



| Committee on Education and Workforce Development

Legislature USVI

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- 0:00:00 Music Music Music Music Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Oh, oh, oh, oh. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. good morning good morning to everyone good morning to the people of the Virgin Islands
- 0:12:23 and welcome to the Committee on Education and Workforce Development hearing. I just wanted to let the public know that we will be starting shortly. Right now I'm looking for a quorum so we can begin this meeting, but we do have the testifiers for Block 1 already present here in the chambers as well as those individuals online. As a matter of just housekeeping, what I will ask and encourage which is I continue to encourage the public as we start this meeting. There are documents for today's hearing that are available on the committee drive on the legislature's website, which is really important for you to check out so you can follow along the agenda, various documents for today's hearing.
- 0:13:06 If you go to legvi.org and you go to committees, go to the Education Workforce Development Committee folder and there you'll find the items for today's hearing. I won't be able to begin without a, and just for public information, you need three members of your committee in order to start a meeting. I have received different notices of tardiness and excuse, but what I want to emphasize is that it's important that we get started so that we can respect everyone's time and get this very important agenda today. So the Committee on Education and Workforce Development will stand and recess for approximately five minutes. I hope everyone will be ready, my colleagues will be in the wells, and we can get our meeting started today. I want to thank everyone, my staff, the central staff of this institution, to also testifiers for their time and commitment, and we're going to have a great day today.
- 0:14:04 I also at this time want to, yesterday was, and also we've had a series of persons who lost lives, yesterday was the funeral of Glenn Webster, in my former capacity with election system as a deputy supervisor I knew Glenn was a very well

board member and so my condolences to his family his friends entire circle and all those who've lost a loved one as even today learning of others in situations that aren't violent current in our territory and that's why it is really so ever important when we talk about education and everything and everything the importance of it let's do our best to prevent crime but also in the case of health care ensure that we do better for our people the committee on education and Warfare Development stands in recess for five minutes. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

0:23:43 Thank you. We'll be right back. [2 such phrases repeated 42 times · standby audio before the proceeding, transcribed by the recogniser as speech]

0:44:43 Good morning and and we've come out of recess. Good morning for those of you just tuning in. Good morning to everybody and welcome to the Committee on Education and Workforce Development. I want to go ahead and get started. I want to just first off once again just thank understand good morning to also the same viewing audience. Thank everyone. I want to thank the central staff, media security facilities so a management journal office legal counsel I report everyone for their version of preparation for today's hearing and also once again thank the testifiers for their time of participation for today's hearing on July is national disability so in this month we recognize a series of important recognitions July is National Disability Independence Day with will we celebrating this month, National Support for Public Education Day, National Parks and Recreation Month, National Minority Mental Health Awareness, International Alopecia Month for Women, Sarcoma Awareness Month, Social Wellness Month, Juvenile Arthritis Awareness, National Cleft and Cranial facial awareness and prevention month a time dedicated to health and wellness prevention and we celebrate my office staff and I and team we celebrate this month and we really you know celebrate our health workers our educator educators because it's both we have health and education matters this month to celebrate and we thank all those in our communities for their notable achievements which are often underscored as we gather for today's hearing parents in our community we are definitely at a juncture not just our parents but just a wider community administrators facilities everyone involved in education

0:46:42 and the wider public have questions about the quality of our school's education and and concerns of course as we approach and fast approach reopening of schools we still have safe on unsafe buildings of course many years of decaying we're coming and and there you know a lot of monies we've received but certainly I will put out that while we've received a lot of funding by way of federal dollars for school reconstruction we are a ways away from the rebuilding of our schools and there are more things slated to come And I will say that in my capacity as the chairwoman of the Community Education and Workforce Development, I've tried and I'll continue to try to ensure that, and I believe so much in strategic planning, I believe in also implementation of plans and that's why to this day and I continue to ask for plans. Today's focus of today's hearing is specifically on, this is, we're gonna be hearing in Block one the school accountability management report this report by law is compiled with the lead entity of the Virgin Islands Board of Education in collaboration with the Virgin Islands Department of Education for those who are tuning in or who are maybe new to what is occurring today with respect to this plan is that what we're doing today also occurred last year and this is a annual plan that is due to the legislature which the Board of Education submits the due date is June 15th and certainly the board did you know within relative time submit the report to the legislature which they did on July 1st

