

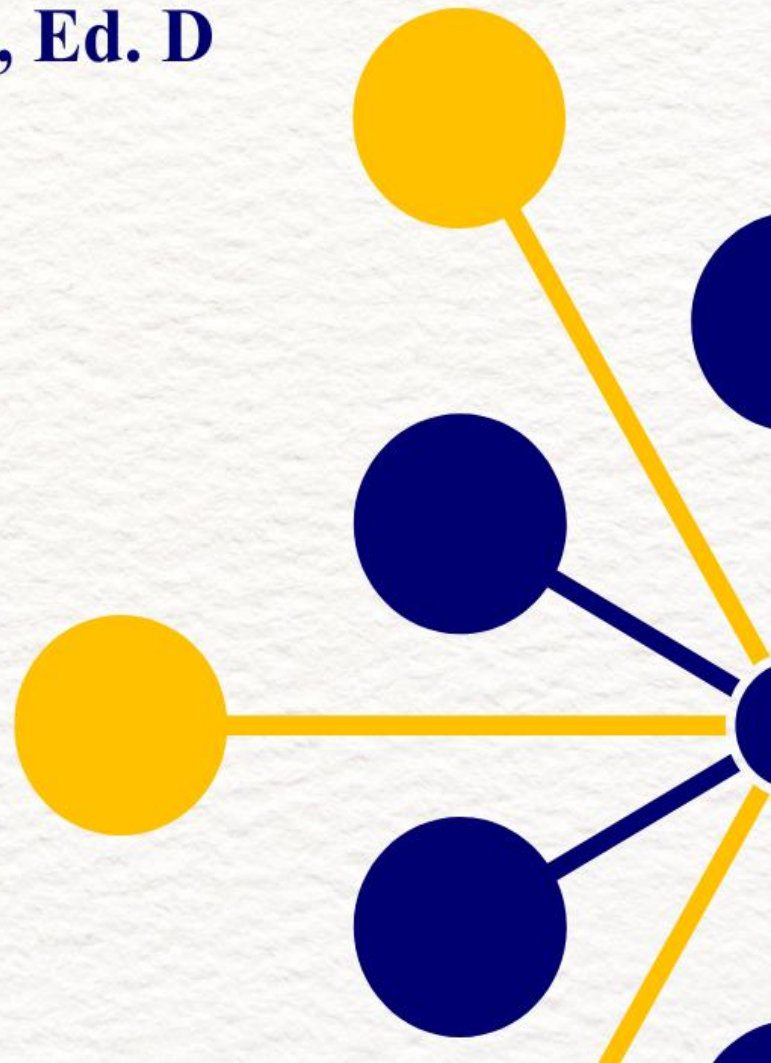
# COMMITTEE ON HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION & TELECOMMUNICATIONS

VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
SENATE HEARING TESTIMONY

**Prepared By:**

**Dionne Wells-Hedrington, Ed. D  
Commissioner**

**April 8, 2026**



**Dionne Wells-Hedrington, Ed.D.**  
Commissioner

GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS  
DEPARTMENT OF  
**EDUCATION**



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April 6, 2026

Honorable Marvin Blyden, Chairman  
Committee on Housing, Transportation & Telecommunications  
Capitol Building  
Post Office Box 1690  
St. Thomas, Virgin Islands 00804

*Sent electronically via [senatorblyden@legvi.org](mailto:senatorblyden@legvi.org)*

Dear Senator Blyden:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee on Housing, Transportation & Telecommunications on behalf of the Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE). We appreciate the Committee's invitation to provide testimony as part of its annual review of telecommunications matters involving service providers, government regulators and infrastructure owners, and policymakers.

As the Department serves over 10,000 students across the Territory, the Committee's review is critical to advancing reliable internet connectivity, equitable access to digital technology, and resilient telecommunications infrastructure that supports both instructional delivery and administrative operations. Your leadership in this area plays an essential role in ensuring that our students and educators are equipped with the tools necessary for effective teaching and learning.

