

Testimony
Virgin Islands Board of Education
Proposed School Redistricting Plan – 2026–2027 School Year

Good morning, Chairman and Senator Kurt A. Violet of the 36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands Committee on Education and Workforce Development, other esteemed members of the Committee, legislative staff, fellow stakeholders, and the listening and viewing audiences. I am Dr. Kyza A. Callwood, Chairman of the Virgin Islands Board of Education appearing on behalf of the Virgin Islands Board of Education, alongside Member Winona A. Hendricks, Executive Director Sandra Bess, Associate Executive Director Kimberly Gereau and Attorney Jennifer Jones.

On behalf of the Virgin Islands Board of Education, we appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the redistricting plan for the 2026–2027 school year. With a clear understanding of redistricting as the process of redefining school attendance boundaries and student assignment zones to address enrollment, capacity, and community needs, it is important to consider how such decisions intersect with the Board’s role and responsibilities. The Board wishes to make its position clear: the Board was not involved in the creation or adoption of the redistricting plan developed through the Department of Education.

While the Board does not have operational authority over such decisions, it maintains a critical oversight and governance role. Under its statutory authority, the Board is responsible for ensuring that the policies, programs, and regulations governing public schools are aligned with the mission and vision of the Territory’s education system and that students have equitable access to quality education. Specifically, Title 17, Chapter 3, §21 of the Virgin Islands Code empowers the Board to recommend laws, adopt curricula, prescribe regulations, and provide guidance necessary for the proper establishment, maintenance, and operation of public schools.

In exercising this oversight role, the Board would have been able to focus on ensuring that the implementation of the redistricting plan:

- Aligns with existing Board policies and regulatory frameworks,
- Supports equitable access to qualified educators, safe facilities, and rigorous academic programs,
- Maintains transparency and fairness in student assignment processes, and
- Preserves access to academic programs, extracurricular activities, and specialized learning opportunities.

The Board also monitors the potential impacts on class sizes, staffing ratios, resources, and student outcomes. However, it cannot take action on recommended adjustments or policy clarifications without sufficient documentation, including supporting data, implementation plans, logistical maps, and related materials. Any policy updates needed to support the implementation of redistricting must be formally reviewed and approved by the Board to ensure alignment with its governance responsibilities.

Recommendations, Concerns, and Conditions

To ensure a successful, equitable, and transparent implementation of the proposed redistricting plan, the Virgin Islands Board of Education offers the following:

- Centralized Redistricting Support Call Center
 - The Board strongly recommends the establishment of a centralized, high-touch Redistricting Support Call Center to serve as the primary point of contact for parents, guardians, and community members. This customer-service-driven model is essential to ensuring that every family has access to clear, accurate, and timely information throughout the transition. By utilizing this approach, Department can help to reduce confusion, prevent misinformation, and build public trust through direct, responsive engagement. The call center should:
 - Operate with extended hours, including evenings and weekends, during peak transition periods.
 - Be staffed with trained personnel equipped to address school assignments, transportation, enrollment procedures, and program availability.
 - Provide multilingual support reflective of the Territory's diverse population.
 - Include a case tracking system to log inquiries, identify trends, and ensure timely follow-up and resolution for case-by-case considerations.
- Data Transparency and Public Accountability
 - The Board emphasizes that all redistricting decisions must be supported by clear, publicly accessible data, including enrollment projections, facility capacity, and demographic impacts. Regular updates must be provided to ensure transparency and maintain public confidence.
- Phased Implementation Plan
 - To minimize disruption, the Board encourages a phased implementation approach, including consideration of grandfathering provisions or transitional allowances for students in critical academic years.
- Community Engagement and Feedback Integration
 - The Board underscores the importance of ongoing, meaningful engagement with stakeholders. This includes formal opportunities for written input, with clear evidence that feedback has been thoughtfully considered and incorporated where appropriate.
- Equity Impact Assessment and Software Tools
 - A comprehensive equity analysis must be conducted to ensure that no group of students is disproportionately affected. Careful consideration should be given to guaranteeing equitable access to high-quality instruction, resources, and educational opportunities. While the VIDE may employ various approaches to guide the redistricting process, there are existing software tools that can leverage data such as student enrollment, staffing levels, transportation patterns, attendance ratios, and other relevant factors to support fair, equitable, and transparent decision-making. Additionally, the VIDE should clearly communicate the methodology used to arrive at its decisions.
- Resource Alignment and Readiness
 - The Board requires assurance that all schools are adequately prepared for enrollment shifts. This includes proper staffing, instructional materials, technology, and facility readiness to support student success.
- Class Size and Instructional Quality Safeguards