0:48:42 But the work began before the work of the board, the work of the department, certainly me as a senator engaging with a committee on school readiness. It is an ongoing process. Another report not on the onus of the Board of Education is, in fact, the dropout prevention plan that is to come from the Virgin Islands Department of Education. Because as we look at the expenditure of the last, latest grant for public education and to support the social wellness of our children, curriculum, and so forth, administration and the like, we have to actually have an actual plan. And to date, as we are now in July, the former Commissioner of Education, McCarrie Berry-Benjamin, did not produce a draft to the committee or the legislature of that plan. plan, and I've been asking for that plan for several months dating back to last year. But be that as it may, the question is now, and I want to put out, that I am putting out that the acting commissioner, Victor Sohm, and I have already had a series of internal meetings and we're going to move the department forward in collaboration with the executive legislative branch the way it needs to move forward. As it relates to the education of our youth, it is my hope today that the legislature, the executive branch, all the people of the territory can be more informed by the Board of Education and the stakeholders in this particular plan, get some more information about some of the federal dollars that can be spent as our students returned to school this year and this concerns are not just from the parents about what's happening in the classroom it's also about the concerns

0:50:48 about the support for our teachers support they need to be able to run their class to manage a class that come by way of certainly the resources they need to teach I continue to press upon the importance of professional development and the

need to support our teachers also as I always encourage for I always encourage our listing of being honest to do you can go ahead and you can turn to the documents for today's hearing so that you get the full information that you get the agenda that you get the plan the report that the Board of Education submitted to the legislature and other committee documents and I have shared a number of times now the what's known as the American Rescue Plan for the Department of Education the \$137 million plan that is going to that addresses the portion of the administration of our schools when we say administration we're talking about curriculum and instruction In Block 1, we're going to again focus in on the School Accountability Report, and that report is found in Title 17, Section 24.

0:52:19 So you can always go to the free search online and obtain that information. So I look forward to this hearing today, to hear from our education administrators, our stakeholders who have come here to understand our Board of Education has come here to testify. And as it relates to workforce development, it's my hope today that we can continue to prepare our children for the workforce so that they have the skills necessary to succeed. There's also components of them succeeding in the workplace, but also we have legislation on character education, we have legislation in many different areas to support. But if it's only on paper and it's not acted upon, our children won't receive the benefit that they need to receive. Secondly on today's agenda, block two is the legislation that I've offered to address the the teaching of Virgin Islands and Caribbean history in our schools, the mandate for the teaching of Virgin Islands and Caribbean history from kindergarten to 12th grade. And we, of course, even have our granny pre-Ks, so the focus would also be that includes our preschoolers. It is a longstanding issue. Not only am I offering the legislation in order to address the longstanding issue of the teaching of Virgin Islands Caribbean history statutorily, but I've also reconciled some, There's some confusion in the file, there's some duplication. So that's also our role as legislators, working with the legal counsel and the code advisor to look at when laws have to be amended so they can be what's known as congruent and we can avoid having to go to court. Of course, the litigants are in court because it's not taking place. We are not, in fact, teaching our children Virgin Islands and Caribbean history, and I know especially we're not teaching the Caribbean history from kindergarten to 12th grade.

0:54:22 Madam Clerk will now proceed with roll call. Roll call and on today's attendance. Senator Donna A. Fred Gregory. Senator Donna A. Fred Gregory absent. Senator Kenneth L. Gittins. Senator Kenneth L. Gittins absent. Senator Carla J. Joseph. Senator Carla J. Joseph present. Senator Milton E. Potter. Senator Milton E. Potter absent, Senator Janelle K. Saro, Senator Janelle K. Saro absent, Senator Kurt A. Viala, Senator Kurt A. Viala absent, Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker present, Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker present, Madam Chair you have two present, five absent.