Enclosed for your review is the Department's comprehensive testimony, along with supporting documentation outlining current conditions, ongoing challenges, and identified needs related to digital learning, equity, and system reliability. We hope this information will assist the Committee in its deliberations and continued efforts to strengthen telecommunications across the Virgin Islands.

Sincerely,

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

Dionne Wells-Hedrington, Ed.D.  
Commissioner

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## Introduction

### Commissioner’s Statement

Good morning, Chairperson Senator Marvin A. Blyden, Vice Chair Senator Marise C. James; other committee members, Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff, Senator Ray Fonseca 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 distinct honor of serving as the Commissioner for Virgin Islands Department of Education where we “Transforming today’s learner into tomorrow’s leaders.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony to the Committee on Housing, Transportation, and telecommunications on issues at the Virgin Islands Department of Education, VIDE. This update will speak to internet connectivity, access to digital technology, and telecommunications infrastructure supporting instructional and administrative functions.

Joining me today are members of my team:

- Dr. Symra Dee Brown-Gumbs, Acting Insular Superintendent – STTJ District
- Dr. Carla Bastian-Knight, Insular Superintendent – STX District
- James Richardson, Acting Chief Technology Officer

Additional VIDE personnel, to include the Technology Coordinators in each district, are on standby virtually 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 provides instruction to approximately 10,297 students enrolled in public schools across the Territory as of January 2026. This number changes daily due to open enrollment and student withdrawals. These students have access to technology devices via Chromebooks, laptops, tablets, and Promethean and Smart Boards

Districts/Schools	PK	KG	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	Total
<b>St. Thomas-St. John District</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>441</b>	<b>385</b>	<b>373</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>378</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>434</b>	<b>412</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>5,292</b>
Jane E. Tuitt Elementary School		26	33	31	25	32	26								173
Joseph Gomez Elementary School	16	99	111	74	84	77	73								534
Joseph Sibilly Elementary School	20	49	40	36	42	35	44								266
Lockhart Elementary School		74	74	74	71	82	69	161	162	158					925
Ulla F. Muller Elementary School	16	75	73	68	65	87	68								452
Yvonne E. Milliner-Bowsky Elementary School	16	60	73	72	62	66	68								417
Julius E. Sprauve School	8	18	37	30	24	17	22	21	27	26					230
Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School								181	205	194					580
Charlotte Amalie High School											248	245	252	223	968
Ivanna Eudora Kean High School											234	189	160	164	747
<b>St. Croix District</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>387</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>353</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>351</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>414</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>406</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>5,005</b>
Alfredo Andrews Elementary School	12	60	67	59	68	61	61	50							438
Juanita Gardine	14	24	31	23	34	29	35	20	37	36					283
Claude O. Markoe Elementary School	13	44	57	57	62	52	64	60							409
Eulalie Rivera	11	47	73	71	61	50	64	76	59	73					585
Lew Muckle Elementary School	14	36	60	66	45	55	61	54							391
Pearl B. Larsen	14	40	48	58	48	40	60	34	63	46					451
Ricardo Richards Elementary School	10	41	51	48	53	66	57	57							383
John H. Woodson Junior High School									254	221					475
St. Croix Central High School											197	152	151	153	653
St. Croix Educational Complex High School											217	248	255	217	937
<b>Virgin Islands</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>693</b>	<b>828</b>	<b>767</b>	<b>744</b>	<b>749</b>	<b>772</b>	<b>714</b>	<b>807</b>	<b>754</b>	<b>896</b>	<b>834</b>	<b>818</b>	<b>757</b>	<b>10,297</b>

The Fixed Assets/Property Management Division will audit the number of technology devices recorded as active assets in the TylerMunis System in August/September 2026 in compliance with the USDE mandatory biennial inventory pursuant to the imposed Special Conditions.

