



| Committee on Education & Workforce Development 2

Legislature USVI

March 23, 2023 · 4.9 hours · gov

Source recording	https://youtu.be/2C2qMJtnV4
Status	This is a working transcript produced by machine from a recording of a public proceeding. It is a finding aid, not an official record of the Legislature.
Transcribed by	VI Update, using OpenAI Whisper large-v3-turbo, run locally. Not reviewed by a person.
Reliability	Automatic transcription, UNVERIFIED. Verify every quotation against the recording before relying on it. Speech recognition splits spoken digits and wraps figures mid-number, so a dollar amount, a vote count or a bill number can be wrong in a way that reads as correct. Speakers are not identified: automatic speaker labelling was measured unusable and removed.
Public record	The underlying proceeding is a public record of the Legislature of the Virgin Islands. 3 V.I.C. § 881(a) defines public records to include all records and documents of or belonging to this Territory or any branch of government, or any "department, board, council or committee of any branch of government" · which names legislative committees by category. § 881(b) gives every citizen the right to examine and copy such records, and the news media the right to publish them. (The open-meetings chapter, 1 V.I.C. § 254, does NOT reach the Legislature: § 253(b) expressly excludes it and its Standing and Special Committees. § 881 does, and it is § 881 that confers the right to copy and publish.) The Legislature broadcast this proceeding publicly itself. The source recording is not ours, is not hosted here, and remains with its publisher at the link above.
Rights	To what we added · the transcription, its arrangement and its description · we assert nothing. A verbatim transcript is mechanical rather than authored, so there is likely nothing in it to own; to the extent any copyright is nonetheless found to subsist, it is dedicated to the public domain under CC0 1.0. Please copy it, quote it, index it, train on it, republish it, mirror it, sell it. Redistribution is the point: a public record with one copy is one fire from gone. No permission is needed, and none is ours to grant or withhold.

0:00:00 so once once once we receive for example today's a payday we would receive the report by monday monday okay but so but but based on the cash management act we get paid today thursday we're supposed to do the drawdown tomorrow so what's your what's the clearance pattern there's a clearance pattern agreement and you probably need to find out within the department of finance that they make that agreement with treasury to see whether it's three days or how much whichever days it is and that's what i'm saying so based on the fact that we were doing a reimbursement with the federal funds um it was suggested that we go back and look at that cmi agreement because that that needs to change or else we will continue to correct correct that's where i was going with it that we are creating that for ourselves because our agreement needs to be within the a reasonable window all right uh the next senator is uh senator jivon james are you Senator Javon James, you're recognized for your five minutes.

0:01:02 Greetings to the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Thank you, Madam Chair, for the time. My question to the Department of Education, do you have like a database of tutors or non-profits who are skilled in helping students with reading and learning at the USVI? I don't know that we have a database, Senator, but we do have existing partnerships in place at the respective districts that we work closely with. We had an RFP that went out recently to solicit community partners to assist the department with some of what we're experiencing in terms of gaps in our students and what we're able to offer. And can you expand a little bit, once that RFP is put out and you have a bid, or a person who won the bid, how will that program work?

0:01:58 I will allow the superintendents to respond as they are the ones that are doing the review process of those respective persons. Superintendent Herman? Sure thing. What we send out to an RFP senator was for nonprofit agencies, private entities to create a program to address our most critical needs as broad data so that's writing and areas of numeracy in mathematics and using their their program focus stop right here stop right here when was that um bid sent out and when does that bid close the bid is closed it was sent out i believe in january um it has already closed we are actually currently

closing we just met and did presentations this week. We met and reviewed the proposals last week. We did presentations this week. And so notifications should be going out through our procurement office, I guess, within a week or so. So it started in January and you said it was closed in which month? It was closed in February. We did have it advertised via our VIDE procurement page, as well as shared through our social media platforms um around the rfp uh for non-profits or any private entity to to bid so since the since that bid has closed i guess you can expound on how much it is going to cost the department i cannot expound on how much it's going to cost the department at this time i can give you an estimate and the reason being is because it is still going through the selection process. Once the vendors are selected, then I would have more specific information. I can tell you that there was not as many vendors as we expected. We had some individuals submitted after the deadline date, but we do have some creative programs that were submitted that we're looking at. Some specialize in the field of agriculture, some talking about using sports to build mathematical and writing skills two minutes so it's going to vary but

0:04:13

what I will say is if probably through the commissioner's office and the chair once everything is done we can share that information with you so through the chair once that information once that information can be be readily available I'm asking that they send everything pertaining to the RFB and the costs and all that stuff to this committee or the body and the reason why asked a question about the database of tutors because I was hoping and praying that we could put some system in place where a teacher notifies the counselors about a child's level of literacy say for instance by the second quarter the ending of the second quarter of the report of the school year and thereafter recommendations can be made with a list of 2,000 nonprofit organizations can either be mailed to them hand delivered or emailed to the parent or guardian to side of the student who is struggling do you think something that can happen in actuality in actuality senator yes and so one of the programs that we piloted in the synchro district this year was again using an online tutorial program where we identified students to see how this would work what we're seeing from those results is we're seeing students are achieving growth in the areas or domains that they struggle with and so one of the key things that we're looking at is how do we maximize that moving forward for the upcoming school year 30 seconds and allow for the teachers to say okay this is either this is the concept that i'm teaching and the students need support or we look at what our diagnostic results already said that our students are um have a deficit in thank you my office will follow up with you regarding that and title 17 chapter 3 section

0:06:00

21 through 24 speaks to the Dropout Prevention Act, and based on that act, there should be a manual that that legislation was passed back in 2007. Is there a dropout prevention manual based on Title 17, Chapter 3, Section 21 through 24? Time. So we do have a draft plan that we are working on for the territory. that is finalized we will put it into action for the 23-24 school year senator um madam chair if i could just ask one more question go ahead senator james thank you madam chair um i saw here where you spoke about the teachers who are eligible to retire where you reference 15 retiring from the St. Thomas, St. John district and 22 retiring from the St. Croix district and you went on to say that 27 international teachers from the J1 exchange program are scheduled to return to their home country at the end of the school year. I know that you're working on it and you also mentioned 10 letters from teachers scheduled to retire at the end of the school year. Can you Can you just explain to me, I don't know what's going on there, can you explain to me the strategic plan to address these issues? Thank you, Madam.

0:07:29

So great question, Senator. And again, our recruitment efforts are ongoing and we realize that we are not the only ones who have teacher shortages. So we're competing with many other states for teachers. What troubles me more so is the persons eligible to retire. Those are the people who could go at any given moment. And so when we look at that listing, you're talking about another 127 teachers that could say at the end of the year, I'm ready to go. So I pay attention to that and look for ways that we could help to create environments where they they want to stay and assist the department in that effort but our acting director shellford can tell you what we're doing right now because i know there's some uh interview scheduled for some international teachers as we speak and so you can talk about what you're doing good afternoon please state your name and title good afternoon milan cooper shellford acting human resources director the office of human resources have been conducting interviews locally along with the international we have a high shortage especially in special education and that has been redundant every year so right now we are seeking international teachers to help fill that gap because we do we tend not to find locals to come fill that gap we are also attending various job fairs we also posted our vacancy flyer on our facebook page so we are trying many and various different forms to advertise so that we could have our positions filled by the beginning of the school year if i may senator to add and so one of the things that we also are doing um is really looking at the distance learning bill and really um aligning um our actions to what this bill speaks So the superintendents are aware of the need to restructure the VIVA program to where it's not a full-time school, but it actually helps us to recruit teachers in those areas where we have shortages or areas that we would like to offer additional foreign languages. For example, that we have never offered before here in the territory and give our students

- 0:09:59 options. So that's also something that we're working on. Thank you. Thank you, Commissioner. I actually had act number 8400 in front of me, the distance learning, but one of the problems that we face, one of the problems that we face, though, with even the IREADY is internet connectivity. Can you address that? Because then if I can't take, if it's interrupting the learning process, what's the backup? What's the plan? So it is definitely a concern and I am not afraid to say publicly, I'm not an IT person. I don't know how to fix it. So what I did is I solicited the assistance of the Bureau of Information and Technology to come in and assist us with an independent contractor to assess our infrastructure. We have invested a lot of money into our infrastructure and there's no reason why we don't have reliable connectivity all day long. So we're going through that process as we speak, however, we are in the testing season. And so that still remains a concern for us. And so the superintendents have come up with a creative way to ensure that the students, don't have those interruptions when they're trying to take this standardized test and even moving forward with the different programs that we have so if you don't mind i know we're strapped for time but superintendent jorgen can you talk about what you're doing certainly um so we've tested in a nutshell we tested our equipment pretty much and we are very concerned that it's going to interrupt testing so what we've done is um we've split the district in half and so all of the The schools in the country will test next week, starting Monday, and then the schools in town will test the following week. So that's what we're doing in this district, and we hope that it proves successful because
- 0:12:03 we don't want any hiccups during the testing period. In the St. Croix district, who's... In Herman, Ursula Herman Insula, Superintendent St. Croix district. In our district, we've staggered it. We started this week with K6. We then have K-8, and then we will have 9-12. We've also, because our infrastructure issues, especially at our high schools, are very severe, we've pulled back our MIFIs. We've allocated our MIFIs to the schools as a secondary internet option, and so the schools all have been appropriated MIFIs, so this week the MIFIs are at all of our K-6 schools, next week it will be at our K-8 schools, then it will be at our 9-12 schools. That point of inquiry, Senator Fred Gregory.
- 0:12:49 Thank you, Madam Chair, and of course, I hope that we don't get a little annoyed because of the point of inquiries, but this conversation is a conversation, it's an important one. I want to go back to the discussion around the distance learning, because apparently the legislation was misinterpreted or I'm not certain what happened, but I need to hear from the commissioner or the two superintendents what is their interpretation of this legislation because we created schools out of this legislation which is definitely inappropriate and not intended and there was never any testimony around us so i need to make sure that we understand what this distance learning bill was to do we here we are here talking about teacher shortages and this bill was uh wait is some since 2020 we 2023 and we still having the conversation around implementing how do we address uh areas especially the content specific areas and in ensuring that our students are able to still get we've created the the impetus for you to do the work what's the challenge i i don't think so so so let me ask let me just ask the question what is your interpretation of the legislation and where are we going when do we expect to see this implemented in earnest this is not rocket science work it is not and i totally agree senator and you will see the full implementation in 23 24 school year because it was designed as a school and we had students enroll for the year i could not change midstream from allowing them to complete a full year in the program moving forward it will serve the intent that the bill was drafted or created by U4, which was to fill some of those vacancies that we have and provide opportunities outside the box or the realm of what we have been offering here at the Department of Education. So we're actually excited. I am. I love the idea of our students being able to take other foreign languages other than French and Spanish and other things, whether it's coding or whatever that that helps them to be competitive this is what we're saying we're doing
- 0:15:26 so we now have the opportunity to expand i think i did that well yeah yeah so so i so thank you thank you so much for what you said so i think that we are on the right track there's just us being a little impatient because we see where the gap is and the fact that our students continue to suffer although we've done our part here from the legislative perspective thank you thank you thank you for your answer also. Senator Novel E. Francis Jr., you're recognized for your five minutes. Okay, we're gonna move on to Senator Ray Fonseca for your five minutes. Yes, pleasant, good afternoon to the listening audience blessing you know I'd like to thank all the testifiers you know I joined madam chairwoman in saying that this is a beautiful presentation you have provided a lot a lot of information so I want to say thank you to all the testifiers, including Dr. Brown, Commissioner Hans Oriel, Dr. Kaiser Carwood. You know, Commissioner, I'm so impressed with your statement where you says every teacher has a role to play in helping students to be able to read and write effectively, you know. The other day at the governor, I'll borrow a quote from him, you know, he said that some students are magna cum laude and summa cum laude.
- 0:17:11 Well, with Commissioner Diane Wells, Hendrington is thank you, laddie. This is excellent. You know, I wanna go to your federal grants. I wanna get into some numbers because at the Arthur Richards, I'm assuming at the Arthur Richards is your Korean Technical Institute. So that's the equivalent of the Raphael O. Wheatley on St. Thomas? Yes, Commissioner? No, not Arthur Richards, current technical education. The Gladys Abraham, I'm sorry. Oh, Gladys

Abraham will be the, right, the new Raphael Wheatley, right.

- 0:17:47 Okay, good. So here's what I wanted to talk to you about. Okay, you know, there's about, there was 2,375 building construction permits issued. permits issued the office of disaster recovery is saying that there's 44 projects in 2023 that are going to be somewhere in the stages of start starting which is going to be another nine hundred and thirty million dollars this is from testimony the virgin housing authority has a billion dollars that they are getting ready to do of course you know the one we know it was 130 million project and it was it was started in 2018 it was supposed to be completed in 2019 we're just now nearing the completion so what I'm saying is that and the governor said it in page 27 of the state of the territory report and I'm reading from it the governor says we continue to establish and enrich the workforce development pipeline as we meet need more than 5 000 workers in the territory and you know i've always been an advocate of education teaching the trades right and i've looked at your budget i've noticed that you have actually increased it i don't know the korean technical education is a hundred percent federally funding is it two minutes is the korean technical education the um is that federally funded is there a local portion um mr smith senator the we it is funded under the um federal grants okay thank you so in addition to that right we have all of the schools the education project just the 23rd you are you are another groundbreaking 162 million dollar
- 0:19:45 project so what i want to emphasize is that you know to your workforce development your career technical institute there are going to be 5 000 new employees that we're going to need to be able to finish these projects so you're doing a beautiful job you know as matter of fact i heard they got some big position coming available at the university don't sell yourself short we need good virgin islanders like you but i want you to to continue to emphasize the career and technical education because we need the trades we need the trades taught in the school and now even more so than ever because there's billions of dollars that gonna be in construction and development new schools new hospitals and we must have our people our locals here afforded the opportunity to be able to get these jobs because you know 30 seconds um you know a licensed electrician can earn upwards of you know 1200 a week and i just just wanted to bring out some particular numbers here where i noticed that um some well one particular administrator is the salary is only like about 25 20 dollars an hour and in the skills you can make 25 dollars an hour is low so you you have to be a little bit more creative to be able to retain those technical um instructors you're going to have to be able to afford to pay them more than 20 25 dollars an hour because they can go in the private sector and gain a lot more than that and uh thank you very much for the time madam chair so so if i may say just one thing to senator fonseca right um spot on point that's
- 0:21:36 my sentiments exactly and um that's why we're having the conversations now about having alternatives to recruiting teachers for those areas because we're not going to get them to come out the private sector to come into public education for the for the salaries that we're paying so that's part of the discussions that we're having so that we'll be able to get them in an abbreviated schedule to provide the theory to provide the hands-on children and get our children on that path for uh work in the future so i'm right there with you on that thank you thank you senator fonseca for that uh i i got a recommendation that i want to pass on which is um can you give this the seniors the uvi entrance exam in the first semester as an exit exam and then you could use that first semester to address the deficiency is that possible you know what you do you understand no there there's and i'm not familiar with uvi but there's a uvi entrance exam correct where then you would then test the seniors in the first semester, the seniors in high school, the high school seniors, and then see how, what the results are, and then you would know what to work on. Is that possible?
- 0:23:06 I think it's worth exploring. I think that's an excellent idea. I don't know if you have any information that you can share. Thank you, thank you. We know that we have some seniors already coming in through advanced placement already. I think when it comes to the basic skills test, that's where the skills test scores come from, from testing. And we do have some already doing that through Summer Bridge. That's how they get into the Summer Bridge program. So I think it's worth discussing, expanding who can do that. Right.
- 0:23:47 I thought when I saw it, I thought it was an excellent recommendation and I was wondering if it was possible. We're going to go to our next, Senator, I recognize Senator Donna Fred Gregory for five minutes. Thank you, Madam Chair. And I would venture to say five minutes is not enough for this extensive discussion, But let's go back to literacy. So I see that you have a literacy plan.
- 0:24:17 And of course, plans, they brief well, of course, but of concern to me is the question that I asked earlier. And I want to thank the commissioner for her response, however, I'm primarily concerned with the fact that we don't have coaches in our schools that's providing support to our teachers as we address our literacy and numeracy issues that we have in the territory. I am at a huge loss in understanding when did that happen and why in the world would something like that happen when we have all of these federal dollars that's available to us you know so i could comment um from my previous previous role when i was superintendent um we were told to remove it from the federal budget uh federal government yeah they told us it was supplanting and we argued and we argued stay right there it's fine for it to be

supplanting but it's supplanting then the responsibility of the state which is this institution needed to be providing the resources to support literacy because we continue to tout literacy for as long as i'm sure all of us could remember but if we are not doing anything around literacy that is deliberate then all of us have failed correct and that is my primary concern because we've opened offices of gun violence and all of these different things but we are not addressing the issues that we have with root cars root cause here in the territory so we will continue to have this circular conversation so are you saying that in your um application to the federal government there is no supports for literacy well wait this was back in my time since then heads have changed and many things

0:26:17 that could not be done could be done now okay you're on my time so and i have to respect the chair so that is a primary concern to me yeah um so let me ask the university of the virgin islands you may not have the information but do you have any data on how many of our teachers uh have passed through the early childhood certification over how many years again thank Since we've been talking about it, let's say within the past, I would say three to four years.

