford all students the opportunity to attend school in their residential cluster areas, doing away with the need for students being out of district. The revised school districts are as follows:

Neighborhood School Boundaries Effective May 2026

- Claude O. Markoe Elementary School District boundaries span West of Cane Carlton.
- Arthur A. Richards K-8 School district boundaries span Cane Carlton to Mount Pleasant West, south of the Queen Mary Highway.
- Eulalie Rivera K-8 School district boundaries include Cane Carlton to Upper Love, North of the Queen Mary Highway.
- John H. Woodson Junior High School will not be in operation.

- St. Croix Educational Complex district boundaries include residential addresses west of Estate Castle Burke; students from outside of the residential district who are enrolled in the Magnet Program will continue to attend the SCEC.
- Alfredo Andrews School boundaries are east of Estate Upper Love to Mary's Fancy, north of the Queen Mary Highway.
- St. Croix Central High School boundaries are East of Estate Castle Burke,
- Ricardo Richards Elementary School and the Lew Muckle Elementary School boundaries are from Estate Mary's Fancy and Barren Spot to Diamond and Estate Blessing. However, students in the 6th grade who are promoted to the 7th grade, whose residential district is west of Clifton Hill, will attend the Arthur Richards Junior High School. Students who reside east of Clifton Hill will attend the Juanita Gardine PK-8 School.
- Lew Muckle Elementary School's boundaries Estate Castle Coakley to Estate Rattan to Estate Pearl to Constitution Hill and Estate Grange and Work and Rest. Students promoted to the 7th grade will attend the Juanita Gardine PK-8.
- Juanita Gardine PK-8 School residential boundaries for students in PK-6 include. This includes the residents from Estate Herman Hill to Estate Judith Fancy to the town of Christiansted.
- Pearl B. Larsen PK-8 School's residential boundaries include Catherine Rest to the southern end of the islands, Gallows Bay to the eastern end of the island.

New School Enrollment Numbers Based on New Redistricting

KG Numbers based on our present PRE-K Enrollment. More students register as more spaces become available post 25 for Pre K

| School | REDISTRICTING BASED ON ARTHUR NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--|
| | Total | PRE-K | KG | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | |
| Alfredo Andrews Elementary School | 291 | 15 | 9 | 45 | 50 | 44 | 45 | 41 | 42 | | | |
| Claude O. Markoe Elementary School | 344 | 15 | 11 | 44 | 63 | 51 | 54 | 48 | 58 | | | |
| Eulalie Rivera | 459 | 15 | 9 | 38 | 44 | 47 | 42 | 35 | 37 | 106 | 86 | |
| Arthur Richards — Redistrict Numbers | 447 | 15 | 9 | 30 | 39 | 39 | 40 | 44 | 40 | 91 | 100 | |
| Juanita Gardine Pre K-8 | 546 | 15 | 13 | 25 | 32 | 29 | 52 | 42 | 43 | 134 | 161 | |
| Lew Muckle Elementary School | 351 | 15 | 14 | 38 | 62 | 65 | 47 | 55 | 55 | | | |
| Pearl B. Larsen Pre K-8 | 389 | 15 | 14 | 38 | 49 | 65 | 53 | 30 | 60 | 20 | 45 | |
| Ricardo Richards Elementary School | 329 | 15 | 10 | 42 | 52 | 42 | 40 | 64 | 64 | | | |
| St. Croix Central High School | 746 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| St. Croix Educational Complex High School | 824 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Total | 4726 | 120 | 89 | 301 | 393 | 385 | 377 | 364 | 399 | 351 | 392 | |



Map of St. Croix

Transportation Cost for Redistricting

The proposed redistricting plan is expected to generate operational efficiencies, particularly in transportation and facility utilization. While precise savings will be determined following final route adjustments and enrollment confirmations, current transportation costs based on mileage and contractual rates indicate that even modest reductions in daily routes will result in meaningful cost savings over time. In addition, the consolidation of underutilized facilities and more strategic deployment of staff will further reduce inefficiencies and support long-term financial sustainability.