0:55:15 Thank you Madam Clerk and do we have any correspondence regarding anybody's absence or tiredness? Yes Madam Chair. please read those correspondence into the record letter from janelle k saru senator 34th legislature of the virgin islands dated July 15 2022. dear chairwoman whitaker this letter serves to inform you that i will be tardy to the committee on education and workforce development meeting scheduled for friday July 15 2022 in the fritz elouette's conference room in st croix i apologize for any inconvenience and i look forward to participating in the discussion upon my arrival thank you in advance for your understanding respectfully submitted janelle casaro senator letter from the honorable kurt avla senator 34th legislature of the virgin islands dated July 15 2022. dear senator whitaker i will be late for today's committee on education and workforce development meeting due to a previous engagement i apologize for any inconvenience this may cause and i look forward to participating upon my arrival thank you for your kind consideration in this matter respectfully kurt avla senator 34th legislature of the virgin island madam clerk we have senator potter who has joined us please mark senator potter as president yes ma'am okay and Letter from the Honorable Kenneth L. Giddens, Senator, 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, dated July 15, 2022. Dear Senator Whitaker, please excuse my late arrival to the Committee on Education and Workforce Development hearing, scheduled for today, July 15, 2022.

0:56:57 I had a schedule in conflict, and I am attending to another matter. I will be in attendance as soon as possible. I note the importance of the agenda's lit items to be discussed and ask that any additional information shared before my arrival that is not in the committee drive be forwarded to my office. Thank you in advance for your understanding. Sincerely, Kenneth L. Gittins, Senator 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands. Madam Chair, those are the correspondents. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Clerk.

0:57:29 Okay, would you proceed with reading the agenda into the record? Agenda for the Committee on Education and Workforce Development hearing for July 15, 2022. The Committee on Education and Workforce Development has scheduled a hearing for Friday, July 15, 2022, at 10 o'clock a.m. in the Fritz-Elouette Conference Room on St. Croix. Block 1. The Committee will receive testimony regarding the status of the 2022-2023 reopening of schools. specifically the school accountability report addressing the safety health administration maintenance and overall operation of the schools as outlined in the Virgin Islands code as follows title 17 section 24 school management accountability a the Board of Education shall one in consultation with the Department of Education conduct a thorough annual assessment and evaluation of all public school facilities school guidance division and school administration in the territory to a in

consultation with the commissioner of education develop and adapt the standards and guidelines for conducting a comprehensive annual inspection assessment and evaluation of all public facilities school administrations and school guidance divisions in the territory and b in consultation with the department of health environmental division the department of labor usha and the department of planning and natural resources make the decision via certification prior to the commencing of every school year that all public schools inspected are environmentally safe three utilize the services of the department of planning and natural resources Public Works, Health, Environmental Health Division, Occupational Health and Safety, OSHA,

0:59:33 and the fire services to carry out the provisions of this section. Invited testifiers, Victor Sum III, Acting Commissioner, Virgin Islands Department of Education, Dr. Kaiser Calwood, Chairman, Virgin Islands Board of Education, Pusta y Encarnacion, Commissioner, Virgin Islands Department of Health Jean Pierre L. Oriel, Commissioner, Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources Gary Malloy, Commissioner, Virgin Islands Department of Labor Darrell George, Director, Virgin Islands Fire Services Derek Gabrielle, Commissioner, Virgin Islands Department of Public Works Block 2, the committee will receive testimony on the following bill. Bill number 34-0238, an act amended Title 17, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 5, Section 41C, relating to the courses of study in public school to require that the Virgin Islands and Caribbean history be taught specifically in kindergarten through 12th grade and for other purposes, sponsored by Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker. Invited testifiers, Victor Sohm III, Acting Commissioner, Virgin Islands Department of Education, and Dr. Kaiser Callwood, Chairman, Virgin Islands Board of Education. Madam Chair, that is the agenda.

1:01:02 Thank you, Madam Clerk. Do we have any excuses for any of the testifiers in Block 1? If you can read those. Yes, Madam Chair. Thank you. We can proceed to reading those into the record. Letter from Victor Sohm III, Acting Commissioner of the Department of Education, dated July 11, 2022. Dear Senator Whitaker, I hope this correspondence finds you in good spirits. Thank you for the invitation to testify at the Committee on Education and Workforce Development on Friday, July 15, 2022. As I explained to you last week and your chief of staff today, I must attend to a present medical issue on July 15, 2022, outside of the territory and will not be able to attend in person or virtually. Additionally, key staff needed to participate in a hearing will also be out of the territory. Specifically, Dr. Renee Charleswell, Deputy Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Yone Wells-Hadrington, Chief Operations Officer, Dr. Stefan B. Jergen, Insular Superintendent, St. Thomas-St. John District.