0:26:50 I don't have any specific data. No problem. To the chair, could you provide that information to the chair? Let's go to our Department of Planning and Natural Resources, because we talk in literacy. And literacy is not something that the Department of Education, that entity, that department cannot be the only department that focuses on literacy in the territory. So, I saw that we're talking about the closing of the Turnbull Library. What does that mean? Good afternoon, Senator. So, Commissioner Oriel for DPNR.

0:27:22 So the capital repairs on the Turnbull Library will commence. Okay. Okay. So, it's because of the capital repairs. I'm not trying to be... My time is running. So, it's because of the capital repairs. But you also noted that the bookmobile is not up and running in this district. So how are we going to mitigate literacy, addressing literacy in this district if our libraries are closed, if our libraries are open from nine to, I think St. Croix is nine to five and in St. Thomas is nine to six or nine to seven. We've discussed this issue over and over about moving the time where our libraries are open and we still in the same place, but we continue to talk about improving literacy. Are we serious? I mean, how serious are we about this? We continue to put all the pressure on VIDE.

0:28:15 This pressure belongs to all of us. So help me, Commissioner, the bookmobile. Yes, Senator. So it's our goal to actually get that to be functional. When? And hopefully before June, before we actually have to shut down. We are working to get it on the road. Okay. Thank you for that. you know, we got to do a little better than this. Let me go to the data, Smarter Balanced Data Analysis. I want to talk about that. So, of course, the information provided commissioner and superintendents is the overall department. So we did not, we were not previewed to, and I'm sure we could go on the system to find the information. But how are you, so when When we look at the information, it is clear that we're in trouble, okay? When we look at the data around... Time.

0:29:16 Oh, boy. May I continue, Madam Chair? May I wrap up? Yes. Yes, you may wrap up. So, when we look at the data for our MAT in particular, we are seeing that our students overall, and of course, we don't know if it's, I think, Deputy Superintendent Atlee made reference to the different K3, and then she said 6, 5, 7, or 9, 12, etc. But this doesn't provide us with the different cans of buckets, if you will, of how they perform, right?

0:29:52 So my question is, I'm going to go straight to the high school level around the mat. So So we've been on block scheduling for many, many, many years now, and now that we are seeing the challenge that we have with our scores on the high school level, I don't have the information, but I'm certain that a lot of this is tied to our secondary grade levels, right?

0:30:20 Are we looking at how we are administering these courses in our high school? For instance, a child takes math this semester. I could tell you, the commissioner made reference to the same thing. I take math this semester, next semester there's no math, the next semester there may not be no math, and then the next one there's math. How are we going to mitigate this? What are we doing? Because when we're looking at the data, this is what we should be considering. We need to be moving to a modified block. is some consideration that must be given around how we are looking at this data and what we're truly doing with the data and how we are making changes as a result of these test scores and where we are. Because we see that in 21, school year 21, 21, 22, we are below standards 77.2% our math and an ELA literacy 60.5. So we have to not only change what we're doing in the classrooms, but we also need to look at our scheduling, particularly in the high school level. So help me to understand what we're doing, Commissioner.

0:31:30 So we did have conversations around scheduling right on point. So I'm going to let the superintendent talk about that. Okay. So to answer your question, Senator, last year, we actually pulled a cohort from every high school administrators we did high school walkthroughs which i try and synthesize for your time and we at the end result was we shifted the instructional blocks at the high schools where we reduced the time and we put in what's called a flex block and we piloted that this school year the consultant that worked with us came and gave us some feedback around how that's used and the 45 minute block that's there was to be used for interventions was to be used for credit recovery was to be used as a

different um means to address student needs what we're going to look at in the upcoming year especially with the shifts with the new board policy around courses to be offered is how we lay out and address that um this year we're also testing our 10th graders we know that in terms of diagnostic data are i ready is no you answer my question i just asked you about this whole block scheduling right so we changed we changed the block and we're looking at how we lay out the courses for the students so now instead of the same old four 90 minute blocks we have 75 minute blocks three 75 minute blocks and one 45 minute block so we shifted the schedule the structure of the schedule and allowed the schools to put innovative programs in place to meet students so typically matt how does matt look across our secondary schools and my term has been called long time if i could just if i could just add senator that one of the things we we have to look at also is a response to failure because a lot of times you you're trying to have those courses where students have failed and it prevents you from offering the subsequent courses and so you don't have to have um courses for students that are failed only in the summer and so what we've done is made sure that our credit recovery program run throughout the year so that we can accommodate students but it's a scheduling issue we have to make our ask up front known to the system the system is going to do exactly what we tell it to do thank you thank you the reason we're going to take a short um recess five five minutes because because I know that you were human, let's put it that way. So, five minutes.

0:34:17 Thank you. I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you [2 such phrases repeated 11 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:39:47 Thank you. Let's go. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I love you Thank you. We'll be right back. do

0:47:17 Thank you. Thank you.

0:48:17 Thank you. Thank you.

0:49:17 Good afternoon, we're back on the record from recess and we will go to St. Croix. I am recognising Senator Novel E. Francis Jr. Senator Francis, go ahead please. Thank you very much Madam Chair and good afternoon to you and good afternoon to my colleagues and of course good afternoon to the people of the Virgin Islands. Thank you very much and testifiers for this very comprehensive testimony, Commissioner Dion Wells-Hendrington as well as UVI and Commissioner JP Oriel. So as the previous speaker had spoken about is that we continue to be very concerned with our Department of Education and where we headed in that respect and of course the testimony you have provided commissioner certainly briefs well it sounds good and i just wanted to ask you how are you you know seeking buy-ins and how all hands on deck in respect to making sure that your goals are met um your base and and clearly your management team good afternoon senator francis uh very good question um accountability bottom line so i have given my superintendents i i don't want to say much in orders but a direction um that lends itself to the fact that teaching and learning is our focus therefore you have to hold your principles accountable and that's part of the site-based management where we allow the flexibility of schools to design programs to bridge those gaps that they're seeing in student achievement very well thank you you don't have to

0:51:09 be reluctant to call it again march and others clearly you're in charge and you're who we hold them responsible and you have to hold those below you accountable as well also thank you very much for your commitment to move the aviation pilot program forward we're truly looking forward to that today we didn't hear a lot about school attendance and as you know i move legislation in respect to truancy because i believe that if our students is not in school then they're somewhere out there and again it presents some challenges as to whether or not they're in a learning environment how has the truancy level improved or do you have an update in where we at with truancy i will allow the superintendents to give more details around that i'm superintendent herman st croix district uh senator in terms of attendance um we see it wavering uh diligently for this school year we have not hit our 95 mark that we have as a set goal across the district consistently. We have done it at certain schools. A couple of things that we saw was the impact of the RSV virus, you know, COVID-19, just overall attendance. Each school has been working with our attendance counselors. Whether we go to parents, we contact them via email, phone calls to try and bring our children to school. So it is ongoing. It is something that we need to work to push but our attendance is is on the rise but it's just not where we want it to be. And have you been able to glean any particular trend or pattern in terms of that grade? That seems I know at one point we actually recognized that kindergarten was where we saw some attendance issue. Have you been able to glean where we've seen it this school year?

0:53:05 Yes so in the St. Croix district kindergarten again remains our lowest especially for this month but so far overall our lowest grade level at 84 percent our highest grade level is the 12th grade with 93 percent 9th through 12th graders high schoolers go to school um so they are the highest rates in the st croix district and then eighth grade with approximately 90 percent so again our early learners children who do not bring themselves to school that is where our attendance rates are the lowest very well that is a problem for me um because of course they don't drive themselves to school but we'll have a

deeper conversation in respect to that. So there's a number of head starts that's been built throughout the territory and I know in St. Croix in particular we're seeing some strides in that. What is the synergy between Department of Education and Human Services in respect to the build out of the head starts and you know what's happening in that space? So we've begun to have discussions, Senator around us collaborating more in regards not only to the infrastructure and the designs, but to the quality of instruction that is taking place to allow for a smooth transition of those students who are in the Head Start program into the public education system. We've also had conversations around embedding some Head Starts within our schools as well. So we'll continue those discussions moving forward very well and as my time run down real quickly 75 employees separating from school 33 of which are teachers um that seems to be rather high an anomaly in in my opinion um have you been able to um you know glean what's happening in that space as well as what for the um international teachers that's leaving uh come june 2023 if you could just touch those two matters for me and the chair stems. I appreciate it. Thank you very much, Madam

0:55:03 Chair, for the time. So I know just from a brief conversation that I've had with some of the individuals that have separated from the department, it's for different reasons, better job opportunities, some relocations, especially for those who are resignations. Of course, retirement, we know they've met their requirements to retire, so that's always optional. When it comes to recruitment we are intentional with our recruitment and it's ongoing like i mentioned we do have some interviews coming up uh with j1 program uh we could give you specifics with that but we will continue our efforts as best as we can to fill those gaps and again we will be using the the procured services of the vendor to fill those gaps through that distance learning program that we have established so it's not the perfect fit senator but i i know that we will do our best to have teachers whether they're virtually or in person um in front of our children for the upcoming school year i am concerned with the amount of individuals that are eligible to retire thank you thank you for that question and for that answer um i will now recognize senator milton potter for your five minutes thank you very much uh madam chair good afternoon one and all um commissioner i want to just shift gears a little bit first of all i want to say kudos to you in terms of just your responsiveness and your passion when i reach out to you with a concern you respond that may seem very basic but it doesn't really happen routinely so i'm very appreciative to you for your responsiveness. I wanted to shift gears a little bit and ask you a question about AEDs, the automatic external defibrillators. And I know it came to prominence really recently when we had that incident on Monday Night Football. I think safety for the Buffalo Bills went into cardiac arrest. And so immediately when I saw that, I thought about us here on a local basis. It was clear that but for the intervention of this device and the team, that young man would be dead. And I reviewed our local

0:57:29 laws and we were really on the forefront of mandating that these things exist. But I just wanted to know if there was the status of that. Do we have these devices in our schools? Is it being tested on a regular basis? Do we have the training regiment there, so that in the event that something happens, we know how to respond. Just a quick, give you like 30 seconds to respond to that. Good afternoon. Afternoons. Afternoon, Mr. Soames.

0:58:00 Good afternoon. Yes, Nada. Victor Soames, the third assistant commissioner. Commissioner, recognize. Mike. Good afternoon. Victor Soames, assistant commissioner. Thank you for that question, Senator. I know that some schools have the AEDs. When I was at alternative education that was installed in the mid-15 teens, mid-20 teens, I want to believe that schools that have school nurses, those nurses are clearly trained in how to use them. We need to do an assessment to make sure that since the storms that all schools do now have those AEDs, that they're functional, that they're being serviced and that the nursing staff at those schools know how to use it. So it's something that, thank you for putting that on our radar that we will certainly pursue. thank you for that thank you very much for that um second question commission on page three of your testimony you mentioned governor bryan's uh agency reform plan and your plan focus on early education early childhood education and but hasn't that always been a focus of the focus so it has not and what specifically quickly can you say what changes are Are you gonna see and what results are we going to get as a result of this new focus?

0:59:19 So we're really going to hone in on providing training and support to our teachers in pre-K to third on the science of reading and on mathematical instruction and providing that ongoing coaching that our schools and our educators need in order for them to improve their instructional strategies that they're using with our children. Our goal is to have our children proficient by the time they leave third grade. If we're able to make that shift, then you'll see the shift up the ladder as the students progress. And so we decided to take that chunk and really hone in on providing that intentional support. Thank you, I appreciate that.

1:00:06 With regards to the Smarter Balanced scores, We all know, I don't think anybody in this room is satisfied with the scores. As a matter of fact, it is something that troubles me. Just the whole concept of learning loss, where we are, and how we're going to intentionally, positively impact our young people. And, you know, I heard you today, I heard the superintendents eloquently spoke or speak about some of the initiatives that they are implementing and will implement, and that is good. I

wanted to ask though is there a role for the University of the Virgin Islands in these types of matters considering how significant a deficit we are at and we have a university here do you interact with the university are they engaged are they involved things like block scheduling one of the one of my colleagues mentioned about block scheduling you know I could see UVI talking about studies on the efficacy of block scheduling is it time for us to you know so those types of things to what extent do you interact with the university of virgin ireland i think i think we could improve um we do interact but um not so much on a day-to-day operational level and the needs specific to the districts uh so that's a point that that i definitely will will embrace When we talk about variations in schedules, there's so many different models that can be implemented territory-wide. I do allow the superintendents to have that flexibility. But one of the discussions that we had at break was the fact that math is being tested, ELA is being tested. do we want those to be unblocked or do we want to create skinnies where students have those particular subject areas for the entire year so I think it's really the time is here for us to really look at our practices and make the shifts they may not be met with much acceptance you know because change always makes people uncomfortable but at the end of the day what is best for the child what will help our children to be more successful and I think it's something that the superintendents definitely grabbed the whole of today and we'll go back and look at how we're doing that. Thank you very much. I know my time was called, Madam Chair,

1:02:29 I won't abuse it, but I really believe that having joining forces with the University of the Virgin Islands, you know, to address some of these critical issues will be in all of our best interests. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you, Senator Potter. Senator Kinnett Gittens, you're recognized for your five minutes. Thank you, Madam Chair. However, my colleague here, Senator James, was trying to get a point of inquiry. Do you mind?

1:03:02 No, I don't. Senator James, point of inquiry? Yes. It's along the same line of questioning before the previous speaker regarding the teachers who participated in the J1 program. My question is The Commissioner mentioned that there were several concerns and reasons for the teachers to leave and we want to remain competitive as you know there's a teacher shortage so my question was do we have a system in place where we're having assessments and surveys done to find out how we can be able to retain these future teachers who are participating in the J1 program and if so what are you doing with that information? Thank you Madam Chair.

1:03:46 I will allow the acting director to answer. Melendie Cooper-Shelford, acting human resources director. Mike. Okay. Melendie Cooper-Shelford, acting human resources director. Senator James, the teachers who come on the J1 program, they're here for a time period. They are allowed to be on island for at least three years, and there are times when they are providing an extension. However, once that extension has ended, they do have to return. It's a Department of State policy that they have to return back to their homeland. However, once they return and they do the two years residency, they are allowed to reach out to the department where we assist with either giving them another visa, whether it's the H-1B or the J-1 visa. Madam Chair, I just want to interject. It came out of the Commissioner's mouth that there were several reasons why some will not like to return. If I'm not mistaken, I heard that...

1:04:54 No. I was speaking about the general population of separations, not the H1 or J1 persons. Okay. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair, for the time. Point of inquiry, Senator Johnson. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. question is in same line here you guys do a exit interview on the teachers and that are leaving and if you're doing that exit interview what is the majority of the reasons for teachers leaving okay milenku pashel for acting human resources director like the commissioner mentioned majority of the times the teachers leave for better opportunities they are moving off island and they like we said there are times they retire and there's no way we could keep them so with the exit interview we can't um really force them to stay but when they decide okay we're gonna make a better opportunity a better life of ireland our hands are tied there's nothing we could do that's especially salary and cost for living thank you senator johnson thank you mrs shill and so forth. Senator Gittens, your five minutes.

