36th Legislature of the United States Virgin Islands

Committee on Education and Workforce Development

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Memorandum

TO: Mrs. Kurell A. Sheridan, JD
Executive Director
36th Legislature of the Virgin Islands

FROM: The Honorable Kurt A. Vialet
Chairman, Committee on Education & Workforce Development

DATE: September 8, 2026

RE: **Committee Report for Wednesday, September 2, 2026 meeting**

Please find attached the report for the Committee on Education and Workforce Development (EWD) meeting held on **Wednesday, September 2, 2026,** in the Frits E. Lawaetz Legislative Conference Room, St. Croix.

cc: All Senators
Chief Legal Counsel
Archive Division
Journal Division

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT

Meeting date:	Wednesday, September 2, 2026
Call to order:	10:21 a.m.
Location:	Frits E. Lawaetz Legislative Conference Room, St. Croix
Adjournment:	6:47 p.m.

Committee Members Present	Non-Committee Members Present
Senator Kurt A. Vialet, Chairman Senator Avery L. Lewis, Vice Chair Senator Franklin D. Johnson Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff Senator Kenneth L. Gittens Senator Marise C. James Senator Carla Joseph	Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr. Senator Milton E. Potter Senator Marvin A. Blyden Senator Clifford Joseph, Sr.
Clerk/Timekeeper: Janella John, Communications Manager **Committee Staff:** Gloryvee Christian-Krieger, Chief of Staff Samanta Prentice, Chief Researcher **Protocol Officers:** Jervon Ottley Myrna de Altier Pickard **Legislative Reporters:** Part I - Nataya Munoz Part II - Nadine Williams Part III - Vashti Barry Part IV - Joanne Samuel Part V - Tricia Sealey Part VI - Nataya Munoz Part VII - Nadine Williams	**Public Affairs/Media:** Bernard Matthew, Sr Alwyn Baptiste, Jr. Chantel Acosta Barry Leerdami Diana Cruz Chaunte Herbert Dequan Milliner Jamal Potter Africah Harrigan Torian Martin Saidah Sekou **Sergeants at Arms:** Walton Jack, Jr. (STX) Delvin Fleming (STT)

BLOCK I: Summer Maintenance and Preventive Maintenance Plans

The Committee received testimony from BSCM regarding summer 2026 maintenance, school-readiness work, facility conditions, available funding, staffing capacity, contracts, and plans for continued maintenance during the 2026-2027 school year.

Scope of Summer Work

BSCM reported using in-house personnel, summer workers, competitively procured contractors, and available funding to complete or advance air-conditioning repairs, plumbing and restroom improvements, electrical work, roofing, painting, deep cleaning, grounds maintenance, door and window repairs, and kitchen and cafeteria work. Funding constraints delayed the start of several projects, while aging

infrastructure, recurring equipment failures, limited skilled-trade capacity, and long lead times for specialized parts remain major obstacles.

St. Thomas/St. John District - Key Facility Updates

Lockhart K-8: Seven of eight modular buildings were rehabilitated; the final modular is scheduled for the 2026 Christmas break. AC and electrical systems were reported at approximately 90% functional and plumbing at 95%. Aging modulars, roof rehabilitation, HVAC replacement, and the lack of an adequate athletic facility remain concerns.

Charlotte Amalie High School: Modular repairs, AC work, ceiling-tile replacement, decking repair, and kitchen hot-water and HVAC work advanced. Roofing was reported at approximately 80% functional. Roof leaks, modular windows, auditorium HVAC replacement, and automotive-shop modernization remain outstanding.
Ulla F. Muller Elementary: Roofing, painting, cleaning, AC maintenance, and a new kitchen water heater were completed or advanced. Plumbing was reported at approximately 65% functional; the kitchen exhaust hood and ice machine were non-functional, and playground installation remains pending funding.

Ivanna Eudora Kean High School: Renovation of 12 upper-level restrooms was underway. AC was reported at approximately 75% functional, plumbing at 65%, and roofing at 50%, underscoring the need for continued major repairs.