1:02:15 I sincerely apologize, as I fully intend to cooperate and work harmoniously with the first branch of government and the Committee on Educational Workforce Development. i assure you that i understand the importance of the hearing but staff needed to provide vital information will be unavailable at that time if necessary i will be willing to meet with you after hours or even on a weekend saturday you may contact me at 340-201-6307 for further discussion Thank you. Respectfully, Victor Som III, Acting Commissioner, Department of Education. Letter from Derek Gabrielle, Commissioner, Department of Public Works, dated July 13, 2022. Dear Senator Whitaker, this correspondence serves to acknowledge receipt of your invitation, dated July 7, 2022, to offer testimony at the Committee on Educational Workforce Development Hearing on July 15, 2022. Due to a scheduled conflict, I will not be able to attend the hearing. Please feel free to contact my office if you need further assistance.

1:03:27 Sincerely, Deborah Gabrielle, Commissioner, Department of Public Works. Letter from Gary Malloy, Commissioner, Virgin Islands Department of Education, dated July 13, 2022. Dear Senator Whitaker, I am in receipt of your revised invitation and updated agenda for the Committee on Education and Workforce Development meeting, scheduled to be held on Friday, July 15, 2022, at 10 o'clock a.m. at the Fritz Elowes Conference Room on St. Croix. Unfortunately, I will not be able to attend. As you may know, the Virgin Islands was recognized nationally for the success of our Jobs for America graduates, JAG program. The Virgin Islands received the prestigious five out of five state award.

1:04:16 Several members of our JAG VI team and I are out of the territory. We are participating in the JAG national training seminar that began on July 11th and ends July 15th. With great respect, based on this conflict, we are unable to attend this hearing. I welcome the invitation at another time. Respectfully, Gary Malloy, Commissioner, Virgin Islands, Department of Labor. Letter from Jean-Pierre L. Oriel, Department of Planning and Natural Resources, dated July 14, 2022. Dear Senator Whitaker, my apologies for not being able to attend a hearing scheduled for July 15, 2022 to discuss the role of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources in relation to school management accountability i have previously scheduled meetings that present my attend that prevent my attendance at the hearing what i can provide at this time is that dpnr pursuant to his role as outlined in 17 vic subsection 24a 2b is scheduled to participate in a school tour in the district of saint croix on july 28th and july 21st to assess the readiness of schools for the opening of the 2022-2023 school year. We are also awaiting confirmation of the date that the school tour will take place in the district of St. Thomas, St. John. Members of my permits and environmental protection staff in both districts will assist in assessing compliance with

health and safety regulations. Until the tour takes place, This is the extent to which we can speak to the readiness of the school to open for the 2022-2023 school year. My apologies once again for being unable to attend the hearing on July 15, 2022. Sincerely, Jean-Pierre L. Oriel, Commissioner, Virgin Islands Department of Planning and Natural Resources. Madam Chair, those are the excuse letters.

1:06:24 Thank you, Madam Clerk. At this time, I'm actually very excited to introduce my intern, Kian, Mr. John, so you can come into the little north near me one. Kian John. Kian John is a recent graduate of the Career and Technical Education Center as well as the St. Croix Educational Complex, and he's soon to be a freshman at the University of Houston in downtown where Keon will study sports medicine as his backup plan for his desire to be a professional baseball baseball player as pursues that career if that does not formulate Keon was born and raised on the lovely island St. Croix Virgin Islands and he's currently of course with my office serving as an intern and I and one of Keon's main goal is to get a higher education and also work to pursue his professional baseball career and I I can already say that Kian is doing a phenomenal job. He's already jumped into the constituent work and today's is here. So Kian, again, thank you for all you're doing thus far and keep going. Proud of you and, okay, and. And for those who are just taking a quick picture of Kian and to all the interns, for all the staff members and all the interns throughout government, just continue to do well. so much you can learn as an intern and experience and you're and they all contribute to all of our offices in meaningful ways so thank you Kian and to all the interns as well we're gonna now before we jump in on to today's hearing I want to express for the public just for their awareness is how we got to today and an important date as well so we know that school is set to reopen