1:06:15 Thank you, Madam Chair, and good afternoon to all. Special good afternoon to some former educators that I see here in the St. Croix Chambers, and the others. Special good afternoon to former Senator Adelbert Bryan. Welcome. I want to thank you, First Commissioner, for your comprehensive testimony here this morning into the afternoon and thank you to you and the team for your response and the work that you're doing. Let me try to do this as quickly as possible. We've had, in looking at the national news, we've had over some 100 school shootings across America. We've had two school shootings at just this week on the mainland and just the other day we had a incident at the John H. Woodson Junior High School. How are we truly addressing the safety and security at our campuses? I see a request for funding for certain equipment however are you familiar with act 3193 which appropriates or reappropriates some over five million dollars to the department of education to include monies for pa systems and intercom systems in both districts yes yes senator the pfa funding um we currently are the vendor has been selected for the installation of the PA system in Central Complex and Juanita Gardein. I'm sorry, can I ask you to stop a second? It seems like there's an individual online

- 1:08:07 and I'm hearing. Someone who's on, yes, Senator, you're correct. Someone online, please mute. Okay, no problem. Mute. Thank you. Sorry, Senator, so you're absolutely correct. We are about to mobilize the contractor that is installing the first set of PA systems, intercom systems in our schools. I'm in the St. Croix District, it's Complex, Central, and Juanita-Guardin. In St. Thomas, it's Charlotte Amalia High School and Gomez Elementary. We have the RFP out for the camera systems, territory-wide, that's being solicited as we speak. In the interim, we've installed the Mitel phones in all of our classrooms to allow for that two-way communication in the event that we have any emergencies on the campus. So we will continue our efforts to have those things rectified sooner than later. In addition, we're putting out the RFPs for the fencing on our campuses and Mr. Soom and his team are looking at our entrances and any changes that we may need to have in place relative to the way students enter campuses, our parents, et cetera, those plans are being updated.
- 1:09:39 Thank you for that. All that sounds good. I need to see some timelines and a number of these projects please to include I see you your remarks on page 13 with regards to the next steps with the improvements and other improvements being made to our kitchens across the territory and I see a number of them for St. Croix but again there's no timeline on any of these projects and these equipments have been sitting in some of these schools for over some four or five years so I'm asking to the chair for a timeline on these projects and the list of contractors please also on the page 29 20 35 and 36 you provided an ambitious schedule for summer maintenance projects, but most are in the stage of the bid process. Again, we're not seeing when these projects are going to come online, how long they're going to take. What's the status of that? So before I could put any timelines in terms of when it's going to start, the contract has to be in place. That's one. I can't have Mr. Fleming identify each project individually in terms of the length of time, but until we have contracts in place, it's hard for me to project, Senator. Okay. And your HR director is there, correct? How many school nurses are we short by? And you have the salaries of these individuals? Senator, I could get that information to
- 1:11:33 you. Please do. Commissioner, we'll continue our discussion on the school resource medic or the school health technician. It doesn't just be a mandate to have a RN on the campus. If I make a conclude with one more, Madam Chair. Mayor Mrakas- Sure Senator, then let's go right ahead. Mayor Mrakas- Commissioner Oriel, are you still online? Mayor Mrakas- Yes, Senator. Good afternoon.
- 1:12:06 Mayor Mrakas- Good afternoon. Did you get a chance to review the bill draft request that I sent? Just for my colleagues and the public's knowledge, I strongly believe that our public libraries, sorry, are not getting the attention it truly deserves being under the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, not to blame the agency itself, but I think things just get lost. I heard questioning about the school library hours, which have been a major concern. So I've submitted a bill draft request to legal counsel and the purpose or request for this is to remove and reestablish the public library services from under the department of DPNR and transfer its entire operations and functions and services under the office of the governor for budgetary purposes only, but as a standalone agency to be known as the office of libraries, archives and cultural affairs. commissioner did you get a chance to review this uh no senator the only bill joff requests that you have shared with me recently was the one on the city plan the one on what the city planner okay my okay i'll have my uh i thought they sent you this one as well i'll have them uh send it to you as well and as the first draft uh come out i already had a discussion with the university of the virgin islands also who will also uh be responsible uh it'll also govern by the university of the virgin islands board of trustees this office uh will be also headed by a qualified individual uh so we'll discuss it more and i'll put the information out to the general public thank you uh madam chair for the leniency madam chair can i just speak to one thing as it relates to the hours please yeah yes definitely um commissioner orielle go
- 1:14:15 right ahead thank you so um we have heard you know not only from the legislature but the community about extending the hours of the library again prior to 2023 or actually prior to 2022 the The library's closed at 5 p.m. And what we did, given the limited staff that we have, is we have now extended those hours from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. And we also have included Saturdays, so that we're open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturdays as well. When the other facilities come online, Florence Williams should be open. Again, July is the projected date of completion.
- 1:15:04 We will be moving to that adjusted schedule as well. The more staff we have, the closer we can get to 8 p.m. But staffing is essential for extended hours. Thank you. But we have made the effort and increased and improved our hours to the community. Thank you Commissioner for that information. Mayor Mrakas- Madam Chair, one point of information. Also earlier I heard from one of the superintendents that spoke to creating a school security bureau within the Department of Education with peace officer status. I just wanted to remind them and the body that this was already created, the School Security Bureau under Title III, Section 262, which places this bureau under the Virgin Islands Police Department.
- 1:16:11 Thank you. Thank you. Point of inquiry, Senator Potter. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I wanted to ask Ms. Cooper Shelford what the current starting salary for a beginning teacher is and how that compares with the national average. I'm Malene Cooper Shelford, Acting Human Resources Director. The starting salary for a teacher with a bachelor's degree is at \$49,000. Okay, thank you.

- 1:16:42 How does it compare to the national average? How does it compare to the national average? The starting salary on a national level is usually \$52,000 to \$53,000. Okay, thank you. Well, today we've had all the senators except Senator Alma Frances Heiligen. I was just going to thank her for her patience because we've gone through 12 of us so far um and she's been patient throughout so here thank you senator senator francis heilegei thank you thank you you've you're now going after 12 people so this is your this is your five minutes thank you for your patience well sometimes the last shall be first so i'm okay good afternoon to my colleagues to the people of the territory um to the testifiers and the staff alike my first set of questions have to do directly with i know we talked around retention and of some of the teachers and one of the things that we've had other testifiers come in and people from the international teachers programs and they talked a little bit about some of the interesting stories around their visas and some of their concerns are we doing a much better job with that to make sure that there are no major problems that with these teachers mike mike okay so we do and be begin with your name melaine cooper shellford acting human resources director yes senator we are doing a way better job we do have a program manager on board who's assisting the office of human resources with ensuring that we answer and we provide the necessary
- 1:18:42 service to our international teachers yes very timely that was usually where the problem lied that i understood from many of the teachers through that program i when you spoke about under special education and not having enough educators are you zoning in specifically as to how you're going to get special education teachers and also not only limited i know when the public hears a lot about special education sometimes they just zone into children with deficiencies as it relates to their education but special education also they're also gifted children under that category what are you doing to also find educators for them as well or do you not have an issue with that specifically in the special education area so superintendents can you comment on that so in our special education program we'll see the majority of our disabilities lie within ADHD, autism, and students with behavioral disorders. In terms of the students who are considered gifted or students who are advanced, we really differentiate in the schools. We are mandated to have a gifted and talented program at our elementary schools to address those needs. And then, of course, you know, secondary, we have our honors or advanced programs. But in terms of special education, what we see is we're not just looking for our resource teachers, the teachers who push in. We're looking for teachers with experience, and again, because the bulk of our disabilities show up as emotional disorders or even autism, individuals who have experience in dealing with children in those specific fields.
- 1:20:34 Two minutes. So that's what we're looking at. My radio station had a competition last month where we opened it up for students to write essays we had two winners from charlotte amali and two from i think it was moravian school um one of the things in speaking to some of those young people we asked them questions after they were allowed to read their essays live on the air and got their prize is we asked what do you think and it was the charlotte amali students we asked what do you think fundamentally impacts you the most when it comes to your education and one of the students said block scheduling that was his biggest issue and this was directly from a student they they said it it does not help them the way it has been touted to help them for them it's a hindrance and one of the things i'll just give you a quick example when i was in high school over 30 years ago i took a math class and i failed miserably. I think I left that class with a 28. But because I was not in the block program, I was able to take the class the very next semester with a different teacher. And in that teacher's class, I ended up getting an A. So I want to ask you, not only with the block program, but also the quality of teachers, because the difference between me getting an F and an A wasn't my ability to learn it was the way the teacher taught 30 seconds so I want to know a little bit about how do you handle that and get the best teachers for our students in order for them to learn that's a very good question one of the things that we realize is you know when you
- 1:22:27 conduct an interview for a particular position people interview well then when they come you see something different they're already here so what do we do and that's where the support system comes in and that's why the superintendents have been behind their coordinators to get into the schools to provide that support on the high school level you have chairpersons that are able to assist as well but that's what we find a lot of times we you think that they're ready and they're not and so that support has to be in place superintendent i just wanted to chime in real quick before dr urgen goes in it um we also have to talk about relationships and rapport with students um what what you build with one teacher and you understand their instructional style and and their strategy, you may not be familiar with another one. So, when you look at, especially at the secondary schools, or any, it's just how do the students relate with the teacher, how do they meet the teacher's expectations?
- 1:23:32 Let me just give, Madam Chair, could I just wrap up? Sure you may. I'll just use me as an example again. With the teacher that I got a F with that one semester, Her style was more, I wrote it out on the board, pick up your book and read it, and figure it out for yourself. That was her style. The other teacher was more interactive. She would go write it out.
- 1:23:58 She would say, well, okay, Alma, this isn't right. You could do better. Try this way. She was also that teacher that said, during lunchtime, you could come if you have questions. So they taught two completely different ways. And we have to

figure out that in this modern day and age, what might have worked back then might not work today. We have one-year-olds knowing how to use smartphones. So it's not the same dynamic.

1:24:29 So I'm very much concerned as to the way we're educating as well as the quality of the teachers as to how they also teach. The multiple modalities is critical. And that's part of the differentiation that we're speaking about. The one-size-fits-all college approach is not what we want to see. But generally, that's what you see when you go to a high school class. For some reason, the interpretation or the perception is we don't need to be doing that type of elementary-style teaching when that's what the children thrive in. And so, again, it's support. What gets monitored gets done, but we have to show them how to do it. In a lot of cases, we assume that people know what differentiation means when you don't. And so that level of support, intensive intervention and support is what we are doing right now and will continue to push if we're going to see the improvements in instruction that we desire. Thank you so much for the response.

1:25:36 But if I could just add, Senator, that's just where the rub of the work is. Quality teaching in 45 minutes, it's everything in comparison to 90 minutes of someone that doesn't know how to connect the dots. Thank you. I am now going to exercise the power of the chair today because you've been here a long time and we have another block and we have those people on St. Croix. So I'm going to let my colleagues ask one question, and I'm only going to allow one response on the other side. Is that good? Yes, it is, because I'm the power, I'm the chair.

1:26:17 So we're going to start with Senator. One question from each Senator as we do this second round. One question, two minutes. One question. So, Senator Carla Joseph, are you ready? I myself have about 20 questions left, and it's clear to me that we're going to have to have you back here because I didn't get a chance to ask mine. So, Senator Carla Joseph, if you're not ready, we can move on. Look at that.

1:26:52 Senator Joseph? I'm always ready. Okay, you're ready. All right, go. Thank you so much, Madam Chair. My question is regarding the CTE programs. Are you looking at actually, I noted you said, you know, CNAs and all of those are CTE programs. Are you looking at offering industry recognized certification when our young people complete high school is that something that is on your trajectory either they're they're completing high school and they've earning and that career path uh certification uh industry recognized certification either in construction um nursing and the like kindly expound on that one person speaking so one one person and it's not expounding it's nutshell answers thank you Thank you, Senator Joseph, Victor Sam III, Assistant Commissioner. We are currently doing that. Once you graduate from school and you are a certificate, as an example, if you're a cosmetologist, that student has to complete over a thousand hours to be licensed by the Department of Licensed Consumer Affairs. So we are currently doing that in our CTE time thank you senator i recognize senator franklin johnson d johnson thank you very much madam chair i need five minutes dr hendrickson how would you rate the vid vid success in the literacy development in early childhood years how would you rate it what's the scale senator excuse me what's the scale 0 to 10, 0 to 5 0 to 10 I would say maybe 6.5

1:29:01 Okay, not satisfied No, I want it to be a 10 Thank you very much Thank you, thank you Commissioner I really appreciate your real answers Next I recognize Senator Marvin Blyton thank you thank you thank you madam chair commissioner um addendum b the federal grants balance is there's some 35.4 million dollar in federal grant that um expires on set in september of this fiscal this year my question is let's go just speak to the first three um the fiscal year 2020 consolidated grant the fiscal year 21 consolidated grant and the fiscal year 21 education stabilization fund can you speak quick briefly to what those funds are for and the effects if we do not um utilize those funds do you do you believe realistically that we're going to utilize those funds we're going to utilize those funds um spending plans will be furnished for this party i didn't have all of them together so i didn't want to do one district and not the other and i'm monitoring it we are monitoring it we have weekly meetings i am not playing i don't want any money sent back those are for school programs after school per diems you will see a high percentage of personnel reimbursements that has to be drawn and so So we're aggressively working on it, Senator.

1:30:41 Time. Can any be used for our CTE programs? At this point, without revisions, no. It's already in the CGA, and so whatever exists now is what it will be used for moving forward. We could plan better. Thank you. Thank you, Senator Blyton. Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff, I recognize you for your one question. you madam chair okay um any minima anymore what's the status on this buses for special needs students which district and we do have buses all districts both districts so we do have buses we do need to purchase some new buses that's a conversation that we will have to have on the senior level in terms of where the funding will come from but we do have operational buses in both districts thank you thank you thank you senator the graph that was a real yes yes quick quick answer um question senator diane tk part you're recognized for your question thank you madam chair I'm gonna try to do two rapid questions in my two minutes if I can Commissioner you I'm so happy that you mentioned Act 7587 which I was the sponsor of the bullying bill and yes I plan to have some amendments on that legislation as we know that it's still a problem and would probably always be a problem in our schools so I want to have dialogue with you in regards to your

- 1:32:35 ideas because you mentioned you gave the little synopsis there because it's always going to be a problem and your administrators your teachers should be trained to deal with bullying but one thing that I've seen and I commend you for partnering with the police department you've had an escalation of fights in the schools time if I may madam chair wrap up yes please one thing that I've seen that was effective in our community back in the day youth multi-service centre that when students were suspended that didn't stay home and spend their suspension time at home. They receive academics and they receive counselling. At the end of the suspension period their parent or guardian had to come and receive counselling with them. I just want to see these kind of things come back into our community, and I want to just say that I'm going to bring this legislation forward. I'm working on it, and I hope that I would have buy-in from your department. Thank you, Madam Chair.
- 1:33:57 So if I may, we are along the same lines. actually have been meeting as a senior leadership team and coming up with a territory wide disciplinary approach to our students who commit level three or level four infractions instead of out of school suspension what are we doing with these children so it's along the same line so we should have something in place a draft by the time your legislation comes up but that's That's definitely what we're doing.
- 1:34:28 Thank you. I recognize Senator J. Van James for your question. Thank you, Madam Chair. Greetings once again to the testifiers. You made a reference to the pre-K through third grade initiative, which should help and assist with the reading and comprehension of the students. You went further to say that you will focus on ensuring that you have the adequate resources and ongoing targeted training. So my question to you, as far as your deadline or timelines, can you speak to when you will have this completed and as for the resources, will you need additional resources on the legislature or will it be from some federal funding? That's my question.
- 1:35:23 Great, great question, Senator. We're actually utilizing federal funding. Um, that RFP, um, I want to believe for both districts or the RFP for pre-K. I know St. Thomas, St. John district's RFP is already out. Um, and St. Coy district will be out shortly. The goal is to have that contract in place to mobilize the vendor and have those intensive trainings ready for the new school year time and as far as a timeline as far as when you expect to have this in motion the new school year 2023-24 school year august thank you madam chair for the time thank you you stole my question so i won't have to do I won't have to give mine. We think alike on that one. Senate... We're gonna take a break so that we can switch the... You'll keep going? Yes. Okay. Senator Novell E. Francis, Jr. Is he... No? Okay. Okay.
- 1:36:32 Let's move on. Senator Ray Fonseca. No? Okay. Senator Donna Fred Gregory. Your one question. Okay. I know I like to chat. Well, I have a lot of questions, but I have to say that when we have education, we need to keep them for the whole day. We need to feed them and then we keep them for the whole day because we have a lot of questions. So we heard from you that we have some 27 J1 international teachers leaving the territory come June of this year. So that's naturally the end of the school year. So, and then you talked about recruiting other international teachers. What's the challenge with keeping these current international teachers i know that a lot of the laws have changed around the what is it h1b now it's j1 so what's the challenge with uh keeping the teachers that are here on the ground because if our teachers are leaving new teachers are coming then they got get indoctrinated and it kind of sets us back so what type of conversation i mean i know that you don't have any control over the immigration laws but what type of conversations are we having to see if we can maintain these teachers that are currently here on the ground with us time melaine cooper shellford acting human resources director i'm senator like we mentioned earlier we do provide the teachers who return after their two-year residency we do provide them the option to come back under another visa whether it's a h1b or j1 visa so you're saying
- 1:38:19 that these 27 teachers are not interested in returning no they're gonna go back home for two years and majority of them do ask to come back okay so for the sake of the audience so there is a requirement yes so explain that for the sake of the discussion so it don't appear as if education did not do what it was supposed to do to maintain to retain rather these teachers so explain what that is as far as when a teacher is here a j1 teacher what has to happen etc okay thank you So, the J-1 teachers are offered a two-year visa.
- 1:38:57 They do have the option of an extension, which takes them up to five years. Like you said it earlier, the law states that they have to return home. When they do return home, they have a two-year residency where they now have the option of reaching back out to the department to ask to sponsor another visa so that they could return. So, these other teachers are only the five-year window? Yeah, that's what I was gonna ask. They've all met the five-year window. yes they have yes they all have okay they actually have been here for six years sorry um due to the covet they could not return back home so they did um the department has they provided them an extra extension all right thank you thank you for following up with with that on that question too because i was also under the impression that that you know they couldn't come back or when they go they there wasn't a space in between so thank you for that um next we have I'd like to recognize Senator Milton Potter thank you very much madam chair like most of my colleagues had a million questions to ask but I'm gonna ask this one question Commissioner in your testimony you had a very eloquent statement that really stood out to me you

said you wanted to capture the pockets of excellence throughout the territory and create a homegrown database of great teaching to assist those struggling with their craft i want to give you an opportunity to elaborate on that how does that look so a lot of the professional development modules that we currently utilize don't have people that look like us from the Caribbean. And I beg to differ that excellence isn't in the Department of Education. The excellent teachers in the Department of Education that we need to capture the good teaching and make those modules available for a teacher who is struggling in differentiating instruction can go and watch a colleague perform the task so that they can garner those instructional strategies that they too can use so i want to