Other STT/STJ campuses: Work included walkway-roof and electrical repairs, AC repairs, ceiling and kitchen improvements, and general maintenance. Reported needs included non-functional kitchen exhaust hoods, aging HVAC equipment, window and door repairs, playground work, and continued modular rehabilitation.

St. Croix District - Key Facility Updates

Pearl B. Larsen PreK-8: AC was reported at approximately 85% functional; work and follow-up needs included freezer/cafeteria equipment, flood-related concerns in the band room, electrical connection for modular classrooms, and other corrective maintenance.
Lew Muckle, Ricardo Richards, and Alfredo Andrews: BSCM reported generally strong operational conditions, while continuing AC, plumbing, roofing, painting, playground, and kitchen-equipment repairs as required.
St. Croix Central High School: AC was reported at approximately 70% functional, electrical and plumbing at approximately 85%, and roofing at approximately 70%. The campus continues to require significant follow-up, including larger rehabilitation needs.
Juanita Gardine PreK-8: AC was reported at approximately 70% functional. Outstanding work included HVAC repairs, auditorium and classroom cooling issues, and other corrective maintenance.
Eulalie R. Rivera PreK-8 and Claude O. Markoe: Both facilities were reported in generally strong operating condition, with continued attention to AC, kitchen, plumbing, and localized repair needs. Claude O. Markoe was reported at approximately 98% for AC and electrical, and 100% for plumbing and roofing.
St. Croix Educational Complex/CTEC and alternative/adult education sites: BSCM continued AC, electrical, plumbing, roofing, and general repair work, with operational percentages generally high at several facilities but ongoing equipment and building-system needs.

Maintenance Funding

BSCM emphasized that the Settlement Fund and Project S4009 are separate funding sources. Project S4009 included a $3 million FY2026 appropriation plus $2.736 million in prior-year funds and encumbrances carried forward. Across the two sources, only $13,058.77 remained uncommitted, while significant maintenance and capital needs persisted.

Maintenance Staffing and Contracts

BSCM reported 53 funded Maintenance Division positions territory-wide: 52 filled and one vacancy, the School Facilities Maintenance Manager for St. Croix. Custodians are VIDE employees and are not included in BSCM staffing figures.

The workforce included only three refrigeration engineers/AC technicians territory wide. One of the two assigned to STT/STJ was on leave, leaving one available technician in that district. BSCM also reported seven maintenance mechanics territory-wide and a substantial imbalance in laborers: one in STT/STJ and nine on St. Croix.

BSCM stressed that staffing alone will not resolve the maintenance backlog without timely funding, materials, equipment, replacement parts, tools, preventive-maintenance resources, and specialized contractor support.

For FY2027, STT/STJ contracts expiring September 30, 2026, were being competitively procured for landscaping, deep cleaning, trash removal/dumpster rental, and pest control. St. Croix renewal options were being used where appropriate, while new landscaping and deep-cleaning solicitations were issued. A new territory-wide emergency AC repair and maintenance procurement was initiated to supplement limited in-house refrigeration capacity and provide faster specialized response to urgent HVAC failures.

BLOCK II: Redistricting, New Schools, and School Readiness

VIDE reported that schools opened on August 10, 2026, under the theme “Breaking Barriers, Setting Records, Becoming Five Stars.” The Department described an operating framework centered on Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), attendance, accountability, leadership coaching, stronger Tier 1 instruction, and evidence-based implementation.

Territory-wide Workforce Snapshot

VIDE reported 1,901 employees as of September 2026, including 775 teachers, 258 paraprofessionals, 104 school monitors, 97 administrators, and 42 counselors.
A total of 223 employees, or 12% of the workforce, were eligible for retirement as of September 1, 2026; 108 teachers were retirement eligible.

From May 1 through September 1, 2026, VIDE recorded 109 separations: 56 in STT/STJ and 53 on St. Croix. The separations included 43 retirements, 27 resignations, and 37 appointment endings.
The testimony included two inconsistent St. Croix vacancy totals - 82 and 85 - before presenting a detailed needs table. The Committee should request a reconciled, dated vacancy report by position and school.