1:08:21 um august 8th and the importance of today's hearing is to highlight and i think and i want to do this today because it's really important it's it's very important that we do in fact do our best to have the information the individuals in block one again the lead agencies is a Rajan's Board of Education, the lead agency·lead department·lead board, rather, responsible for this report to be put together. But all the other agencies·and I'm going to go down and give you each one of them, but I want to emphasize because the public and just for the public to understand the I'm gonna read the law into the record because I think it's really important that we understand once again title 17 section 24 the Board of Education shall number one in consultation with the Department of Education conduct a thorough annual assessment and evaluation of all public school facilities school guidance division and school administration in the in the territory to a in consultation with the Commission of Education develop and adopt the standards and guidelines for conducting a comprehensive annual inspection assessment and evaluation of all public school facilities school administrations and school guidance divisions in the territory and be in consultation with the Department of Health Environment Division the Department of Labor OSHA and the Department of Planning and Natural Resources make the decision via certification prior to the commencement commencing of every school year that all public schools inspected are environmentally safe. Three utilize the

1:10:22 services of the Department of Planning and Natural Resources Public Works Health Environmental Health Division Occupational Health and Safety OSHA and fire to carry out the provisions of this section these departments shall submit a report as provided in subsection D of this section which shall include a identification of the major maintenance needs of the school B the schedule of completing maintenance and see the cost estimates for major maintenance B the Board of Education the Commissioner of Education shall develop a schedule and proposed timeline for addressing areas of concern and identify through the inspection assessment and evaluation process see the border education based on the assessments made under the provisions of this section shall make recommendations to the legislature and the governor and seek secure funding for the timely and expeditious repair and maintenance of public schools in the territory D the border education and consultation with the commissioner of education shall make recommendations to the legislature and the governor through annual report of its findings and recommendations based on the inspections conducted under the provision of this section no later than June 15 after the close of the school academic year. The report shall include the findings of administrative deficiencies and recommendations for addressing the deficiencies, two findings of guidance and counseling deficiencies and recommendations for addressing the deficiencies, and three identification of strength and weaknesses of of each school to include achievement and standardized test scores and statistics for dropouts attendance college entrance and vocation program entrance so that is once again title 17 section 24. the public works in particular and i want to emphasize that that wasn't the first time

1:12:16 that I engaged Commissioner Derek Gabriel on Public Works role and responsibility with respect to the role of the of Public Works in the plan it is important so even before promulgating the plan it was important for Public works to be part of the process. Department of Health it's this the same because it's this we're going into this last year into as I addressed the report last year's report going into this year as well was the relevant stakeholders they were addressed even as I within the first week of office as I addressed them and then we had series of hearings and the like it is good now that we're they're going to be that is the PNR is going to be engaged in the tour and of course now that the Department of Education

is engaging them but we are just a few weeks away so in reality a lot of this should have taken place before the board was compiling the report but we are where we are we can only move forward and learn from this but this would not be the first time that I engaged public works Department of Health OSHA because even last year OSHA Ricky Dean Andrews was before this committee for last year's report so it's just we do this as a routine but more than a routine we have to see that the work is done the other issue and the issues we're facing is the certifications if you I read it but we can you know again that's available on public drive the information that that type section 24 but they were required to provide certifications we have to shift we have to move in a much more productive way in order for us to put together a good report and then us as a body making those actions with respect to the report i commend the burgeon's board of education because i've been tracking this report for quite the number of years before becoming a senator as well and the report continues to evolve but the board in putting together the report is not the body that's going to execute it it's a responsibility of the department of education