Currently, the Department operates approximately 750 miles per day for general education transportation and an additional 200 miles per day for special education routes, at a contracted rate of 16.01 dollars per mile. This results in substantial daily and annual transportation costs that are driven, in large part, by students attending schools outside of their residential zones. The redistricting plan is expected to reduce total route mileage by aligning students with schools closer to their homes, which will decrease transportation costs, reduce student travel time, and allow for more instructional time within the school day. While exact savings will be finalized following route optimization, the Department anticipates measurable cost reductions and increased operational efficiency.

The decision to discontinue operations at John H. Woodson Junior High School is based on both facility conditions and long-term sustainability. The campus has experienced ongoing environmental and infrastructure challenges that require repeated intervention, including air quality remediation and maintenance efforts. Continued operation would necessitate significant and recurring financial investment without guaranteeing long-term stability or safety. In alignment with the Territory's approved facilities master plan, and in consideration of student health, safety, and fiscal responsibility, the transition away from this facility is both necessary and unavoidable.

Timeline for implementation of redistricting plan

During the months of March and April, the Virgin Islands Department of Education implement a comprehensive communication plan using both print and audio messaging to ensure that families across St. Croix are informed about the upcoming school changes in a timely manner, especially those most directly impacted. As part of this outreach effort, the department will also host an in-person meeting in April for families of current seventh-grade students attending John H. Woodson Junior High School. This meeting will help prepare families and students for their transition into a new eighth-grade school community for the upcoming academic year.

At the same time, district staff, school registrars, and system analysts are working closely with the PowerSchool support team to carry out the district's Prep-to-Build process in preparation for the 2026–2027 school year. This process includes developing classroom projections, organizing course schedules for the opening of the new Arthur A. Richards PK-8 School, and finalizing new school assignments for students currently enrolled at John H. Woodson Junior High School.

The Virgin Islands Department of Education has developed a comprehensive Transition Plan in collaboration with key stakeholders, outlining benchmark deadlines for communication and action to ensure a smooth districtwide operation. This includes notice to employees of new campus assignments, and School Leadership shifts that will be required due to separations and projected retirements. As staff shortages continue to affect classroom coverage, the plan supports the strategic rightsizing of instructional staff and equitable placement of support across the district, the transition to new workspaces and learning environments, and the successful opening of the 2026–2027 School Year. As the department embarks on this student-centered, data-driven and intentional shift in the district, we welcome the support, and collaboration of our community, and the families we serve daily.

This implementation timeline is structured to ensure that all operational, staffing, and communication benchmarks are met in advance of the 2026 to 2027 school year. The Department is closely monitoring each phase of execution to ensure readiness, minimize disruption, and provide clear guidance to families, staff, and school leaders throughout the transition process.

Impact on Educators and School Staff

At the Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) we recognize that a stable and well-prepared workforce is essential to improving student outcomes, as such; recruitment and retention remain one of our top priorities. Our focus extends beyond simply filling vacancies; it is also about strengthening and creating long-term work stability. As staff shortages continue to impact classroom coverage both locally and nationally, the St. Croix District and the Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) continue to face daily retirements and resignations. Many of these separations occur in hard-to-fill content areas that have long presented staffing challenges. We are still competing with states and districts that offer attractive incentive packages, lower cost-of-living environments, and in some cases, relocation assistance.

Currently the cost of living, to include the limited availability of specialized services in the territory, makes it increasingly difficult to attract new talent and retain our existing staff, as many of our educators face economic and personal pressures that have led to turnover. Over the past two weeks, we have lost and continue to receive resignations where teachers are leaving the field to fill vacancies in other agencies locally.

As we prepare for the upcoming school year in August, the district anticipates ongoing difficulties in filling vacancies in critical areas, including English Language Arts, Mathematics, Special Education, Foreign Languages, School Nursing, and Guidance Counseling.

Over the next two weeks, the district will participate in a series of interviews aimed at recruiting applicants who have indicated their interest in becoming teachers in VIDE to help fill these essential positions and ensure that our students continue to receive the highest quality education

The implementation of redistricting across the Virgin Islands Department of Education, St. Croix District presents a critical opportunity, at the right time to strategically realign both human capital and instructional resources to better serve students across the island of St. Croix. As part of this transition, the reassignment of approximately 75 administrative and instructional staff from John H. Woodson Junior High School will play a pivotal role in stabilizing school operations, addressing existing staffing gaps, and supporting the successful reopening of the Arthur A. Richards K-8 School.