- Clear safeguards must be established to maintain appropriate class sizes and protect the quality of instruction across all affected schools.
- Transportation and Accessibility Planning
 - A comprehensive and clearly communicated transportation plan must address bus routes, travel times, safety, and reliability to ensure that student access is not compromised.
- Protection of Program Access and Continuity
 - The Board stresses that redistricting must not limit access to academic programs, extracurricular activities, or specialized services. Equitable access must be preserved across all districts.
- Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adjustment Mechanism
 - A structured monitoring system must be implemented to track outcomes and allow for timely adjustments. Regular reports should be provided to the Board and the public to ensure accountability and responsiveness.
- Clear Policy Alignment and Required Approvals
 - Any necessary policy changes must be formally presented to and approved by the Board prior to implementation. Full compliance with Board policies and regulations is required.
- Condition of Support
 - The Board's support for the proposed redistricting plan is contingent upon the Department's ability to fully address these recommendations and concerns. Particular emphasis is placed on the implementation of the Redistricting Support Call Center as a critical mechanism for ensuring transparency, responsiveness, and community confidence.
- Redistricting Advisory Committee
 - It is recommended that a Redistricting Advisory Committee be established, particularly in light of the construction of new schools that will require future rezoning decisions. The committee should include representatives from the Commissioner's office, the Superintendent's office, Special Education, one representative from each active PTA, the Board of Education, the CTEC Board, the business community, and the Senate to ensure broad and inclusive stakeholder input.
 - The committee would be responsible for reviewing and analyzing key data, evaluating redistricting options, and presenting informed recommendations to the Superintendent. Additionally, to promote transparency and community engagement, the committee should hold at least one public meeting to provide all stakeholders with an opportunity to review and respond to proposed plans.

Equity remains a central focus for the Board in reviewing the implementation of the redistricting plan. It is essential that all students, regardless of geographic location, have fair and consistent access to qualified educators, safe and well-equipped facilities, and rigorous academic programs.

As the Board was not involved in the development of the redistricting plan, it will rely on clearly documented projections related to class sizes, staffing ratios, and resource allocation to understand potential impacts. Such information is essential to ensure that any increases or resource constraints are identified and addressed in a manner that protects student achievement

and instructional quality. Also, the redistricting process should ensure that all students continue to have equitable access to a full range of academic programs, extracurricular activities, and specialized learning opportunities, including career and technical education, advanced coursework, and support services. Additionally, effective collaboration between the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance and the Department of Education is essential throughout the redistricting process. Both entities must provide clear, accurate, and documented information, ensuring that what is shared is consistent, substantiated, and aligned across agencies. This coordinated approach will ensure that the Board, stakeholders, and the public receive reliable and transparent information, strengthening trust and supporting well-informed decision-making.

The Board views redistricting not as an isolated operational adjustment, but as part of a broader, long-term strategy for strengthening public education in the Virgin Islands. All changes must align with a forward-thinking vision that prioritizes student success, promotes system sustainability, and fosters continuous improvement across the Territory. Note that whatever decision is made by the Department it should be announced prior to the end of the fourth marking period and before the May graduation ceremonies. This timeline is important to ensure that parents and students are informed before the close of the school year. Early notification will allow students to clearly understand their school placements for the upcoming year. It will also provide school counselors with adequate time to address any emotional or transitional concerns with students and parents. Additionally, it will give families sufficient time to make necessary preparations, including uniform planning and other logistical arrangements.

In conclusion, the Board of Education remains committed to collaborating with the Department of Education and all stakeholders to ensure that the redistricting plan is implemented in a manner that is equitable, transparent, and consistent with our shared commitment to educational excellence. We encourage careful attention to these considerations and look forward to ongoing dialogue and oversight as implementation proceeds.

Thank you.