1:41:17 create something like that locally thank you very much thank you thank you senator potter and thank you for that answer commissioner senator can it get things you're recognized for your one question thank you uh madam chair uh i'm gonna switch it up here a little bit but just a yes or no answer to dp and our commissioner uh at 84 50 established the invasive species eradication program known as the snake bill however i saw a message going around yesterday that some wildlife encounters llc a group of snake specialists and wildlife control operators will be visiting the island April 3rd through the 7th and that they will be working with Dr. Cole to find and dispatch many invasive boars and that they need your permission to search your property and they want you to sign a Google form giving them permission to hunt on your property and for liability purposes.

1:42:32 i just want to know if you're aware of this and if this is an initiative uh from your office time no senator i'm not aware of it thank you for bringing it to my attention uh i will look into it thank you thank you thank you senator gettens senator alma francis heiliger your question good afternoon again um my question centers around cafeteria and food i have a teenager in my house that goes to Charlotte Amalie High School and she seems to twist her uncle's arm every morning to give her money to buy lunch where I feel she needs to eat the cafeteria food but she has this narrative where she doesn't like the food and she's questioning certain things I need to know and I've heard it from other people where they have sent me photographs of some of the meals. Some I thought looked delicious and some look very questionable. That's the best I could use. The question I want to ask, because when I was in high school, I know at times even I experienced that problem. I'm from the class of 91, so it's my colleague here, Dr. Juergen. And I said that to the one of you go back me up because i remember some of these lunches so what i want to know how have we attempted to improve the lunches for these young people or even i know some do breakfast as well what have we done to improve this because some of these children are blatantly saying they don't want to eat this food and i need to know what the issue is and how do you deal with repayment or reimbursement from the federal government, because I know you have to meet nutritional

1:44:24 quality requirements in order to do so. Thank you. Senator, you know, one of the things we've done with the commissioner and her coming on board is she gave us the charge to go to every school and eat the lunch. See, is it something that you would like to eat normally and we gave her some feedback and we were using that feedback to really, really make some improvements. Some kitchens are better than others. I'll tell you the truth. Some kitchens are better than others and you know, Ghana, the days when we used to have our pea soup and the triangular Johnny cake and salt fish and we don't serve those things in our schools anymore because some of them have been deemed unhealthy even though did just fine by all of us yeah so we are looking at ways with some of the new requirements such as brown rice to make it appetizing for we want them to come into the cafeteria we want them to have good meals breakfast and lunch because we know that that's going to help them do their studies very well right so we're working on it and we hope to make some improvements in those areas that need to make improvements hopefully roll around for the new semester next year absolutely and in this district i'll say this much the kitchens have been stretched and stressed because many of them have been satelliting but we are going back to each kitchen um preparing the meals for each school okay thank you madam chair for that i'd like to quickly add that one of the things that we need to do is look at our recipe planning because usda does allow provisions however we can't fry we have to bake so we can't use white flour we have to use wheat flour so there is opportunities once we submit the adequate recipes and get them approved that we can do that but we're just not in a place so with the restructuring of school lunch through the office of the commissioner we will get to that place where we can submit the the recipes that meet the usda guidelines i have i have a thank you for that i have a follow-up question to what

1:46:30 What types of food protection certifications are required for food-handling personnel? DR. DR. DR. DR. DR. DR. DR.
DR. DR. DR. DR. DR. DR. DR. DR. DR. DR. DR. DR. DR. DR. DR. moving away from that into SafeServe, and we're preparing
our staff for that eventuality at this point.

1:47:04 Okay. Thank you. That wraps up our second round, which is the last round. I'm going to ask the testifiers, beginning with Commissioner Oriel and then Dr. Brown, and then finally the Commissioner of Education, Dr. Wells Hedrington.

Thirty-second wrap-up. You know that we have to bring you back, all of you. you go ahead um commissioner oriel i mean just thank you for the opportunity to present um we are making strides uh again we will be opening our first library

in st john uh in the early parts of april uh and we hope everything continues to move smoothly so that we can also open the major facility florence williams in christianstead uh in july of this year um so we are timing and trying to move the libraries forward and get our people back inside of them and using them accordingly but thank you very much for the opportunity thank you dr brown thank you mike for dr brown Thank you again for this opportunity, and thank you for the feedback and questions.

1:48:20 Really appreciate it. What I would like to end with is that we talk about, and there's this growing thought and discussion on growth mindset and grit, brain-based teaching and learning, and once we understand how the brain is formed and how the brain grows and learns, and when is the best time, critical periods for learning, we need to use that to lead in our instruction. I think 80% of what we hear is lost, yet we continue to lecture. And that's not just at the K-12 system, but also at the university level.

1:48:54 And when we're thinking about bringing in teachers, other places they reach out to me, New York, DC, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and what they do offer are paid differentials. a special education teacher i did receive and speech language pathologist i received a paid differential for for being in special education signing bonuses that's something else as well and we do have a paris the pros program in collaboration with the vide that is expected to start in the summer of 2023 so that should bring of course it's long term but it should bring more teachers eventually thank you thank you for that dr wells hedrington well on behalf of the Department of Education I want to thank you and the rest of your colleagues for allowing us this opportunity to share some of the things and some of the challenges that were happening that we're having at the department and we're just looking forward to our continued collaborative relationship as we move the Department of Education forward I am here and and always willing and able and responsive to answer any questions or any concerns that you may have. Thank you again.

1:50:09 Thank you. I want to thank all the testifiers for being so forthcoming and providing us with information. I want to right now thank all my colleagues who showed up today to ask questions. They were wonderful. And, of course, thank the staff for helping us. We're going to be in recess, so you're excused. and we'll recess to go into the next block. Thanks again. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back.

1:55:00 Thank you. We'll be right back.

1:56:00 Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. I'll see you next time.

1:59:30 The Committee on Education and Workforce Development is back on the record. Madam Clerk, Block 2, will you read it? Block 2 into the record. Thank you. In Block 2, Bill Number 35-0055, an act amending Title 17 of the Virgin Islands Code pertaining to school curriculum in elementary and secondary schools, proposed by Senator Franklin D. Johnson. Invited testifiers, the Honorable Dr. Dion Wells Hedrington, Commissioner, Virgin Islands Department of Education, Dr. Kaisa A. Colwood, Chairman, Virgin Islands Board of Education, and Mario C.

2:00:28 Moorhead, author, historian, activist. Madam Chair, this concludes the reading of Block 2. Thank you, Madam Clerk. Do we have any correspondence to be read into the record? No, Madam Chair. Thank you. We will now begin to hear testimony from the sponsor of the bill uh who speaks to this bill i do i do madam chair i recognize senator franklin johnson bill number 35-0055 an act amending title 17 of the virgin islands code pertaining to school curriculum in the elementary and secondary school Madam Chair, I must say I bring this bill because what I saw happen with the old bill, which would have been bill number, the present bill as it stands, bill 34-0238, came to this committee back in the 34th legislature.

2:01:36 i don't think it was properly vetted the way it was introduced it was held that's right it was held in this committee but it came to session i don't think it was properly vetted at the time that it came to session it was special order so testifiers didn't even get the opportunity to testify on the entire matters i had some meeting with the board of education and we had a very very very good meeting to discuss this matter as a matter of fact we came to a point where we was pulling the bill back and in the process of that discussion there was some language that was a I would consider a little disrespectful and I said to the committee at that time we need to go forward and have this be heard let's all the players come forward and put the testimony to the floor I say this to say in my conversation with the board, I challenge that VI history can be stand alone.

2:02:39 It doesn't need to be combined, integrated with nothing else. And I also question members of the Department of Education. How many of y'all learn about Wilmot Blyden in school? How many of y'all learn about Rothschild Francis in school? How many of y'all even learn about some folks that I have named that they probably don't even know? Roy Innes, Virgin Islanders. How many of y'all learn about Oscar Henry? And I still hold my position that some of our heroes

and sheroes, I learn as a man.

- 2:03:20 Not in school. we continue to deprive our children from our history and want to find out why they don't know who to identify themselves with and who their leaders were in this territory and the list is a very big list when you start to look at some of our leaders that have made marks across the world not just in the virgin islands across the wall i i will resolve the time and let the testifiers them go forward and at the appropriate time i'll continue bringing in a lot of these names of people that we have failed to teach our students and our children about thank you and i ask for my colleague support in this measure as we go forward thank you very much madam chair sure thank you senator johnson first what i'll do is ask all the testifiers in this block to speak clearly, put your name and title on the record, and who you're here on behalf of. We're going to start with those of you here in the chambers on St. Thomas.
- 2:04:29 You may proceed. Dr. Kaisa A. Callwood, Chairman, Virgin Islands Board of Education. Dr. Dion Wells, Hedrington, Commissioner, Department of Education. Dr. Victor Sumlin III, Assistant Commissioner of Education. Dr. Stephan Yergin, Insula Superintendent, St. Thomas St. John's School District. And now we'll go to St. Croix. Will the testifiers on St. Croix please speak clearly, put your name and title position on the record. Thank you. Samantha Prentice, Associate Executive Director, Board of Education.
- 2:05:04 Emanuela Perez-Cacias, Vice Chair for the Virgin Islands Board of Education. Maria Moorhead, Kujan Patriot. Mary Moorhead. Thank you. Yvette Mahmohan Arnold, State Director, Instructional Development, Department of Education. Thank you, Mrs. Arnold. I'm sorry I interrupted you. Can you repeat again? One more time. I'm sorry. Sure. Yvette Mahmohan Arnold, State Director, Instructional Development, Virgin Islands Department of Education.
- 2:05:38 Thank you. Thank you. Is there anyone else virtually that needs to identify themselves? Madam Chair, it should be Dr. Lauren Larson, the St. Croix District Social Studies Coordinator. And of course, St. Croix Superintendent Arisilda Adley-Herman. Okay. As she comes in, she can go ahead and introduce herself, and then can someone check and see if Mr. Larson will be joining us, or he can, you know, when he joins, he's not joining us. We're checking on that now, Senator. Okay, go ahead and introduce yourself. Thank you. Good afternoon, Erisilda Atlee-Herman, Insular Superintendent, Sinkori District.
- 2:06:28 Thank you, Superintendent. We will begin And then, with the first testimony that I do have here, which is from the Virgin Islands Board of Education, Dr. Calwood, you may proceed. Good afternoon, Honourable Maurice C. James, Chairwoman of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, committee members, other members of the 35th Legislature present, and a listening and viewing audience. I am Dr. Kaiser A. Carlwood, Chairman of the 21st Virgin Islands Board of Education, here and after the board. Thank you for the invitation to testify on Bill Number 350055, an act amending Title 17 of the Virgin Islands Code pertaining to school curriculum in elementary and secondary schools. During the 34th legislature, the board participated in a bill review session and a legislative committee education and workforce development meeting to discuss bill number thirty four zero two three eight now act eighty six eighty four relating to virgin islands history and caribbean history curriculum in public schools the board maintains its position that while it's imperative that local and regional history is taught emphasis must be placed on the recurring need for additional resources and qualified history teachers. Additionally, adjustments to class schedules will be necessary given a limited amount of instruction hours required. There is simply not sufficient time in the school day for all of the courses, SLAP subjects mandated by the legislature to include it as a standalone course for all students. While VI History is a standalone course and a graduate requirement for every student in a senior high level, it is taught within the context of the social studies curriculum on the primary level. Furthermore, the board reviewed the Department of Education's department, VI Standards of Achievement, VISA, which holds the department accountable for higher educational and academic goals from 2022 through 2024. In August of 2022, the board approved the standards for social studies, which includes VI history. The board requested that the department revise the visa to include content and materials to be used for VI and Caribbean history, as well as acquire and make available to all schools additional resources by local and Caribbean authors and historians. In conclusion, the board supports amendment in section 1B of bill number 350055 regarding family life, drug prevention and sex education. Lastly, the Department is to be commended for the great work on the standards of achievement
- 2:09:22 presented to the Board. As it pertains to the history of the Virgin Islands and basic Caribbean history, it is the Board's expectation that the Department will provide clear guidance to all teachers on the instruction and integration of these subjects for a more holistic approach to education, which removes barriers to make connections among different areas of studies, as well as fosters learning that models real life. The board looks forward to the department's progress report to highlight what aspects of these subjects are being taught to students as aligned in the standards, curriculum, lesson plans, and other areas. Chairwoman James, thank you for allowing the Virgin Islands Board of Education to provide testimony. We stand ready to answer questions. Thank you, Dr. Collarwood. You're welcome. We will now hear from

Commissioner.