- 1:14:51 i will make note of just i'll make note madam clerk um we have an um a tardy letter from from Senate President Donna Fred Gregory if you want to read that into the record. A letter from the Honorable Donna A. Fred Gregory, President, 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands, dated July 15, 2022. Dear Chairperson Whitaker, please accept this letter as a formal notice of my late arrival to today's Committee on Education and Workforce Development meeting, which is scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. in the Fritz E. Luets Conference Room on St. Croix. Please have all circulated documents placed on my desk for immediate review upon my arrival. Thank you for your consideration on this matter. Kind regards, Donna A. Fred Gregory, President, 34th Legislature of the Virgin Islands.
- 1:15:43 Thank you, Madam Clerk. We'll now proceed with today's hearing. Just to note, I just a special note that we have um at least i want to know one of the testifiers has to leave at 12 o'clock um they did notify us ahead of time so we're going to go ahead and proceed i want to first off um for those who are block one please turn on your cameras um those who are our testifiers online. Thank you. Okay, I see everyone. Thank you and welcome for those who join us on via Teams. Please raise your right hand that's those in the well as well please raise your right hand as I read pursuant to a rule 507b of our rules and just you say I do after I repeat the statement do you solemnly affirm under penalty of perjury that a testimony will give to this committee will be the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth to the best of your knowledge and belief I didn't hear the folks on the line? Thank you. Yes. Thank you. Okay. Already our first testifier for today's hearing is the Virgin Islands Board of Education and here we have in the well today Dr. Kaisa Callwood. We also have Executive Director Dr. Stephanie Berry and the board on the committee chairperson of the committee that deals with the facilities, Emmanuel Perez-Cassius. Thank you and welcome. You may proceed with your testimony, Dr. Collwood. Good morning, Honorable Chairperson Genevieve Whitaker, members of the Committee on
- 1:17:41 Education and Workforce Development, other members of the 34th Legislature present, and the listening and viewing audiences. I am Dr. Kaiser A. Collwood, Chairman of the 20th Virgin Islands Board of Education here on after the board or VIBE. With me today, our board member Emanuela Perez Cassius, Chairperson of our School Plans and Facilities Committee, and Dr. Stephanie Berry, our Executive Director. I provide the following testimony as it pertains to the VIBE School Management and Accountability Report, SMAR, for the 2021-2022 school year. By way of background, the Virgin islands board of education annually submits the smart to the virgin islands legislature in accordance with 17 virgin islands code subsection 24 school management accountability the vibe created a 2021-2022 school year report to provide all vi stakeholders with critical data about the infrastructure of virgin islands of the virgin islands public school system it must be clear that the SMAR is not a report on the state of public education. Instead, it is an assessment based on the available data concerning the territory's public schools and VIBE school plans and facilities committee's multiple walkthroughs during the report period. As such, the scope of a report is limited to providing legislative recommendations for evaluating all public school facilities, school guidance divisions, and school administration in the Territory. In lieu of reading the entire SMAR report, which is attached to this testimony for ease of reference, I would highlight the VIBE's findings, concerns, and recommendations for the three main areas required by stature.
- 1:19:31 Public School Facilities 17 Virgin Islands Code Subsection 24 allows VIBE to utilize the services of the Departments of Planning and Natural Resources, Public Works, Health, Environmental Health Division, Occupational Health and Safety, OSHA, and the Virgin Islands Fire Service to carry out the provisions of this section. The VIBE requested information from these departments included but not limited to a identification of the significant maintenance needs of the school, b the schedule for completing maintenance, and c the cost estimate for major maintenance in addition to information gathered from spf committee walkthroughs during the report period reports were received from fire services arson and fire prevention and department of health doh environmental health and the child care and regulatory services division the review focus on facilities operation infection control and food and water safety detailed walkthrough inspection forms and reports from St. Croix Fire Services and the Department of Health were included in the SMAR. The VIBE reviewed the responses from the previously mentioned requests to all auxiliary agencies listed in the VI code for a comprehensive

assessment and evaluation of all public schools. Tables 1 and 2 in the SMAR provide a high-level review from two of the five auxiliary agencies which responded. The VIBE will continue to follow up with the respective reporting agencies to receive a status on the noncompliance areas identified and the missing school. A. SPF walkthroughs. The chart included in the SMAR identified areas of concern based on members' observations during the school walkthroughs. These areas will be revisited during the upcoming walkthroughs and discussion with the VIBE.

1:21:30 The VIBE reviewed responses to previously mentioned requests to all auxiliary agencies listed in the VI code for a comprehensive assessment and evaluation of all public schools. I think I read that already. B, arson and fire presentation. The unit reported on items to include lack of exit signage, missing smoke detectors, expired fire extinguishers, occupancy limits, leaking roofs, inoperable exhaust systems in the kitchen, leaking roofs and poor drainage system creating fall hazards and inoperable panic bar systems. There were no reports provided from the St. Thomas St. John District and not every school was reported on in the St. Croix District. C, environmental health child regulatory services.

