

BILL NO. 35-0066

Thirty- Fifth Legislature of the Virgin Islands

April 4, 2023

An Act amending the Virgin Islands Code, title 17, chapter 5, relating to the course of study in public schools, by adding section 41j to establish the Reading Initiative for Scholastic Excellence Program in the public schools of the Virgin Islands

PROPOSED BY: Senator Marise C. James

Be it enacted by the Legislature of the Virgin Islands:

SECTION 1. Title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 5 is amended by inserting a new section 41j to read as follows:

“§ 41j. Reading Initiative for Scholastic Excellence Program

(a) The Department of Education shall establish and maintain The Reading Initiative for Scholastic Excellence (RISE) Program to provide instructional support to school districts, school administrators, and instructional personnel in implementing evidence-based reading instruction and interventions in order to improve student reading achievement.

(b) The Department of Education shall establish criteria to identify schools that must receive support. However, a school serving students in kindergarten through grade 5 must be identified for support if 50 percent of its students who take the territory wide, standardized English Language Arts assessment score below a Level 3 for any grade

level, or, for students in kindergarten through grade 3, progress monitoring data collected shows that 50 percent or more of the students are not on track to pass the territory wide, standardized grade 3 English Language Arts assessment. A school identified for support under this section must implement a school improvement plan or, if the school is already implementing a school improvement plan, the plan must be amended to explicitly address strategies for improving reading performance consistent with this section.

(c) The Department of Education shall collect progress monitoring data regarding the implementation of support. The support must include:

(1) Professional development, aligned to evidence-based strategies identified for appropriate instructional personnel and school administrators.

(2) Assistance with implementing:

(A) Data-informed instructional decision-making using progress monitoring and other appropriate data;

(B) Selection and consistent, coordinated use of high-quality instructional materials and supplemental materials;

(C) Reading instruction in other core subject area curricula, with an emphasis on civic literacy; and

(D) A multitiered system of supports to provide students effective interventions and identify students who may require an evaluation for special educational services, including identifying characteristics of conditions that affect phonological processing, such as dyslexia; and

(3) Evaluating a school's improvement plan for alignment with the school district's K-12 comprehensive reading plan and the school district's allocation of resources. If the Department team determines that the school's reading plan does not address the school's need to improve student outcomes, the district school

1 superintendent shall convene a meeting to rectify the deficiencies of the reading
2 plan.

3 (d) Identification of a school for support pursuant to this section does not, on its own,
4 require a school to implement a turnaround option or take other corrective actions. However,
5 a support team may be used to assist with providing the differentiated matrix of intervention
6 and support strategies, if applicable. The Department of Education may direct a support team
7 to make other forms of assistance available to schools.

8 (e) Once a school's data shows that it no longer meets the criteria under subsection (b),
9 the school, for purposes of complying with this section, may discontinue receiving support and
10 implement a school improvement plan at the conclusion of the school year. The support may
11 continue subject to available resources.

12 (f) As part of the RISE Program, the Department of Education shall establish a tutoring
13 program and develop training in effective reading tutoring practices and content, based on
14 evidence-based practices and aligned to the English Language Arts standards, which prepares
15 eligible high school students to tutor students in kindergarten through grade 3 in schools
16 identified under this section, instilling in those students the love of reading, and improving their
17 literacy skills. To be eligible to participate in the tutoring program, a high school student must:

18 (1) be a high school junior or senior who has a cumulative grade point average
19 of 3.0 or higher;

20 (2) have no history of out-of-school suspensions or expulsions;

21 (3) be on track to complete all core course requirements to graduate; and

22 (4) have written recommendations from at least two of his or her present or
23 former high school teachers of record or extracurricular activity sponsors.

24 (g) To participate in the tutoring program:

25 (1) A school district must recruit, train, and deploy eligible high school students
26 using the materials developed under this section;

(2) Tutoring must occur during the school day on school district property in the presence and under the supervision of instructional personnel who are school district employees. A parent must give written permission for his or her child to receive tutoring through the program. Tutoring may be part of a service-learning course;

(3) Students may earn up to three elective credits for high school graduation based on the verified number of hours the student spends tutoring under the program. The hours of volunteer service must be documented in writing, and the document must be signed by the student, the student's parent or guardian, and an administrator or designee of the school in which the tutoring occurred. The hours that a high school student devotes to tutoring may be counted toward meeting community service requirements for high school graduation;

(4) The Department of Education must designate a high school student who provides at least 100 verified hours of tutoring under the program as a 21st Century Scholar and award the student with a pin indicating such designation.

(h) The Department of Education shall encourage school districts to initiate, adopt, expand, and institutionalize service-learning programs, activities, and policies in kindergarten through grade 12. Service learning refers to a student-centered, research-based teaching and learning strategy that engages students in meaningful service activities in their schools or communities. Service-learning activities are directly tied to academic curricula, standards, and course, district, or territorial assessments. Service-learning activities foster academic achievement, character development, civic engagement, and career exploration and enable students to apply curriculum content, skills, and behaviors taught in the classroom. Upon request of any school district that chooses to implement service-learning programs, activities, or policies, the Department of Education shall:

(1) provide assistance in locating, leveraging, and utilizing available or alternative financial resources that will assist school districts or teachers desiring to

1 receive training and other resources to develop and administer service-learning programs
2 or activities and encourage school districts to include kindergarten through grade 12
3 service-learning programs and activities in proposals they submit to the department under
4 federal entitlement grants and competitive territorial and federal grants administered
5 through the department;

6 (2) develop and adopt elective service-learning courses for inclusion in middle
7 and high school course code directories, which will allow additional opportunities for
8 students to engage in service learning. School districts are encouraged to provide support
9 for the use of service learning at any grade level as an instructional strategy to address
10 appropriate areas of territorial education standards for student knowledge and
11 performance; and

12 (3) allow the hours that high school students devote to course-based service-
13 learning activities to be counted toward meeting community service requirements for
14 high school graduation.

15 (i) The Virgin Islands Board of Education shall encourage school districts to include
16 service learning as part of any course or activity required for high school graduation and to
17 include and accept service-learning activities and hours in requirements for academic awards,
18 especially those awards that include community service as a criterion or selection factor.

19 (j) The Virgin Islands Board of Education shall adopt regulations to administer this
20 section.

21 **BILL SUMMARY**

22
23 This bill amends title 17 Virgin Islands Code, chapter 5 is amended by inserting a new
24 section 41j to establish the Reading Initiative for Scholastic Excellence (RISE) Program in the
25 public schools of the Virgin Islands. The bill requires the Virgin Islands Department of
26 Education and the Virgin Islands Board of Education to provide instructional support to school
27 districts, school administrators, and instructional personnel in implementing evidence-based

reading instruction and interventions in order to improve student reading achievement. The bill requires the establishment of a tutoring program and development of training in effective reading tutoring practices and content, based on evidence-based practices and aligned to the English Language Arts standards, which prepares eligible high school students to tutor students in kindergarten through grade 3 in schools identified under this section. The Department of Education shall allow the hours that high school students devote to course-based service-learning activities to be counted toward meeting community service requirements for high school graduation. The Virgin Islands Board of Education is required to adopt regulations to administer the RISE Program.

BR23-0327/ March 1, 2023/ PFA