- 2:10:19 Assistant Commissioner Sum. I apologize. Good afternoon to the Honorable Marie C. James, Chairperson of the Committee of Education and Workforce Development, members of the committee, other members of the 35th legislature, other testifiers, and my fellow Virgin Islanders. For the record, I am not Dionne Wells-Hendrington, Commissioner of Education. I am Victor Sum III, the Assistant Commissioner of Education. Accompanying me today to present this testimony are Dr. Yvette McMahan-Arnold, the State Director for Instructional Development, and Dr. Lauren Larson, the St. Croix Social Studies Coordinator.
- 2:11:04 here. Respectfully, please allow me to explain the variants this testimony presents from Bill 35-0055. I, along with Deputy Commissioner Renee Charleswell, who's not here today because she's on jury duty, VIDE Legal Counsel at Vincent Hudson, and our curriculum team to include Dr. McMahon-Arnold, along with Dr. Larson, met virtually with the Honourable Franklin Johnson, Senator, on Monday, March 20th, 2023, to receive clarification on the bill. After discussing the bill's intent and the proposed amendment to the bill, its possible impacts, and a live online presentation from Dr. Larson, Senator Johnson respectfully requested the same presentations for the Committee on Education and Workforce Development. Initially, there was agreement to table the bill in order to meet with the policy rules and regulations committee of the Virgin Islands Board of Education, the Virgin Islands Department of Education and the office of Senator Franklin Johnson to work on perfecting the bill. This meeting remains scheduled for Monday, March 27, 2023. The department will take a position on the bill upon completion of our collaborative efforts with all pertinent stakeholders. The Department is tremendously grateful to Senator Johnson and this committee to allow us to share the work done thus far to advance standards, curriculum, and the teaching of Virgin Islands history and Virgin Islands-centric civics. This update by Drs. McMahan, Arnold and Larson will discuss the recently completed development of new standards for social studies within the Virgin Islands, Standards of Achievement for Social Studies or Visa SS. This work was guided by the definition of social studies as follows. Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse democratic society in an interdependent world. This definition of social studies is from the National Council for the Social Studies
- 2:14:07 presented in the draft Virgin Islands Standards of Achievement for Social Studies, or Visa SS. A review of the introduction given in the document provides a clear explanation of the process utilized to develop the standards. The Department conducted an internal and external review of the standards for feedback. Presented in a spreadsheet, the feedback shows what was said, how it was treated and the justification for the action taken in addressing the feedback. Visa SS was presented to the Virgin House Board of Education for review and approval on Wednesday, June 20th, 2022, with a follow-up presentation on Saturday, July 9th, 2022. The Department was tasked to provide a statement to explain what is perceived as a lack of attention for Virgin's history in the document. To address this perception, the Department revisited the difference between standards and curriculum.
- 2:15:14 The Virgin's Cultural Framework document of June 2021 provides a definition for both. Standards are clear and concise statements that describe what a student needs to know at a specific stage of development. Standards are clear and concise statements that describe what a student needs to know at a specific stage of development. Standards refer to the minimum requirements of what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade level. These standards address a foundational framework of what is to be learned. The goal is to ensure that all VIDE students focus on a common set of standards and are provided opportunities to learn at the highest possible level. While the standards address what is to be learned, they do not address how learning experience are to be designed or what instructional resources are to be used. This is the work of curriculum.
- 2:16:21 Curriculum consists of the components that provide for the delivery of instruction to include content area standards textbooks and other instructional resources print and digital as well as videos lessons assignments and assessments the overall purpose of curriculum is to focus on and connect the work of classroom teachers to standards assessments and classroom practices to increase student achievement with submission of with the submission of visa ss to the Board of Education for review and approval, a few key points were highlighted as follows. The Department's ongoing curriculum work continues to see the terms being used interchangeably, which leads to misunderstanding both internally and externally of what is presented in the document.
- 2:17:16 The submission speaks comprehensively to social studies, taking into consideration the body of knowledge that is considered social studies the document presents standards as defined above not a curriculum also defined above given our

rich versions history and culture visa ss presents standards specific to versions history and culture at every grade level and course throughout the document specifically grade four is is grade and age appropriate for Virgil's history while grade 9 is a standalone course requirement in accordance with the board's graduation policy. An implementation plan is in draft to support the next phase of this work.

- 2:18:06 At a July 28 special meeting the board voted to approve the Virgin Islands Standards of Achievement Social Studies draft. During the August 29, 2022 board meeting the Visa SS was fully approved by the board. In its correspondence, the board directed the department to make additional resources by local and Caribbean authors and historians. Specific to local resources, this work started several years ago. Virgiant's History Resources. To support the development of Virgiant's History Resources, the department finalized a professional services contract on August 29, 2022 with the publishing company Code Mantra to leverage the customized publishing of the Virgin Islands history workbooks for grades 3 through 8 and a customized Virgin Islands centric civics textbook. The customized projects will present locally produced instructional resources for teachers and students. Prior to the contract with Code Mantra, VID entered into a licensing agreement with Houghton Mifflin Harcourt to secure the licenses to the templates on which Code Mantra will port the locally developed content. Virgin Islands history. Dr. Lauren Larson, the St. Croix social studies coordinator continues to lead a team of teacher leaders to develop content for grades K through eight representing grade appropriate workbooks complete with pictures representative of the Virgin Islands to date the workbooks along with table tables of contents teacher resources and scope and sequence have been published for grades K through two content for grades 3 through 8 have been developed, vetted, and is now ready for alignment with the new
- 2:20:14 visa social studies standards. A draft table of contents for the customized workbooks for grades 3 to 8 is to be revised and updated this summer. This draft table of contents has an embedded version of history curriculum and will be aligned to the proposed visa social studies standards upon final approval by the commissioner and adoption by the Board of Education. In addition to aligning each lesson with a national C3 framework, each lesson will also be aligned to Visa SS. The workbooks under development in grades three to eight, similar to the workbooks already completed for grades K through two, will include an embedded curriculum for the various lessons that emphasize the important elements of Virgine's history and culture.
- 2:21:04 Virgin Islands history is not taught in isolation, but in context of the wider world to give student perspectives on the world around them and the opportunity to compare, contrast, and analyze the social, political, physical, and economic factors that have impacted the Virgin Islands. Virgin Islands Centric Civics. The development of a Virgin Islands or VI Centric Civics course has been more recent as required by Act number 7934 proposed by the Honourable Senator, proposed by the Honourable Novell E. Francis Jr. Senator. Dr. Larson has played a lead role in this work, bringing expertise and experience to the project. The project features the rich history and legacy of our Virgin Islands government. Over time several discussions ensued of two options to infuse Virgin Islands context into an existing civics textbook or to pursue a standalone resource. Curriculum or group members expressed the desire to move forward with the option to embed the local Virgin Islands content into an existing civics text instead of a standalone resource. Similar to the Virgin Islands History Workbooks, customization is again required that will combine a locally developed Virgin Islands content and pictures. The two initiatives, Virgin Islands History Workbooks and Virgin Islands Centric Civics, complement each other. Through the purchase of licensed course templates from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt and professional service contract with Code Mantra, the department will collaborate to incorporate locally developed resources into student workbooks for e-publication initially and print
- 2:23:06 ready deliverables. Both initiatives require customized publication of locally developed resources to support Virgin Islands history and Virgin Island Centric Civics. Of note, the Virgin Islands History K-8 workbooks are already embedded with a civics component and will feed seamlessly and naturally into the Virgin Islands Centric Civics component. Without a doubt, building from pre-K to 8 Virgin Islands History will feed into the high school civics course and also complement the existing 9th grade Virgin Islands History course. Both projects utilize our local teachers to include retirees who provide time, experience, and expertise. Collaboration is essential to this joint project. It speaks to an eretive process between Code Mantra and the VIDE.
- 2:24:09 From prior experience with published versions of history K-12 workbooks, the iterative process requires a number of conference calls, emails, etc., as drafts of the workbook are exchanged, marked up, revised, and finalized. Below is the scope of work to be undertaken by code mantra once the contract is fully executed. It is important to note that a purchase order is already approved for this work.
- 2:24:41 Update. The Virgin Islands Centric Civics Initiative is in its final stage of review and work on their iterative process for Virgin Islands history for grades 3 to 8 has started. Dr. Larson and a team of educators meet on Saturdays at the Ricardo Richards Elementary School. This work is supported through per diems. You can see the obligated expense to Houghton

Milfin Harcourt and Code Mantra, as well as the Code Mantra scope of work that includes collaboration required around the integration of six workbooks for six different grades, published workbooks for grade 3 to 8 to be housed under department's learning management system, which is Schoology, civics integration of local content into the existing Harcourt-Milfin HMH national civics text, code mantra to provide digital content and print-ready cartridges, code mantra to e-publish locally developed teacher resources. The department will provide all content and pictures to represent the local Virgin Islands content. The terms of the contract allow for the rights to host student text and teacher resources. on the VIDE's network, thereby giving VIDE sole ownership. Ongoing communication throughout the life of the contract through virtual meetings, email, conference calls, etc. will be needed. Funding for the Virgin Islands Centric Civics textbooks and the Virgin Islands History Workbooks are reflected in the table below.

- 2:26:18 Funding needs for continuing both initiatives include resources to print Virgin-centric civic texts 9 through 12 and Virgin's history workbooks consumables for grades 3 to 8. Stipends for local educators to work on the content and resources, provide ongoing training, train the trainer for local educators, the purchase of K2 workbooks for both district. You will also see embedded in this testimony the social studies proposed budget for civics and the VI history initiative. At this time, Dr.
- 2:26:56 McMahon-Arnold will navigate you through the hashtag GoOpenUSVI microsite which houses as an online repository all things standard curriculum, instructional materials, and academic resources. The awesome work produced by Dr. Larson and his team is located on a Microsoft OneDrive application and he will provide a live demonstration of this work. Afterwards the department's team and the Commissioner will remain available for questions and at this time Madam Chairwoman I turn it over to Dr. Yvette McMahon-Arnold our State Director for Instructional Development. Dr. McMahon-Arnold.
- 2:27:43 hi good afternoon everyone um mrs ac sum um i'm thinking that dr larson if he does his presentation to share where we are with the actual project and then i can come in right after to show what else we are doing to support that project it will flow thank you thank you dr macbara arnold Dr. Larson thank you good afternoon sir good afternoon you're you're mute and when you start put your name and title position on the record please thank you Dr. Larson yes good afternoon everyone I am Dr. Lauren Larson I serve as the St. Croix district social studies coordinator and i'm honored today to be able to share with you some very exciting developments that are occurring in the in the field of social studies education across the territory uh first of all let me i need to recognize some individuals without whose assistance, this would not have been possible. I want to begin with recognizing the attention of Senators Novel Francis and former Senator Kirk Bialy, who provided the initial funding through a special appropriation to get this work started. And once we got it started, there's been a number of individuals who jumped on board and have been very supportive in the process. For example, we have the number of teachers who have been part of this process even before who worked on the VI history workbooks and are also assisting with the VI-centric civics initiative.
- 2:29:48 these teachers some some have since retired um continue to work at some of them um even with without getting paid devoted their time their efforts uh to see this this this uh this project uh make make some significant progress um dr malik siku of university who has provided some resources especially along the lines of understanding the vi organic act and the issue of self-determination as as we know the issue of um status is very important as we look at our at 175 years of emancipation um another very important um uh part in this process is um channel channel 12 tjx tanya singh the executive director who made available a number of educational resources that the uh the channel 12 owns have produced and are relevant for our students in understanding their history their political systems and their various institutions now i'm not sure if um uh how to proceed but i was asked to just give a quick um demonstration of some of the work that has been done.
- 2:31:12 And as Assistant Commissioner Sun pointed out, and I couldn't have done it better in explaining the difference between curriculum and standards, I'm hoping we understand the role that each plays in terms of providing a platform for the development of content and courses relative to helping students to learn and progress academically.
- 2:31:46 The civics, the bi-centric civics project attempts to integrate national civics, which most students take in high school with local Virgin Islands institutions. In other words, what we do is we customize the approach so students not only get what other students across the United States get, but they get something additional in terms of being able to look at political institution from the perspective of their own community. So in most civics textbook, you read a section, and what happens is that they may give an example of, say, California or Florida or Maine or Montana in terms of the comparison.
- 2:32:56 But what we're doing is we're making the comparisons locally. and and you'll see what we're talking about um the idea of civics education is to help educate your community so they can be informed and understand that they have a role in helping to improve the community through civic engagement through community service jury service i'm going to vote and understanding how the political institutions work so that they can be also informed voters and select hopefully the

best candidates that will help their communities to thrive so i'll begin sharing my screen and what you should know is that this is based on a national textbook a textbook that's available to to um to uh literally millions of students across the nation but we have modified certain parts of the textbook with permission of the publisher so again students would get not only the national um view but also a local perspective in terms of how the virgin islands as a community evolved and the institutions that now serve the people of the virgin islands so for example i'll share my screen now okay the the first um i'm gonna go through this kind of quick because um it's a lot i don't know i know i cannot cannot cover everything because we'll be here until um tomorrow morning but say for example unit

2:34:49 one chapter one uh this this is the from the text and we've made modifications um early as um miss dr larson yes we're we're not seeing what the presentation anymore we're actually seeing something blue probably you're not you okay let me stop sharing again okay i'll try it again how about now same same thing as before i'm not sure what's happening um in your background okay instead of your presentation i don't know why that is i'll try it this way then. i'll bring it here. Yeah, maybe. One second.

2:36:14 How about now? You're not sharing yet. Nothing yet. Okay. do you want to take a no no like you got it you got it okay how about now well yes yes okay okay okay so so for example as earlier um page 17 in the text we introduce students on what it is what it is how we became citizens and we introduce students from an early period because um civics is about developing a citizenry that's that's responsive to their community and we begin by giving a a quick background a history in terms of dr larson one second i can i can hear the discussion on the other side i need to hear dr larson please go ahead dr larson yeah so for example we've incorporated some background information in terms of uh our early history and our march to become citizens on the united states um so that's that's what we begin to um to introduce them to the virgin islands oh actually um we may have actually begun as early as uh page 14 here it is where we introduce them to the virgin islands a quick summary quick history to put it in context where we located our early history and eventually the the purchase of the islands from from Denmark okay now the that's in unit unit one which which covers generally basic civic concepts and ideals and normally you would you would have these these are

2:38:16 examples that they use other states but here we're going to use the u.s virgin islands then another one um let me switch to unit two which leads to the federal government and as early as page nine in talking about the national government our representative for the national in the national government is of course our delegate to Congress and we introduce our students to the issue of not only the Virgin Islands but other territories representation in Congress and we created some narrative that summarizes and explains the process how initially we didn't have any vote in Congress but through certain reforms we were able to get a voice in congress to some extent and of course this is going to lead uh eventually to a discussion in terms of status because we know that um while we have a voice in congress um this voice cannot vote on the floor but they can vote in in the committee uh we talk about the qualifications of the virginal delegate to congress and some other other southern um other background information uh there's also some discussion on the organization of congress and we have a description here in terms of that comes from the congressional research record that talks about the delegates to congress the history and the current status

2:40:06 And the historical description in terms of how territories eventually evolved towards becoming states, there's a different path to the Virgin Islands, but nevertheless, we also introduced them to the idea of what is an unincorporated territory, something that many of us still grapple with, what does it really mean for us as Virgin Islanders? we look at this process, especially as it affected other territories, Guam, Northern Marianas, American Samoa, and so on. And what most folks don't realize is that even at one point, the Philippines were a territory of the United States, but were given their independence by the U.S. as a result of the Spanish-American War. We talk about the delegates' rights and responsibilities the committee of the whole and voting and then we have a listing of of the um the different delegates from the early territories as you know the the states that the areas that became states eventually started off as territories uh so there's a lot of information that gives that background information and puts it in perspective and hopefully our students when they grasp these things they will begin to understand and become informed as now we talk about the issue of status and where we want to go as a people all right so so that's um the second unit um the third unit um we made a lot of changes because this is the unit that deals with state and local government

2:41:53 and we we replaced a photo of the statute of liberty with our symbol of liberty in the virgin islands and that is the um individual blowing the council um signaling um a better day ahead i i should point out that each unit each chapter is aligned to our local standards okay and at the beginning of each chapter the standards that are covered in each chapter are identified so that there's no question in terms of what the targets of the learning should be especially for teachers and and these are these are the standards that have been recently approved by the virgin islands the board of education and these are the standards that relate to um this unit which deals with the local government the bulk of the edits we made in this in this uh publication is really in this unit which deals with local government and we included as much as possible the

information about the virgin islands The graphics, many of the graphics we replaced are based on local photos, local events, and local personalities. This photo that we use in this opening section came from a recent interaction between some students and some of our senators back in December. Close Up had a summit with high school students and senators.

2 : 43 : 46 And the students researched certain local problems and presented solutions to the senators. I think some of the senators that may be in this hearing may remember that. And remember that the students did an excellent work in terms of researching the problem and coming with possible solutions and having a dialogue with our local lawmakers in terms of how improvements can be made for the benefit of the Virgin Islands community.

2 : 44 : 17 And that is what civic education is all about. because in each chapter, they have a section where it says students take action. I want to highlight our students as much as possible to make it relevant to their education. And in this case, some students had researched some of the issues around teen mental health challenges and they made recommendations and they presented at uvi in the amphitheater uh in terms of their findings and what they recommended uh for for our lawmakers to consider to help students young people who are having mental health challenges all right so um one of the exercises talks about bipartisanship in politics and we we we took a we took an excerpt from uh former governor's map um one of his city territory addresses where he called for bipartisanship and now we have to read this and then complete an activity um to talk about the benefits of bipartisanship work among senators which i'm sure all of you know in terms of working with the the um the executive branch and the um and the legislative branch uh here we talk about schools and a lottery this was an original in original civics text but we we now replaced another state's lottery with some information about our local lottery system to show how the lottery as as an institution um sort of semi-autonomous um agency uh that has um uh the ability to um generate revenues and how some of that revenues goes back into the community

2 : 46 : 28 and actually some goes back also to education and this comes from the lottery website that explains um the the breakdown in terms of what percentage goes to what agencies and um how lottery funding i should say lottery proceeds um uh helps communities in terms of um meeting some of their their goals me media doc um commission assistant commissioner some is going to speak can you turn on good afternoon dr larson this is a very awesome presentation as there are others to present as well testimony if you can uh summarize and wrap up for us please okay thank you sure sure all right But the goal of both the VI History Workbook Development Project and the VI Centric Civics Initiative is to customize education according to the needs of our particular students.