With the closure of John H. Woodson Junior High School and the district's shift to a K-8 model, the redistribution of its staff will be guided by student enrollment trends, identified vacancies, and the instructional and operational needs of each school. This approach ensures that all schools are adequately staffed to meet both academic and social-emotional needs, while also maintaining compliance with class size expectations and program delivery requirements.

A significant portion of the current John. H. Woodson staff will be reassigned to schools experiencing increased enrollment because of redistricting. Schools such as Eulalie R. Rivera PK-8 School and Claude O. Markoe Elementary School, which have historically absorbed students from previously closed schools and continue to experience population growth, will receive instructional personnel to reduce class size pressures and ensure equitable access to quality instruction. Additionally, targeted administrative support will be allocated to strengthen leadership capacity and improve school-level operations.

Simultaneously, schools with identified vacancies or programmatic gaps including Alfredo Andrews Elementary School, and other PK-8 campuses will benefit from the reassignment of experienced educators and support staff. This will ensure continuity of instruction, minimize disruptions to student learning, and provide immediate relief in hard-to-fill positions with our current staff.

A critical priority within this redistribution plan is the intentional staffing of the newly reopened Arthur A. Richards K-8 School, located in Estate Paradise. As a state-of-the-art facility designed to serve approximately 720 students, Arthur Richards will require a robust and balanced staffing structure inclusive of school leadership, core content teachers, special education personnel, and student support services. A portion of the Woodson staff, particularly those with middle school expertise, will form a strong pool of educators to fill not only the Arthur Richards campus, but all schools in the district requiring specific Content Area Educators. This helps VIDE ensure that all

schools open with experienced educators capable of establishing a strong academic culture and supporting a seamless transition for students entering the K–8 model.

The redistribution will also support enrollment balancing efforts across the district. For example, disparities such as the higher population at St. Croix Educational Complex High School compared to St. Croix Central High School, and the uneven enrollment between Juanita Gardine PK-8 School and western schools, underscore the need for strategic staffing aligned to student distribution. By aligning staff placement with these shifts, the district ensures that resources follow students in a fair and equitable manner.

Beyond addressing staffing needs, this redistribution directly supports the broader goals of redistricting such as reducing transportation burdens, minimizing instructional time lost in transit, and allowing students to attend schools within their residential communities. As student populations become more geographically aligned with school boundaries, staff placement will further reinforce stability, community engagement, and continuity of services.

In summary, the reassignment of the 75 administrative and instructional staff from John H. Woodson Junior High School is not simply a redistribution of personnel, but a strategic investment in the success of the district’s redistricting initiative. By filling vacancies, strengthening high-need schools, and building the staffing foundation for Arthur A. Richards K-8 School, the VIDE is ensuring that every school is positioned to deliver high-quality, equitable education to all students across St. Croix.

STX District Employee Count by Class

| Row Labels | STX | JHW |
|---------------------|-------------|------------|
| Administrators | 53 | 2 |
| Counselors | 22 | 2 |
| JROTC Teachers | 2 | 0 |
| Librarian | 10 | 1 |
| Nurses | 7 | 1 |
| Other Support Staff | 283 | 15 |
| Paraprofessionals | 145 | 11 |
| School Monitors | 59 | 6 |
| Teachers | 423 | 42 |
| Grand Total | 1004 | 79 |

Parent Impact

The Department recognizes that redistricting is a significant transition for students and families. We understand that changes of this nature can be difficult. At the same time, these adjustments are necessary to better align resources, expand access, and strengthen learning environments across the district.

To support families through this process, we are implementing a structured transition plan that includes direct communication, community meetings, and school-level support to assist students with adjustment. While every effort will be made to maintain continuity where possible, including for students with unique academic or social needs, some changes are unavoidable. Requests for special consideration will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.

Parents should wait until they receive their child's official School Placement Letter for the 2026–2027 school year before purchasing uniforms to ensure accuracy. Notification of school placement changes will occur during April and May. It is critical that parents update their contact information in the PowerSchool student information system immediately. All official communications will be sent using the contact details on file. Failure to maintain accurate information may result in missed and important notifications.

As additional PreK–8 schools come online, the district will continue to review and adjust residential boundary lines to ensure equity and efficiency across all schools.