## Technology Challenges

Since the start of the current school year, the VIDE has been faced with ongoing network and internet connectivity challenges, primarily impacting schools and activity centers in the St. Thomas-St. John School District. As the Department’s primary Network Operations Center (NOC) is located on the island of St. Thomas, these disruptions have also directly impacted the St. Croix School District, thereby resulting in territory-wide interruptions. These challenges are partly due to aging infrastructure, outdated equipment, and recurring system failures across both districts. However, the primary cause of our service interruptions has been directly linked to the frequency of WAPA power outages on both districts. These outages have resulted in damage and loss of valuable technology equipment which significantly impedes the Department’s ability to maintain consistent network and internet services. Additionally, battery backup systems, which are designed to protect operations during outages, have also deteriorated under continuous exposure to these unstable and fluctuating power conditions.

## **Technology Status/Solution(s)**

In response, the VIDE Information Technology team has temporarily implemented various short-term stabilization measures which include the critical upgrade of a major central server. This improvement allowed for faster restoration of services following outages and replaces legacy systems previously in place. While this has improved operational recovery, it is not a sustainable long-term solution given the continued instability of the power grid and the ongoing challenges associated with WAPA service interruptions.

To address these systemic concerns, the VIDE has been actively working on securing federal funding for the upcoming funding year through the E-Rate Program administered by the Universal Service Administration Company on behalf of the Federal Communications Commission. This federal initiative provides discounted support for the Department's telecommunications services, internet access, and internal network infrastructure. Through the E-Rate Program, the VIDE is preparing to modernize its technology environment by replacing outdated equipment, deploying upgraded battery backup systems, enhancing internal network infrastructure, and expanding wireless connectivity across all school campuses.

In preparation for the upcoming E-Rate funding cycle, the Department is finalizing contract development and anticipates releasing a Request for Proposal in the coming months to support the first phase of territory wide implementation. This phase will include the supply, installation, and maintenance of advanced battery backup systems. These services will be fully delivered by select vendors to ensure timely, efficient, and professional implementation.

In subsequent phases, the VIDE will replace deteriorating cabling and upgrade obsolete network electronics to further improve network performance, reliability, and scalability across the territory. These investments are mission-critical to supporting future growth and evolving technology demands. The VIDE has also identified the need for a dedicated generator to support critical technology operations during extended power outages at the NOC. While a generator would significantly enhance system reliability, no funding source has been identified for this component as generator purchases are not eligible under E-Rate funding guidelines. However, the VIDE is working with the leadership of the Bureau of School Construction and Maintenance to obtain a generator for the NOC. Quotes have been received to remove the generator that was previously at Sprauve to the headquarters. Once installed, a contract will be put in place for the routine maintenance and fueling of the generator. Additional support is essential to complete this critical infrastructure upgrade.

In summary, while recent improvements have increased short-term network stability, long-term sustainability will require continued infrastructure investments. Federal E-Rate funding remains a critical mechanism to modernize the Department's technology systems, improve reliability, and ensure uninterrupted educational services throughout the Virgin Islands. Thank you for the opportunity to share this testimony with you, your colleagues, and our fellow Virgin Islanders. We are prepared to answer any questions you may have.

## **Conclusion**

In closing, the Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) appreciates the Committee's continued attention to the critical role telecommunications plays in advancing education across the Territory. As we serve over 10,000 students, the need for reliable internet connectivity, equitable access to digital technology, and resilient infrastructure remains essential to supporting both teaching and learning, as well as the Department's administrative functions.

While progress has been made, ongoing challenges continue to impact digital equity and system reliability. Addressing these gaps will require sustained collaboration among service providers, government agencies, and policymakers to ensure that all students, regardless of location, have consistent access to the tools and resources necessary for success in an increasingly digital learning environment.

VIDE remains committed to working in partnership with the Committee to identify solutions, strengthen infrastructure, and enhance connectivity across our public school system. We are confident that, through continued coordination and strategic investment, we can build a more equitable and resilient telecommunications landscape for the students and families of the Virgin Islands.

Thank you for your consideration and your unwavering commitment to the advancement of education in our Territory.