2 : 47 : 44 our students get information about other place parts of the world through regular textbooks. Here we have the opportunity, here we have the resources now to have them identify within their community how it works in terms of the history, the proud heritage that we should all have, we should share as Virgin Islanders in terms of what we've accomplished in light of many obstacles and many challenges.

2 : 48 : 27 And now, I think I heard earlier someone says about the one size fits all. This is not a one size fits all approach. This is a one size design to fit Virgin Islanders. Make sure our students are equipped with whatever information, whatever academic content that would help them to thrive, to be globally responsive citizens, whether they live here or other parts of the world, but also to generate a clear understanding of who they are and the responsibilities they have to their respective communities. that's how i can wrap it up but there's a lot of information in this in this arm in this text that hopefully we'll all get a chance to um to um to see and and share thanks dr larson for this wonderful presentation at this time we have dr mcmahon arnold for a very brief presentation and they go open us by microsoft i'm i'm going to i'm going to um interrupt for for one second here this this presentation i don't know if if her presentation is going to to be related to this but this was a and it was an excellent presentation but it was on civics the issue here today is history that's that's what the issue is or am i I, maybe I should ask the sponsor of the bill because my understanding is we're focused on history as opposed to civics, correct?

2 : 50 : 14 So is, is what Dr. Mahan is... Dr. Mark Mahan, the presentation that she was to make spoke to how all of this This wraps up into curriculum, and we talked about looking at a repository, and this is what we presented to the senator, so we were acquiescing to his request when we met on Monday. But we can forego that presentation, so we can focus on the other testimonies. Dr. McMahon did forward the link for the microsite to Senator Johnson. We will be more than happy to forward that to you as well, Senator James.

2 : 50 : 56 I would actually like for her to do a summary of... If that's fine, I would like to at least hear Dr. Arnold speak to her role in this project. But I was just pointing out that sitting here, I was distinguishing Dr. Larson's presentation from what the issue is before us today. Understood. yeah thank you but i i'd like her to give a summary please thank you sure good afternoon everyone yvette mcmahon honor state director instructional development um the work that dr license team has been doing i've been helping to facilitate that work through the logistics primarily working directly with the consultants um meeting with the team as well when they meet on Saturdays and we meet every Thursday with the publishing team.

- And so what I wanted to share my presentation was how in addition to what Dr. Larson's team is doing now, the work that he shared just now was around VI-centric civics. However, the team has moved on to work under VI history components of this overall contract. So the contract has two phases, the VI-centric civics that aligns to the law that was passed, and then the VI history chapter, I should say, units based on the grades. So this is just, he was just sharing what that first phase of the work is all about what i can share is that in addition to the virgin islands history and the
- 2:52:44 virgin islands centric civics because history is included in the center in the vi-centric civics as you've seen him present and i was just going to share where we have been housing specific resources to virgin islands history on our microsite that's our digital library of resources and just to indicate where how teachers can utilize these resources it's a hub it's a growing hub of resources and these resources are focused on virgin islands history and and culture and as doctor as basically some indicated i've already shared the link with um the senator senator johnson and i can share it with the senate as well thank thank you i would i would love for you to share it with us um definitely the the the issue before us is whether or not and and senator johnson you it's your bill but but i want to make sure we're interpreting um your bill correctly and the other senators maybe can can speak to this because this is important. The issue before us is that the act that was passed in the 34th legislature integrates history into VI history and Caribbean history, basic Caribbean history into the curriculum from K through 12 and what you're asking is that it revert to the original language that that had VI history and and basic Caribbean as a single discipline as opposed to integrate and integrated
- 2:54:44 approach correct senator johnson's mic please correct correct madam chair we're reverting to go back to bill number 150321 that's what i don't have the act in front of me 48 yes 48 48 4-4. Act 48-44 is the original, correct? Something that's been on the book for some 30 years now.
- 2:55:18 Okay. So do you want me to go ahead and have the St. Croix testifier? Yes, ma'am. Because it is your proposal. Okay. So on St. Croix, we're going to go ahead and hear your testimony, whether it's for against or neutral um we'll have the speaker and st croix go go forward thank you please identify yourself and um your position i believe it's miss mr mario moorhead correct mr moorhead as a chair i recognize you for your testimony thank you mario moorhead russian patriarch madam chair it is with pride and deference that i offer good afternoon greetings and thank you so much for the opportunity to make our opposition as clear as we can make it.
- 2:56:38 as Prolog indulge me as I point out that failure is not falling down. Failure is staying down. I point this out in as much as it is now one year since Gregory Miller and myself as plaintiffs petition the court Superior Court to enjoin the Government of the Virgin Islands specifically the Department of Education from violating Act 48 44 As a plaintiff I was called to testify.
- 2:58:13 The government of the Department of Justice protested to the court that I was neither a historian and had no expertise in Virgin Islands' history. And so I should not be allowed to testify.
- 2:58:53 Honorable Judge Andrews agreed. and my testimony was constrained. Most peculiarly, I am asked to offer expert testimony before this Committee on Education, Madam Chair, and I am nonplussed as to the contradiction because I see the granular issue before us has been a dialectic between courses and integration.
- 3:00:11 after some 30 years of that benign neglect by the integration into the social studies curriculum three Krusian patriots filed the action in the Superior Court some ten years ago.
- 3:00:55 So, the trial, bench trial, concluded just about a year ago, March of 2022. two. We had been anxiously awaiting the decision of the court when we were informed that the 34th legislature had passed a bill sponsored by former senator Genevieve Whitaker in which the language speaks to repealing act 4844 insistence on courses being taught Virgin Islands history and basic Caribbean history if I If I might, I'd like to point out that there is mutual exclusion between the concepts of a course
- 3:03:02 and the integration of information in the context. in a curriculum, to integrate, and must I remind this committee on education, my mind is a lay testimony in as much as the Superior Court most clearly ruled that I do not have the expertise to speak to Virgin Islands history or basic Caribbean history but I And I think, I read, perhaps as well as most of the members of this August committee, understand the word integrate to mean to mix or to merge and to mix something is to combine it to join it onto something else
- 3:05:05 to merge is to become lost in something else it's self-evident madam chair that once we speak to integrate two entities, the larger entity will always dominate the lesser or smaller entity thus margin is to become lost in a larger entity are we correct in understanding that the 34th legislature wished to have Virgin Islands history and basic Caribbean history mixed and merged with the larger in the entire history of the United States of America without becoming lost in it.

- 3:06:59 Of course, on the other hand, mutually exclusive from integration, Madam Chair, a course is a plan of study, a plan in which one is engaged to study a particular subject matter.
- 3:07:48 A subject matter that would be extremely difficult to identify if it is merged with a much larger entity. We would like to hope that the 34th legislature would like, like the rest of us, to have their progeny their children and their children's children to actually have the opportunity to know themselves being a fact of history that the overwhelming majority of us are descendants of enslaved Africans.
- 3:09:22 It is extremely critical from my vantage point that our students be given the opportunity to know themselves meaning to be able to identify themselves on the world stage Not too long ago, I paid attention to some information shared about the civic, the civic information that the Department of Education hopes to expose our students to.
- 3:10:41 It gave me the fleeting thought that our students would need special attention just to find pride in the absence of identity that civics will teach them. What is an and why is citizenship in an unincorporated territory limited? I went to school. I never heard that citizenship could be limited. Yet here we are. We have limitations to our citizenship. Will we expose our students to this peculiar state of citizenship?
- 3:12:07 I beg indulgence, Madam Chair and this committee, in as much as I'd like to make it emphatically clear. And I enjoy reading. I particularly enjoy reading about my people. St. Croix, Cruzians, Virgin Islands, Virgin Islanders, the Caribbean, and Africa, and I have pretty much made myself familiar with what is used as textbooks to teach Virgin Islands history in our schools without competing for the attention following the what was the adjective the great testimony that preceded us I would like to point out that in all my readings of all the textbooks I have never come across the
- 3:14:09 year 1644 as the origin, the provenance, the genesis, the starting point of our history in what is today St. Croix and the Virgin Islands. 1644 As a reader, I am very familiar with the 1619 Project in the United States, and bringing to light the events that unfolded in Jamestown colony of Virginia at the time, what was described as the beginning of shuttling enslavement of captive Africans on the North American continent. I mention this because it's 1619 project proudly displays that these captives were from the kingdom of Ndongo. Shouldn't our students know that in 1644 the first of our enslaved ancestors were brought here from the Kingdom of Ndongo, the difference being that by 1644 the Kingdom of Ndongo was ruled by the legendary Queen Nzinga.
- 3:16:36 Shouldn't our students know something about 1644 and the arrival of our first enslaved ancestors. How about the name Jan Snook, the name Clay Brookhart? Those two names Mr. James has great significance, 1644, for our ancestors arriving from Mindungo in Shackles and Chains.
- 3:17:33 Mr. Moorhead, this is Senator James. I don't want to lose a quorum, and right now I'm sitting here with my vice chair. It's just the two of us right now, so I'm hoping that we can ask some questions and hopefully my colleagues will return to the chambers so that we can ask some questions. So, I'll give you another five minutes, if that's okay. No? Excuse me?
- 3:18:06 I would rather hurry up and wait if it's all right with you, Madam Chair. You'd rather hurry up? I like that. Hurry up and wait. Yes. Okay. okay so we're gonna are we going to begin with questioning at this point all right let's do that then we're going to start with and the blight and I think you you you would be the first one no on this point Thank you. I walk in with Senator Jensen today. Through the chair to legal counsel, I think there's been a lot of testimony before us today. However, you know, the bill that's before us i think we need to kind of retool ourselves and get back to why we're having this discussion the department of education made their testimony there was a lot of conversations around civics but the issue that we have here is around virgin alice history and um is around virgin alice history so the question that i have through the chair to legal counsel is this mr legal counsel Also, the bill that was passed in December and signed into law in January, December of 22, signed into law in January of 2023.
- 3:19:46 What is the difference between what was in the law previously and what's in the law today? And then once that question is asked and answered, then through the chair, I wish for the Department of Education to provide us what do they see as the significant difference between the previous law and what is in law today. So we could move this conversation along to make a determination as to what we really need to do with this particular measure.
- 3:20:25 Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you. Through the Chair to Senator Fred Gregory, prior to December 29, 2022, and the passage of Act Number 86-84, which is codified in Title 17, Chapter 5, Section 41 of the Virgin Islands Code, the law read, all schools in the Virgin Islands shall instruct all students in history of the Virgin Islands and basic Caribbean history, such courses to be part of the curriculum in elementary and secondary schools.
- 3:21:08 On December 29th, this body amended that language, essentially struck that language and replaced it with the following language. The history of Virgin Islands and basic Caribbean history to be integrated into the curriculum for kindergarten

through grade 12. Did that answer your inquiry, Senator Fred Gregory? It answers my inquiry. So the operative word here is integration. So let's hear from the Department of Education through the chair as it relates to the impact of courses versus integration, and what is the department doing, or what they were doing, or what were they supposed to be doing, and where we are now, based on this law.

3 : 22 : 08 How does this change the narrative? Thank you. Good afternoon, Senator Fred Gregory. My understanding is that the social studies curriculum, does the existing social studies curriculum does so presently it does integrate in all grade levels the teaching of virgin's history and basic caribbean history the the issue for the department isn't so much the integration of virgin's history as to the fidelity of teachers teaching their history at all grade levels i think that is really the crux of the problem what needs to happen is that as principals review lesson plans on a weekly basis principals should ensure and also assistant principals should ensure and insist that they're seeing as a part of lesson planning that teachers are incorporating virginia's history in daily instruction i i'm going to interrupt i'm going to to interrupt and ask this question here. Prior to December, prior to December of 2022, the law said that you were to teach the history of Virgin Islands and basic Caribbean history. Such courses. Such courses. So, it's only three months since the law has changed.

3 : 23 : 50 So are you saying that prior to the law being changed, you were not... You were integrating and not teaching it as a course? I'm using the language that the Attorney Carty... So, if you look at the social studies curriculum, and I would ask if he's still on board, Dr. Larson, who's intimately familiar with the curriculum, there are strands, for the lack of a better word. When you teach, for example, seventh grade geography, it talks about teaching the geography of the Virgin Islands. VI history is not required until the ninth grade as a credited course based on the board of education, but certainly as a former seventh grade geography teacher, I taught Virgin Islands geography because as we look at the social studies curriculum, you introduce that as a strand of their history. Dr. Larson?

3 : 24 : 53 Yes, I'm Lauren Larson, district coordinator, social studies. The, this discussion really is an extension of what we had on Monday, but the board requires certain courses at certain grade levels, and the legislature is also making certain mandates. and i think and i suggested this uh to center johnson on monday perhaps some discussion needs needs to occur between the board and legislature in terms of how to deal with this and i gave the example previously caribbean history was a requirement for graduation at the high school level the as so was pronounced history and u.s history the the board changed that and now we're being asked to integrate um caribbean history with vi history okay okay um dr dr larson okay thank thank you what i'm going to do is go to the the dr carwood then dr carwood in your testimony Tony, you say while VI history is a stand-alone course and a graduation requirement for every student on the senior high level, it is taught within the context of the social studies curriculum on the primary level. Is that what is being done

3 : 26 : 50 in the Virgin Islands public schools? Based on the curriculum that we have approved with the department, that's what's supposed to be being done, yes. No, it is a standalone course and a graduation requirement for every student on the senior high level. Okay, Senator Johnson. Madam Chair, a question is being asked continuously over and over by my colleague here and you, the chair.

3 : 27 : 27 And from what Dr. Kaiser-Carlo just said, his word was, suppose no one haven't answered the question and I'm asking, I'm trying to enforce that, the answer the question that is being asked, because everybody's going around. Do you remember what my question was? Because the law only changed in December. So what was happening before December 2022 with respect to the law that was on the books, which required you to teach the history of the Virgin Islands and basic Caribbean history, such courses to be part of the curriculum in elementary and secondary schools?

3 : 28 : 14 i'm going strictly with the law at this point i mean we're in the senate so were you maybe you're turning me into an attorney here today at in the senate hearing i am and i apologize i apologize um please please answer the question though if if you see where i'm going so i'm going to refer to the board policy as it stands where it talks about in the elementary grade level subject areas are a part of the promotion a part of the subject areas are social studies within social studies we have subsets which includes virgin islands history however in our elementary classrooms virgin islands history is not taught solely in social studies there is integration of that content in mathematics we read around the history of the virgin islands we work in writing and we we address those different domains so prior to the law change it it was not a standalone course because we talked about the subject area and so within the subject area we followed at our elementary level we followed and we we looked around what what happened in high school there was a specific course virgin islands history because high school is a credit based so we look at courses at high school and so the law talks about courses whereas it didn't make the delineation of what occurs at elementary versus secondary in high school when the law changed because it says integrate it allows us to really focus on how the structure of elementary is where we're not course driven is more so around what happens in the content area so that that's what occurs okay thank you I I understand what you said now we will go to my colleagues the point of inquiry information I I didn't get and I don't know please identify Senator Francis is that you point of inquiry Mike Mike Senator Francis very well I think miss Morehead has been trying