St. Croix Redistricting and Arthur A. Richards PreK-8

The St. Croix District opened all schools and programs on August 10, 2026 and reported welcoming 4,937 students. The new Arthur A. Richards PreK-8 School opened with 534 students and 79 faculty and staff; the enrollment table elsewhere in the testimony listed 536 students. Classrooms were outfitted with furniture, instructional technology, and learning resources. Transportation routes continued to be refined with Abramson, Inc.

The closure of John H. Woodson Junior High School and opening of Arthur A. Richards were central to the new district configuration. Students attending outside their residential school district declined from 384 in SY2025-2026 to 37 in SY2026-2027 and VIDE reported 347 student reassignments through redistricting.

Incoming ninth-grade students were assigned by residential address, except students in the St. Croix Educational Complex magnet program; high-school students otherwise were not included in the redistricting count.

Enrollment shifted notably to Arthur A. Richards, Juanita Gardine, Pearl B. Larsen, and St. Croix Central High School, while Claude O. Markoe, Eulalie R. Rivera, Lew Muckle, and other campuses experienced decreases.

St. Croix Special Education Capacity

The district reported 45 special education classrooms serving 535 students. Fifteen incoming students arrived with existing IEPs and were placed for continuity of services.
As of August 2026, 189 students required evaluations, including backlog cases and new parent-initiated requests. Existing special education classrooms were at or above capacity. The district estimated a need for approximately nine additional classrooms, together with appropriate space and personnel.

St. Thomas/St. John Readiness and Enrollment

The STT/STJ District reported total enrollment of 5,119 students for SY2026-2027.
Most elementary schools were at capacity, limiting the district's ability to undertake redistricting until rebuilding creates additional space. VIDE stated that students were not being turned away and no enrollment waiting list existed.

The district's priorities included MTSS, positive behavioral supports, attendance improvement, alignment between elementary and secondary instructional frameworks, and a data-driven accountability process.

Attendance and Accountability

VIDE identified chronic absenteeism as a serious territory-wide concern. STT/STJ attendance was reported at 91.5% in SY2023-2024, 90.5% in SY2024-2025, and 92.9% in SY2025-2026, against a goal above 95%. The district set a goal to raise average daily attendance to 95% and reduce chronic absenteeism by at least 20% in SY2026-2027. Testimony described early-warning triggers and escalating interventions, though the St. Croix and STT/STJ sections cited different absence thresholds; VIDE should standardize and clarify the territory-wide protocol.

VIDE reported that some students had been chronically absent for 30 to 70 instructional days. Planned responses included daily monitoring, direct family communication, parent conferences, home visits, referrals, wraparound services, stronger parental accountability, and a stakeholder intervention committee involving legislators and other partners.

Committee Follow-up Priorities (through the chair requests)

- Senator Novelle E. Francis, Jr. requested a verified list of outstanding vendors associated with prior-year expenditures from BSCM.
- Senator Avery L. Lewis requested a comprehensive update on all capital projects, including timelines, orders, and other relevant information from VIDE.
- Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff requested the results of the air-quality and water-quality testing from BSCM.
- Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff requested information regarding the number of contractors currently located on St. Thomas from BSCM
- Senator Milton E. Potter requested an update on the pricing of installation for equipment ordered from BSCM.
- Senator Clifford A. Joseph, Sr. requested a copy of the preventative maintenance plan from BSCM.
- Senator Franklin D. Johnson requested the potable-water quality testing reports from the previous week from BSCM.
- Senator Kenneth L. Gittens requested the dates and total number of hours associated with missed instructional time from VIDE.

Conclusion

The September 2, 2026, hearing highlighted summer progress and the successful opening of schools, including the new Arthur A. Richards PreK–8 School and implementation of the St. Croix redistricting plan. However, ongoing concerns remain regarding aging facilities, maintenance funding, staffing shortages, special education overcrowding, and chronic absenteeism. Continued oversight should focus on verified timelines, reliable data, preventive maintenance, and measurable student outcomes.