At this stage, parent involvement is essential. We expect parents to remain informed and engaged by monitoring official communications, visiting the Department's website, and staying connected with their child's school. Parents must also log into their PowerSchool accounts to verify and update demographic information. Documentation such as notarized lease agreements, mortgage statements, or current utility bills reflecting the parent's name and address will continue to be required to confirm Home of Record.

The Department is committed to clear, timely, and transparent communication. We ask for your cooperation and partnership as we work to ensure a smooth and successful transition for all students.

Effects on access to academic programs

The redistricting initiative and the redistribution of staff from John H. Woodson Junior High School will significantly enhance student access to a wide range of academic and support programs across the district. By aligning personnel with student population shifts and school needs, the Virgin Islands Department of Education is strengthening equitable access to key programs, including CTE, athletics, ESL/ELL, and SPED.

For Career and Technical Education (CTE), the transition to a K–8 model and the reopening of Arthur A. Richards at K–8 School create opportunities to introduce early exposure to career pathways. While comprehensive CTE programs will remain anchored at the high school level, staffing reallocations will support foundational skill-building and exploratory courses at the middle grades, ensuring students are better prepared for advanced pathways at the secondary level.

In athletics, the redistribution of staff and students across more balanced school populations allows for the expansion of organized sports programs at the PK–8 level. Schools that previously lacked sufficient enrollment or staffing to sustain athletic offerings will now be better positioned to provide structured extracurricular activities, increasing student participation and promoting wellness.

For English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Language Learner (ELL) services, redistricting ensures that qualified instructors are more strategically placed based on student need. Rather than concentrating services in a few schools, the redistribution of specialized staff allows for more consistent and equitable language support across campuses, improving instructional access and outcomes for multilingual learners.

Similarly, Special Education (SPED) services will be strengthened through a more balanced allocation of certified teachers, paraprofessionals, and related service providers. By distributing SPED staff in alignment with student enrollment and individualized education program (IEP) needs, the district can ensure compliance, reduce caseload imbalances, and provide more inclusive and responsive support within students’ home schools.

Overall, the redistricting effort improves access by ensuring that programs are not limited by geography or historical enrollment patterns. Instead, resources including specialized staff and program opportunities are intentionally distributed so that all students, regardless of where they live on St. Croix, have equitable access to high-quality academic programs and services.

Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School

In addition to redistricting considerations, facility conditions across the Territory continue to play a critical role in school planning and operational decisions. In keeping with the call to safeguard the health, safety, and educational continuity of students across the Territory, this update provides a comprehensive account of the work completed at the Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School during the period in which the campus operated on an abbreviated schedule beginning November 16, 2026, and concluding with the return to full operations on March 2, 2026. Throughout this period, the responsible agencies and contracted partners undertook a series of corrective actions to stabilize environmental conditions and ensure that the school could resume regular instruction in a manner consistent with established public-health and facility-maintenance standards.

A monthly deep-cleaning schedule has been instituted to maintain a consistent level of sanitation across all instructional and common areas. Specifically, to address ventilation deficiencies, a Beta

EVR unit was installed to increase the intake and circulation of fresh air within classrooms. This installation represents an interim but essential step toward long-term ventilation improvements. This measure reflects the Territory's commitment to ongoing environmental stewardship and the prevention of conditions that could compromise student or staff well-being. In addition, a full remediation assessment was conducted to evaluate the indoor environment and identify areas requiring immediate intervention. The assessment confirmed elevated carbon dioxide levels in several classrooms, underscoring the need for enhanced ventilation and prompting swift corrective action.

Indoor air quality (IAQ), particularly carbon dioxide levels, has a direct effect on student health and cognitive performance. CO₂ levels serve as an indicator of ventilation effectiveness. Concentrations above 1,500–2,000 ppm can lead to drowsiness, reduced concentration, headaches, and decreased academic performance. Key CO₂ Levels and Health Impacts

- Below 1,000 ppm: Ideal—healthy and comfortable
- 1,000–2,000 ppm: Common in schools—may cause drowsiness and a sense of stuffiness
- 1,500–2,000 ppm: Reduced concentration, headaches, and diminished academic performance
- 5,000 ppm: Maximum allowable occupational exposure; indicates inadequate ventilation

To address these findings, a Beta EVR unit was installed to increase the circulation of fresh air within classroom spaces. This installation serves as an interim measure while the Department continues the procurement process for additional units, with cost proposals currently being solicited for the installation of dedicated EVR systems on each wing of the campus. Recognizing the need for immediate supplemental ventilation, Berry Screens was contracted to fabricate two custom ventilation screens for every classroom. These screens will support increased airflow until the full complement of EVR units is installed. Though the screens were approximately three days late in arriving to the islands, to date in most classrooms' screens were installed. Moving forward and until further notice, teachers will need to open windows to allow cleaner ventilated air to circulate the classrooms.