to get the chairs attention for quite some time

- 3:30:34 now I think it's only fair that we give an opportunity to weigh in on this discussion. Okay Ms. Moorhead go ahead. Thank you. Identify yourself and name and title thank you. Thank you Mary Moorhead. Well the one title I would give is that one was the original plaintiff for the court case that is in court. The bill 35 that 0055 was requested because the court case on this issue is still waiting for judgment but Judge Andrews cannot make that judgment until the original language of Act 4844 is reinstated and that is the purpose of Bill 350055. We're not here to discuss what is history, what is civics, what is a curriculum, what is course, all that was done for four days in the courtroom of Judge Andrews and if we can just have the language reinstated that was removed by Bill 0238 then the judge can rule we accept and know that it is the authority of the legislature to make laws but it is not the authority of the legislature to interpret law and that is what we would like Judge Andrews to do if we can have the language reinstated and that's all I'm asking for that's what this bill is supposed to be about not a discussion of the liberation of things that was deliberated in the courtroom. When we have a problem I said go to court. We went to court but the 34th legislature circumvented the court case because they did not allow for the judge to make judgment by changing the law. So we want the law to go back to what it said before in Act 4844. That's simply what we would like to have moved and we can all go home thank you thank you miss Moorhead the committee on
- 3:33:05 educational workforce development stands in recess for five minutes thank you I'll be right back Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Let's go. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Let's get started. Thank you. We'll be right back.
- 3:43:27 Thank you. Thank you.
- 3:44:27 Thank you. We'll be right back. [2 such phrases repeated 14 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]
- 3:51:27 We'll be right back. Thank you. Let's go. Thank you. Thank you.
- 3:53:57 We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. The Committee on Education and Workforce Development is back on the record. We're going to begin with a round of questions from my colleagues. minutes in this round and we're going to begin with Senator Carla Joseph. I recognize Carla, Senator Carla Joseph. Thank you so much Madam Chair. Pleasant good afternoon to everyone. I really want to commend members of the Department of Education for being here all day. It shows that you're very committed to me to education i wanted to ask a question through legal counsel to the to through the chair to legal counsel regarding the interpretation of this bill relative to sx case number sx two one tree cv three four eight i think you have a copy of it legal counsel
- 3:56:52 through the chair to senator joseph i have a copy of the order yes the order requiring additional briefing i do okay so in this in this order that has some play with this bill that we are considering and based on the testimonies that we hear uh from the saint croix district what what bearing will this bill have on this court order in your opinion through the share to senator joseph i i can only speak to what the order is requiring Okay, what is the order requiring?
- 3:57:36 The order is requiring the parties to the case that you've cited, the case number. The order requires that the parties, in light of what was the legislature's enactment back in December, the court has, and this case was pending at the time of December 29th when this, when the legislature passed, what is now, I believe, 84-86. 86-84.
- 3:58:09 I'm sorry, 86-84. This case was pending. Evidently there was a trial based on what I've read. There was a trial on the merits. The parties presented their testimony. The legislature then acted, which it had the right to do. So on February 27th, the court entered an order saying whether the new law, meaning what was done in December, requires integrated instruction of Virgin Islands and basic ribbon history in each grade from kindergarten through 12, and if so, whether such instruction is being provided accordingly, and two, whether rules and regulations were promulgated as required by section 41 . the judge required 30 seconds um briefs to be submitted by february 27th the department of education submitted a brief the board of education submitted a brief and in summary what they are now arguing is that the action that the legislature took in december essentially made the plaintiff's argument and their interpretation of what the statute was moot, because it was the argument of plaintiffs that the previous statute required essentially Virgin Islands and basic Caribbean history such courses to be part of the curriculum. So it was the plaintiff's argument that the Department and the Board of Education was not following the law in that they were not having, essentially, they interpreted as Bertrand's history and Caribbean history as courses, essentially as standalone courses, all right?
- 4:00:03 So when the legislature passed in December and made it to be integrated into the curriculum, what the briefs of, again, the board and the department has provided to the court says that the arguments of plaintiff, based on the legislature's action, is now moot. The plaintiff, however, their brief to the court was, they prefer to supplement a brief to the court

after this body acts on bill number 350555.

- 4:00:41 That is what they've represented to the court. That is the posture of where things stand as we are now. The court has not ruled on the plaintiff's case that was actually filed in 2013. That's how long this case has been pending, but no decision has been made at this point by the court. This is where the case now stands. I hope that answered your question. It does, because now we are looking at legislating some type of solution for a court case. My time has been called, and I thank you so much.
- 4:01:25 Thank you. Thank you, Senator Joseph. Point of information, Senator Johnson. Hello. Madam Chair, I must answer to what my colleague just said here, which is totally incorrect. It was a measure that had been on the board and the books for some 30 years. 30 years we came now whilst there's whatever case hearing is going on and change it in the middle of the water we change it so we're not legislation based on a court case we're legislation based on what a bill for 30 years an act was been enacted and never actually gave our children that VI history. And I stand and I ask the question, do we know some of our leaders? Do our children know some of them? And I guarantee you the answer is no. If I go to the classrooms of them today, I ask who's Charles Clark, they won't know. If I ask them who is Roy Innes, they won't know. If I ask who's Denmark Vesey, they won't know. If I ask who is Carl, in fact, they would know Caroline Adam Fax, but they won't know her history as a female. The, um, okay. So I definitely don't agree with what my colleagues just said. It's far from what is the facts.
- 4:02:46 Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you, Senator Johnson. I am going to acknowledge, recognize Senator Marvin Blyden for his three minutes. Thank you so much, Madam Chair. Good afternoon again to my colleagues. Good afternoon again for the testifiers. Thank you so much for being here all day. Much appreciated. I am happy that our legal counsel clarified what he just did.
- 4:03:22 So let me ask the Board of Education, based on what was stated by our legal counsel, in respect to the interpretation of integration and via history being taught from the 9th grade to the 12th grade level separately, is that being done at this time? Can you speak up, please? Mike? Yes, to your response, yes.
- 4:03:53 So it's being done separately at this time? Yes. Very well, I need that to be clarified on the record. I know that it was stated in a testimony also by the Department of Education. Oh, before I go there, I also want to thank Dr. Lawson and Dr. Arnold for their testimonies also. But it was stated in a testimony in respect to the bill being tabled in order to meet with the policy, rules, and regulation committee of the Virgin Arnold Board of Education and all other stakeholders.
- 4:04:27 And a meeting was supposed to be scheduled for March the 27th. that the department have not taken a position until or unless that meeting um have have on pass is that accurate uh senator that was based on an informal meeting that we had with senator johnson at the time and during that meeting um we realized that we needed to have all parties present and so at that time we decided that the bill would be tabled and we would meet on monday that's where that date came from so is that still your position at this point or what's your position based on all of the testimonies and information that have come came forward in this committee based on on all the testimony that came for today and the work that has been done at the department of education in terms of the standards work the integration works for those early grade levels we already have it as a mandatory standalone course at the high school level so we are standards based and we teach standards where they integrate different things in there and so i don't see the difference in us using the new standards that were aligned to virgin island's history as part of what we require of our teachers at this time well thank you so much for your responses. I cannot vote in this committee because I'm not a member, but I thought it was important and that I basically do my vetting also. And based on outcome, I will vote at the appropriate time. Thank you so much, Madam Chair, for the time and thank you guys again for all of your responses and all of the testimonies that came forth from both districts. Thank you.
- 4:06:10 Thank you, Senator Blyden. The one thing that I want to point out, and I was not in the legislature in the 34th legislature, but at the time that you passed this, what's the new number? The one that's existing now, 86, these numbers are driving me crazy at this point. When you passed, and I need to point this out to those who were in the legislature in the 34th legislature. When you passed 86-84, you did in fact cause a legislative solution to a pending court case.
- 4:06:55 That's what you did. That's what happened. There was a pending court case since 2013, and so when you did... You say it's my opinion? Yes, it is. That... Yes, it is. opinion, but there was a pending court case. And when you passed the law, you then enabled the Department of Education and the Board of Education to say the issue is moot. That's what it did. And so, I understand what's happening, but you did not stay out in December. You went into it. I know, you're correct. You are correct. You are correct. So we're going to go to Senator Dwayne... That's true.
- 4:07:52 Thank you very much, everybody, please. I have the mic at this point. Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Senator Capehart. I agree with you. You need to understand, though, the history. If we're talking about history today, you need to understand the history of a case, correct? And I'm saying that when this legislation was passed in December and then approved in

January, you were in fact intervening in an existing case. That's a fact, that's a fact.

- 4:08:32 So, today don't say that we're finding a legislative solution to a pending case, because you did that already. Yes, we did. Senator Dwayne DeGraff. Thank you, Madam Chair. For your three minutes. Good afternoon, colleagues. Good afternoon, testifiers. Hey, thank you guys for being here all day. I vote yes. You see, one thing I don't mince words when you come to me, I'm going to tell you straight, I vote yes. what i see here is and very simple i'm not an educator you know but i see vi history standalone versus integrating it into other things that's why to make sure i tell everybody i meet in the world until the day i die i from savannah i don't integrate where i from i from savannah savannah integrated into saint thomas into the virgin islands i'm a virgin islander to the end but i from savannah that's the difference virgin islanders you know we are a piece of this we put a piece of hair yeah we are melting pot But I want our children to know Dion Wells Hendrington Kaiser Calwood Victor Soames Your name again?
- 4:10:02 Erisilda Herman Erisil Silda Herman Silda Herman And Mr. Stephan Juergen Doctors Because are you a part of your history? our children should know this from time they're able to read proficient where dr harris brown came and said her child was from three years old proficiently i want them to know all our your name because you're part of the history all of our names and only requirement i got for them the way you mentioned doing the graph he from savannah so i vote yes i ain't gonna mince and carry on i ain't gonna try ridicule department education you're doing a good job continue doing what you're doing nothing is perfect you're gonna have your issues you have good days you have bad days but i'm saying i support the bill let's fix it let the court make a decision if that's the case but i'm not voting because of the court making a decision we're the first branch of government we rule period that's how i look at it so i didn't vote for it before because i wasn't even here but i had already told the response i wasn't going to support it 30 seconds so i didn't vote for it and again like i say in saint thomas now we've become when you speak your mind say who you are they ridicule you doing the graph that's my father name my family name don't miss words when i tell you i'm gonna do something i'm gonna do so i vote yes so if you're ready for a motion i write the motion i write the vote because i'm saying we're done thank you for the time i'm going to thank you thank you thank you for the time madam chair thank Thank you, Senator, the graph.
- 4:12:01 As the Chair of the Education and Workforce Development, the reason that I vote in yes also is simply because I do not believe that the history of the Virgin Islands and basic Caribbean history should be integrated into the curriculum for kindergarten through grade 12 in each grade, as I see in the judge's order where his question is, in each grade. That's very important to point out. So if we leave the law as it is right now, we in the legislature, we have created a confusion, plain and simple. So, we can always change it after. That's our option. I definitely believe that it should be integrated in the lower grades, as is being done by the Department of Education, but it should be a standalone course. That is my position as a former teacher and understanding that the immersion in a single discipline makes students go deeper. There's a deeper appreciation for what you're studying when it's a standalone course, a deeper appreciation. And so, I agree with some of my colleague that we have to go into depth when it's at the high school level. And I don't think that the Department of Education disagrees with me.
- 4:13:43 So I am going to vote yes also to revert the legislation back to what it was before. Senator Diane T. Capehart, I acknowledge you, I recognize you for your three minutes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to say good afternoon to my colleagues. has been a very interesting conversation and attorney Cardi thank you for that clarification because when I was approached I said first thing I will wait for the attorney to give clarification on this so thank you I believe in just going back to the original language because you know if you have policy your policy could always get superseded and not a commissioner come and that child policy changes but when you have law that's mandated to do abc123 so i am in support you understand because whoever kalaloo kokabewi end up with in the 35th the 34th is done gone they already happen we are here today I'm ready to vote mr. Johnson I ready to go home thank you madam chair Thank You Senator Capehart we will go to St. Croix Senator Javan James you have your three minutes greetings to the people of the US Virgin Islands colleagues testifiers and people of the Virgin islands look at what we are talking about and discussing during virgin alans history month what will history reflect once this hearing is adjourned what will that history be
- 4:15:47 what history will reflect as of march 23rd 2023 we have eight more days in via history month and I'm hoping and praying that we end this month the right way. Let us give the judge an opportunity to interpret the law prior to Act 86-84 being passed in the 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands. I was one of the individuals who voted no but today I will be voting yes and we're here to correct a round. Now for those who voted yes you're entitled to your own opinion and facts whatever you want to call it but all we're saying is give the judge an opportunity to interpret the law point blank and there are three words today I want us to remember and all of them begins with I and the second letter is N integration, interfere and interpretation. Act 86, 84 spoke about integration and that's where we interfered. And we have interfered with the interpretation of the third branch of government the legislature did their part years ago the executive branch which is the governor's senate into law we never had an opportunity to veto it well it can be vetoed by the way but the executive ran

senate into law which is talking about act 86 84 but prior to act 86-84 the third branch of government they were doing their part the u.s constitution is what we

4:17:40 all go by and if we respect the process we will vote yes today for bill number 35-0055 if we really respect the process of three branches of government 30 seconds and i will end by this a quote of quote by edward will mcblyden if you are not yourself if you surrender your personality you have nothing left to give the wall you have no pleasure no use nothing will which will attract and charm me for by the suppression of your individuality you lose your distinctive character happy virginal history and let us do the right thing I was in deep thought, listening to Senator Javan James.

4:18:44 Next I recognize Senator Novell Francis. Is he in the chambers on St. Croix, Senator Francis? Thank you. Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and good afternoon to everyone. I, too, I'm not a member of this committee, but when the time come, I'll be voting yes for this measure, which in turn will be no for the other measure for the third time. I voted no in the Rules Committee, I voted no during session, and I'm prepared again. And basically, I was pretty much hung up on the word integration integration in my opinion is short-sighted they lack vision blindness we are proud people as Virgin Islanders every single day right here in this legislative body we move resolution to honor and commend Virgin Islanders Virgin Islanders are making history all over the world all all over the world. They're first in this, first in that, they're naming streets after Virgin Islanders, and here, we bend in our head in shame, like we don't want to recognize our very own people.

4:20:13 Shameful. We should not even be having a discussion about this matter. so when the time come again I will be voting in the affirmative so that the courts could be able to make the decision we given the courts an opportunity to have a out on this matter well so many years almost three decades we've been waiting for this I also want to take this opportunity to commend the Department of Education again for moving my civics legislation forward. It's not one or the other. It's not this or that. Civics is necessary, VI history is necessary in diverse honors. I worked along with Dr. Larson and Dr. McMahon-Arnold to make sure that our civics are, because it happened right there at school, when our students, when we asked them who want to be senators in future not one student at the education complex rose and from that day i knew that i wanted to move civics legislation forward 30 seconds be careful what we're doing here we have to leave that legacy that our students want to emulate but they can't emulate if they don't know what it is I'm a proud Virgin Islander and I love my children to know who Virgin Islanders are, where we came from and where we're going. Thank you very much for this opportunity Madam Chair, you can count on my vote. Thank you Senator Francis and I agree with you that civics and

4:22:02 history, it's not one or the other, but both. I definitely agree with that. The next, I recognize Senator Donna Fred Gregory for your three minutes. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. So let me just make myself abundantly clear. When this measure came before the Education Committee in the the 34th legislature, I voted to move the measure forward with one caveat. And this is why I'm always concerned about voting things out of committee. When it gets to rules, people say they're going to make the amendments, and it don't happen. The amendment around that was supposed to ensure that on the high school level, that we maintained the standalone course that never happened when it came to the uh the full body i was one of the five senators that voted no so i want to make sure that we clear on that but i have some questions for the department of education because i have to say that you know it's important that when bills come before us and before the respective departments and they ask to testify they say focus on the measure and and that's why I asked the clarifying question earlier. So, how is Virgin Anne's history currently being, and you have to be succinct because the chair gonna cut me off. How is VI history being taught in K through six in elementary schools today? Is it integrated? Short answer.

4:23:41 So it's integrated today. So there are no standalone in K through six. Correct. Okay, let's talk about seven through eight. what does that look like so it's integrated on seven through eight yes on the k through six level do we have virgin ancestry workbook and tech workbooks and textbooks or workbooks we have k-2 we have the workbooks from dr larson um we have other resources that we will be that we just procure that we will be providing training for and the k-2 is across the territory is just in the St. Croix district. Across the territory. Across the territory. And where are we with the workbooks? Because this has been, this workbook conversation has been going on for 10 years. I sat here and I added it up. We still on second grade. When are we going to get to the sixth grade?

4:24:36 where are we with that okay and on the uh so that's a question that needs to be answered but while you're trying to figure that out in the testimony senator it talks about grades three to eight has already been developed and vetted and when you're rolling out for the new school year 23 24 yeah so how is it being taught now if you thought if you're teaching it how absent of the the workbooks, so it's still being thought in a integrated manner, right?

4:25:07 Using the standards. Okay. 30 seconds. K-8 level. I'm sorry, eight, seven, eight level. Integration as well? No textbooks? No? There are textbooks that our junior high teachers use. They vary by resources and it's integrated into the social studies content. Okay. Good. The, and I hear all the conversation around the court case, and there was one of my colleagues that made reference to the fact that, you know, what we're trying to do is impact a court case, but not because

the conversation did not come in December that we're impacting a conversation. We didn't see the vision. That's all happening too.

4:25:47 So reverting this actually helps us to stay out of the free. However, we have to take politics out of the whole thing and really look at what the legislation should look like. And when I look at the legislation before December, it still has some ambiguities in it because it speaks to courses time to be part of the curriculum in elementary and secondary schools. So it's still ambiguous.

4:26:17 So we still have a responsibility as legislators to clean this up. So I don't know what the sponsor wants to do as far as cleaning up the overall language, or we want to wait until these people rule and then we clean it up, but we have a responsibility to clean this up one way or the other. And that's my take on this. Thank you, Madam Chair, for the time. Thank you, Fred Gregory, and for the answers from the Department of Education. I agree that ultimately we have to clean it up based on the expertise from the educators as to how it should be taught in the lower grades and how it should be taught on a high school level.

4:27:07 That's where I definitely will defer to you and I believe I've been hearing that. Integration in the lower grades, standalone in the upper grades. The next person on the list, well, I'm going to go to in-house right now, Senator Alma Francis. Hyliga, I recognize you. Oh, sorry. Did I... No, you went all right. She went all right. Senator...

4:27:39 That's okay. Senator Alma Francis, Hyliga, for your three minutes. Thank you so much. I know we've spoken to some of you before. Welcome to the additional testifiers. For me, I am very serious when it comes to VI history. I am very disappointed we even have to be having this conversation as a born and raised Virgin Islander. But I had, I'm the owner of a radio station, Radio 1000, and we had a competition where we put it out to the public that the students, not only for reading purposes and educating and learning, they had to write an essay on a Virgin Islander named Dr. Lesmore Emmanuel. And the reason why we selected him is because the history that we learned about this individual was daunting, but educational as well. And I'm not gonna kill up too much of my time, but I wanna just read some excerpts from two of the the first and the second place winner and their words alone and these are from children one is from charlotte amali high school and one is from the niski moravian school um the first place winner wants 650 and the second place winner won 300 but just to read a quick excerpt and this is out out of the the mouths of children and and while we are here arguing over this this is their thought process these teachings should be should still be a part of our curriculum it is the it is only in the month of february and march do we normally focus on who we are as black people learning about us as a people should be taught year round i feel Senators should not even have to vote on introducing our own history into our

4:29:40 school system or us having to go to court to demand our history to be taught to us. It's an eighth grader and this is just them listening to what's going on in our community and wrote this essay. No help from me. This is just them in this essay. I will go a step further. Knowing our richness of not only tradition and history, but our land, sea, and sun are avenues to keep our islands vibrant with plant, vegetation, and local fruits, which will lead to jobs in various industries, boating, farming, energy projects. These are avenues to keep our Virgin Islands students close to home, feeling proud enough to share their history handed down and shared by Dr. Lesmore Emanuel. And I just want to read the last part, listening to this student and what touched me the most, and I'm going to just expound on it. He spoke about, in conclusion, I feel if Dr. Emanuel himself was alive, I would seek him out, actually sit down with him and ask him to tell me more about St. Thomas and how it was in the olden days. Why? I was born on St. Thomas, yes. However, with my parents being from Santo Domingo, they share a lot of their culture because that is what they know. I am more aware of what they know than who I am. Thank you, Dr. Emanuel. This is an eighth grader. And he's basically telling us, we live in a melting pot. He's telling us point blank, I am a born virgin islander and i know more about the dominican republic because of my parents that i know about my own history we cannot allow this madness to happen we shouldn't be here our children should not feel like this and i i was sitting there listening to him and i almost went

4:31:43 to tears it's sad an eighth grader is feeling like this in his own home we can't play like this with our children's future we have to teach them who they are because it's the same things that might have happened in the past the things that are happening now and what happens at this moment that we do inside of this institution is going to be the very difference as to the type of future virgin islands we have period so i just wanted to share that so y'all could understand that we're not we shouldn't be playing games our children are watching us. They fully understand what's happening here. And if a child could sit down and write this, we are in some serious issues. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

4:32:31 Thank you. Thank you for that passionate statement. I do want to say that the Department of Education and the Board of Education really cannot comment on what we're doing with respect to the case. So the questions that were asked about how it's being taught are the only questions really that are appropriate for them, not whether they believe we should do what we're doing today in relation to a case. But we can't ignore the fact that we already interjected ourselves into it. So

we will now hear from the sponsor of the bill.

- 4:33:18 Thank you very much Madam Chair and good afternoon to all. I want to start out by saying my great-grandfather is from the island of Barbados on my father's side on my mother's side my great grandmother come through the way of anguella to tortola the bvi so i gotta look for my belongings rights but i asked this question which caribbean island is teaching vi history that's the question i asked which one and i i have one question for uh dr kaiser carlwood do you know who is archie thomas i do what what do you know about mr archie thomas i don't remember off my head now well i'll give you a little hint and this is for my colleague over in st croix archie thomas is the first musician that went to trinidad and win a road match a road match in trinidad our children should know about him our children should know about a lot of the names that are in our building christian hendrix meat market our children should know about these people our children should know about wilmot gittins one of the best fishermen on the island of st right our children should know that and when we talk about baseball and we talk about mr harris clark who played 10 years with the new york yankees our children shouldn't know about that we must make sure that our children know whose shoulders they are standing on today we must make sure that we instill pride and VI pride in our children
- 4:35:18 by letting them know that their forefathers did great things when I ask about Roy Innes I can tell you I met Roy Innes in my grandmother house never knew who this man was and one day when I look on the TV and I see Mr. Roy Innes I was so shocked I said wait who he be in my grandmother house great union leader in New York, great labor leader. How many of our children know about them? And that's what my fight is here today. More than anything else, that our children know who their leaders are, what they have accomplished around the world. Not just in the Virgin Islands. Around the world.
- 4:36:03 Because Virgin Islands have made their mark throughout this universe. If you go to Africa and you ask about Wilmot Blyton. Our people been there and make their mark. When we talk about Caspar Holstein, they're still playing the numbers in New York. We cannot do this to our children. If we want them to change their direction, we have to instill to them a sense of pride of who we are as Virgin Islanders. Time. thank you very much for the time Madam Chair thank you Senator Johnson is there a motion motion Madam Chair Senator Johnson you are recognized Madam Chair I move that bill number 35005 and Act Amending Title 17 of the Virgin Islands Code pertaining to school curriculum and elementary and secondary school be voted on favorably in the Committee of Education and Workforce Development and be forwarded to the Committee on Rules and Judiciary for further consideration. I so move.
- 4:37:26 Second by Javon James. Moved by Senator Johnson and seconded by Senator Capehart, Senator Fred Gregory. No, Senator, sorry, Senator DeGraff and Senator Javon James. Madam Clerk, roll call. Senator Marvin A. Blyden.
- 4:37:55 Senator Blyden, absent. Senator Diane T. Capehart. Yay. Senator Capehart, yay. Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff. Senator DeGraff, yay. Madam Clerk, Senator Marvin Blyden is not a member of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development, so we will begin the roll call from the top, please. Thank you. Senator Diane T. Capehart. Yes. Senator Capehart, yay. Senator Dwayne M. DeGraff.
- 4:38:38 Yes. Senator DeGraff, yay. Senator Donna A. Fred Gregory. Senator Fred Gregory. Yes. Senator Fred Gregory, yay. Senator Maurice C. James. Yes. Senator James, yay. Senator Javon E. James Sr. Yes.
- 4:39:04 Senator James Sr., yay. Senator Franklin D. Johnson. Yay. Senator Johnson, yay. Senator Carla J. Joseph. Not voting. Senator Joseph, not voting. Madam Chair, you have six yeas, one not voting. Thank you, Madam Clerk. Bill number 35-0055, an act amending Title 17 of the Virgin Islands Code pertaining to school curriculum in elementary and secondary schools has been approved by this committee and will be forwarded to the Committee on Rules for further consideration.
- 4:39:53 So ordered, point of privilege, Senator Joseph. Thank you so much, Madam Chair. I just wanted to really explain my not voting position. I am in full support of VI history in all aspects of our education system. I understand what integration is. My understanding of integration is that VI history will be continually repeated in some aspect in not only the social studies, but also in the language arts, the sciences, even in the PE courses. So with repetition, our students will now have a more concentrated understanding and come out to be able to regurgitate. My concern and why I voted not voting was that we need to have the clarity that the course of VI history, as it's being done right now, will be a standalone course in the high schools from 9 to 12.
- 4:41:22 That needs to happen. In the lower grades, yes, the integration can happen. And it really helps our young people in their understanding. But we really need to assure that in the law, it's clearly remain and maintain as the department is doing that vi history will be taught as a standalone course and will be a requirement for graduation from our high schools so thank you so much uh madam chair for that and i'm sure we could uh bring an amendment so it's it's more it's clarified thank you so much thank you senator joseph point of personal privilege Thank you, Madam Chair.

- 4:42:16 I just wanted to do this point of personal privilege to put on the record that I too fully understand what integration is. We are in the Caribbean, we are a melting pot. I come from immigrant parents, from Tortola, Sanket, Nevis. So I fully get what integration is. But as a born Virgin Islander, virgin islander i am never going to put any other place above my own and that's just basic facts and i think we need to focus on making sure a lot more that yes i from my understanding i'm not going to sit here when i was in ninth grade i if i recall i think it was mr douglas he taught me vi history so when i was in ninth grade i had vi history but what i think is happening here i think it needs to be extended in from my opinion because one semester I don't think it's enough so I believe it should be extended on the high school level I don't have a problem with the integration from secondary and elementary but I think there's a difference between you integrating something for example in math class and you say that banana g is indigenous to the island of st thomas if you take 12 banana g's and 12 banana g's you get 24 banana g's that's something where you would be integrating and still educating them at the same time but when it comes to the history of our people i need for our students to continue not one semester on the high school level to go into a classroom and continuously learn and be educated on the people of the territory and where we've come from so that they have a sense of pride and understand that we are very great people and that is from my perspective that is what I would love to see if we were able to fix the
- 4:44:17 legislation whether through the court system doing it are we here get it done at the institution so I just wanted to put that on the record thank you thank Thank you, Senator Francis Heiliger. Point of personal privilege, Senator Johnson. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I first of all would like to start saying thank you to all my colleagues who support this measure. But I also want to say, there's some names I'm going to call here, and I didn't know these folks or learn about them in high school. Hubert Harrison, Ashley Totten, Caspar Holstein, Queen Koesha, Olanzo G. Warren Rothschild Francis J. Raymond Jones Edward Milmot Blyden I didn't learn of none of these individuals in school I might not have been paying attention but I did not and I'm saying this to say that we must teach our children about their forefathers I agree and i definitely will continue to have discussion and dialogue with the board and with the department of education as long as we are respectful to each other people are saying i don't get off i only get off when people come after me only then and i will always defend franklin johnson as an individual every day of the week i thank you guys for your time and testimonies We'll have some discussion. Definitely will. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.
- 4:45:54 Thank you, Senator Johnson. I actually, after listening to you, I feel very fortunate because I attended St. Joseph High School and I had Virgin Islands history. So, all those names that you call, I was actually familiar with them. So, I want to see that done also in the public school and I know that the Commissioner is committed to doing that. I will ask the testifiers on St. Croix to give a 30 second wrap up and then we'll come to St. Thomas so that I can release the people on St. Thomas that have been here all day, just like you have, I'm sure, on St. Croix. So Mr. Moorhead and Miss Moorhead, 30 seconds, if you want to say anything.
- 4:46:42 Thank you, Madam Chair. I would simply use the time to point out that it had been 30 years of benign neglect before three Krusian patriots filed in court. it's now 10 years we are waiting a decision and we hurry it up and waiting thank you thank you thank you Ms. Moorhead thank you I just want to correct one thing and I can do that because it was it's on the official trial transcript that the teachers that testified on behalf of the The department, as a matter of fact, 8th grade teachers were not even aware that the history is required for 8th grade. They're teaching US history. So it's a lot that the department and the board say it's happening, but they're not making anyone accountable or supervising to seeing what's happening.
- 4:47:52 Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. But I'll start with Dr. Carl Wood, I want to thank you for testifying and being here today. Thirty seconds. Thank you for the opportunity to present on Bill Number 35055 and the board stands to collaborate with the Department and the Literature. Thank you. Thank you. And the woman of the day, the Commissioner with a lot on your shoulders. Yes. And who we're committed to working with. I want you to know that. Commissioner Deanne Wells-Hedrington.
- 4:48:35 I know it's a mouthful, right? Thank you so much for this dialogue. I'm just looking forward to making the amendments needed so that we can make sure that we stay in compliance and that our children are educated on their history. I was able to share with Senator Johnson on my trip to DC. There was a group of Hawaiian natives that were talking about their culture. So it is important to us. We just want to make sure that all of our teachers are aware of what it is that we want them to do. And again, like Ms. Moorhead said, accountability is a big piece. What gets monitored gets done. And so we understand that that's an area that we have to work on and you have our commitment to do so.
- 4:49:22 Thank you. I want to end today by first of all thanking my staff for getting me ready for this meeting. I really want to thank my colleagues who guided me throughout the day. I really appreciate it as this was my first meeting and you were all so gracious. Thank you. I'd like to thank the senatorial staff of your committee members, central staff, the everyone. I really feel good about being a part of this process. It was a long day. Department of Education, you are, in my opinion, on

the right path, so stay focused. And so, the Committee on Education and Workforce Development is hereby adjourned.

4:50:21 Let's get started. Thank you. Let's get started. Thank you. We'll be right back.

People named in this transcript

SUSPECTED, and a finding aid only. Names were matched by machine against the spellings used across all 426 of our transcripts, and the title is the one used in the room. Being named here is NOT evidence that a person attended or spoke - only that the name was said. Speech recognition mishears names, so a spelling may be wrong even where no alternative is offered.

18x	Senator Franklin D. Johnson heard in this transcript as: Franklin Johnsen, Johnson
12x	Senator Novelle Francis heard in this transcript as: Alma Francis, Francis, Novel E. Francis Jr, Novell E. Francis Jr., Novell Francis
11x	Senator Carla Joseph the surname alone also matches: Clifford Joseph; Karla J. Joseph heard in this transcript as: Carla J. Joseph, Joseph
9x	Senator Diane T. Capeheart heard in this transcript as: Capehart, Diane T. Capehart
9x	Senator Marise C. James the surname alone also matches: Javan James; Giovanni James Sr heard in this transcript as: James, James Sr, Maurice C. James
8x	Senator Dwayne DeGraff heard in this transcript as: DeGraff, Dwayne M. DeGraff
8x	Senator Fred Gregory the surname alone also matches: Donna A. Frett-Gregory; Donna Frett-Gregory
8x	Senator Marvin Blyden heard in this transcript as: Blyden, Blyton, Marvin A. Blyden, Marvin Blyton
7x	Senator Javan James heard in this transcript as: J. Van James, Javon E. James Sr, Javon James
6x	Dr. Kaiser A. Calwood the surname alone also matches: Linda Calwood heard in this transcript as: Calwood, Kaisa A. Callwood, Kaisa A. Colwood, Kaiser A. Carlwood, Kaiser Carwood
4x	Senator Donna A. Frett-Gregory heard in this transcript as: Donna A. Fred Gregory, Donna Fred Gregory
4x	Commissioner Jean-Pierre Oriel heard in this transcript as: Oriel
4x	Senator Milton E. Potter heard in this transcript as: Milton Potter, Potter
3x	Senator Kenneth L. Gittens heard in this transcript as: Gittins, Kinnett Gittens
3x	Senator Ray Fonseca
2x	Senator Alma Francis-Heyliger heard in this transcript as: Francis Heiliger
2x	Dr. Stefan Juergen heard in this transcript as: Juergen
1x	Senator Donna Frett-Gregory heard in this transcript as: Donna A. Frett-Gregory

Bills and acts referred to

Matched by number against our own acts corpus. The number is what the recognition heard, so it may be wrong; where it resolved, the title is the one the Legislature gave the act.

Bill 35-0055	Act 8730 · April 14, 2023 · An Act amending title 17 of the Virgin Islands Code pertaining to school curriculum in elementary and secondary schools
Act 8400	Act 8400 · December 11, 2020 · An Act amending title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 5 adding a section 41g, implementing and setting the requirements for distance learning ---0
Act 7587	Act 7587 · An Act amending title 17 Virgin Islands Code, adding chapter 42B, providing for Bullying Prevention Education, Gang Resistance Education and Training and making an appropriation to incorporate Bullying Prevention Education, Gang Resistance Education and Training into the Public Schools --0
Act 7934	Act 7934 · An Act amending title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 5, section 41, subsection (c) relating to the courses required to be taught in public schools by adding a structured civics course and providing for technical amendments ---0
Act 8730	Act 8730 · April 14, 2023 · An Act amending title 17 of the Virgin Islands Code pertaining to school curriculum in elementary and secondary schools

Referred to but not found in our acts corpus: Bill 34-0238, Bill 15-0321, Bill 35-0555, Bill 35-0005, Act 3193, Act 4844