Simultaneously, efforts to address structural concerns have advanced. J. Benton Construction has been scheduled to fast-track critical roof repairs, ensuring that moisture intrusion and related environmental risks are mitigated as part of the broader stabilization effort. They have begun to mobilize major equipment and all other material to begin an intensive work order for the summer of 2026. There will be no summer-school activity (June 1- August 1) at BCB this summer for students. All programs such as:

Summer Bridge- students transitioning to BCB from their elementary schools from 5th – 6th grades will physically attend that program at the Yvonne E. Milliner Bowsky School:

Credit Recovery- for all students from 6th – 8th grades will be hosted at the Lockhart K-8th campus. Credit Recovery is an online-based course that will be hosted and accommodated for those students.

Collectively, these actions demonstrate a coordinated and sustained response to the challenges identified at Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School and reaffirm the Virgin Islands Department of Education commitment to providing safe, functional, and resilient learning environments for all students.

Department's Role in the Approval or Oversight Process

The Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) maintains a strong posture of collaboration in the approval and oversight of school closures. The Department remains in regular communication with the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance regarding the condition, maintenance, and operation of all educational facilities. To ensure alignment and transparency, standing meetings are held every Tuesday at 10:00 a.m. to provide updates and address facility-related concerns.

Pursuant to Title 3, Virgin Islands Code, Section 101, Subsection 4, the Bureau is responsible for preventative and emergency maintenance and repairs necessary for the daily operation of public educational facilities and grounds. However, any preventative or emergency repair work that impacts daily school operations to the extent that a closure is required must be conducted in consultation with the Commissioner of Education. This ensures that all decisions to close schools are deliberate, coordinated, and centered on student safety and continuity of learning.

Historically, the Department has faced challenges in maintaining its facilities due to limited funding and aging infrastructure. For example, John H. Woodson Junior High School experienced significant air quality issues at the beginning of the academic year, resulting in a delayed reopening. Since that time, the Bureau has invested substantial resources into air quality testing, mold remediation, and deep cleaning efforts. However, sustaining safe conditions at that campus would require similar interventions on at least a quarterly basis to prevent recurring health concerns.

Given these realities, it is not fiscally or operationally feasible to continue making repeated investments in a facility that has already been designated in the approved facilities master plan to transition into a discovery site as part of the Territory's broader school rebuilding efforts.

The VIDE remains committed to keeping the Board of Education, and all stakeholders informed should additional school closures become necessary as recovery and rebuilding efforts continue. We recognize the significant impact such decisions have on students, families, and staff, and we remain steadfast in prioritizing the health, safety, and best interests of our students in every decision we make.

School Closures in Both Districts this Summer

Arthur A. Richards PK-8 School:

Substantial completion
Opening

Bertha C. Boschulte PK-8 School:

Selective demolition of HVAC in classrooms
Procurement of HVAC units for classrooms
Construction fencing and trailers

Charlotte Amalie High School:

Site grading in the area that was demolished last summer
Construction fencing and trailers

St. Croix Central High School:

Demolition of gymnasium
Construction fencing and trailers

St. Croix Educational Complex:

Renovation of Building 1 – Academic Wing)
Construction fencing and trailers

Yvonne Milliner-Bowsky PK-8 School:

Modernization of selected classrooms
Construction fencing and trailers

Conclusion

In closing, the proposed redistricting plan represents a necessary and strategic step toward creating a more efficient, equitable, and sustainable public education system in the Virgin Islands. This effort is grounded in data, informed by changing population patterns, and guided by our responsibility to provide students with access to quality education within their communities. While change of this scale requires careful coordination, the Department is confident that this plan positions our schools to better serve students, support educators, and operate more effectively in the years ahead. We look forward to working collaboratively with the Committee to ensure its successful implementation.