1:22:17 The health inspection performed focus on the area of food service and formal complaints received from concerned citizens. Numerous infractions were found including mold around coolers, drainage concerns, fencing and playground equipment and disrepair, lack of outlet protectors, issues with pest control, access to toilets and sinks, and leaking roof. Compliance orders were presented to the School Lunch Authority regarding related infractions. DOH conducted a follow-up inspection and the School Lunch Authority received a full compliance confirmation. The DOH did not report on every schools in the district. No other reporting agency compiled the VIBE's request in the St. Thomas, St. John, and St. Croix districts.

1:23:02 The agencies included in the small legislation must evaluate school readiness and deficiencies and prioritize their responsibilities to the public education system of the Virgin Islands. The reports submitted to the VIBE are systematically and historically deficient and do not reflect a true and accurate assessment of our public school facilities within the context of the jurisdictional authority. The VIBE's general concerns and recommendation. The time it takes to communicate with VIBE to request and reply, including VIBE's follow-up and incomplete responses from VIDE, remains a challenge. The VIBE's requests must be pro-terrorized, especially those related to health, safety, security, and regulatory compliance. School principals and the VIBE's inability to monitor progress online tremendously affects accountability in monitoring and evaluating progress with repairs at each school site. The VAI reported the implementation of an online maintenance system which should be accessible to all school site administrators. It is expected that this system will facilitate accurate responses to VAI's requests for information regarding maintenance of school plants and facilities. There is no dedicated funding source or line item and budget for maintenance sustainability. Unclear planning and agency expectations, hamper maintenance implementation, and project completion in both districts. The maintenance budget shortfalls regularly affect school facility maintenance projects and VIDE facilities upkeep and safety. The VIBE continues to support the establishment of the maintenance budget for each school in both districts. The consolidation of sites to house large numbers of students, staff, and faculty in schools are inadequate to safely accommodate large populations and impact modern, clean, and adequately equipped environments. There are no reports that confirm that there was a testing of air and water for each school site as required annually to be formed by the Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Hazard Administration, OSHA, and the Department of Plant and Natural Resources, DPNR, poured the VI code. Therefore, environmental concerns remain unaddressed. Based on a review of the updates on maintenance project provided by Divide, there was no clear explanation for the reprogramming of federal funds once a project was deemed complete. Given the apparent backlog of projects without set completion dates, updated information regarding federal fund expenditures pursuant to three Virgin Islands Code, subsection 96A5 for school plans and facilities is needed on a consistent basis. There's no specific detailed rollout plan for the 2022 summer repairs for reopening the new school year. There's no dedicated plan for the upkeep of school equipment, such as vehicles, air conditioners, kitchen, and vocational equipment. An adequate number of maintaining staff in each district,

1:26:05 for instance, we have 32 in the St. Croix District, 26 in the St. Thomas St. John District. Example, inefficient number of electricians, plumbers, and carpenters. Specific location for maintenance, warehouse, and office space are needed in the St. Thomas, St. John District. Lack of timely receipt of the impressed funding to school administrators results in site disparities. There is a need for the establishment of an inter-agency school plan construction, maintenance, and capital project reporting and tracking process to improve project completion accountability. Vast disparities in site upkeep between the districts could be addressed by establishing reporting processes. The St. Croix Central High School and the John H. Woodson Junior High School were reopened without VIBE certification in violation of 17 Virgin Islands Code subsection 24A to B. In the absence of school principal reports, there can be no determination as to the school plant needs and the impact of consolidating schools administration guidance counseling and maintenance there is no data presented that delineates implementation and evaluation of strategies and programs facilitated through the guidance counseling divisions which is the department purported to have been done throughout the school year to address matters such as

social emotional mental health behavioral concerns academic transition resulting from the pandemic virtual learning and school consolidation. Safety and security concerns. The VIDE Facilities Unit asserted that their approach has been to conduct through assessments of these facilities and create a plan to address those critical needs that affect safety and security issues. Safety issues are a significant concern particularly with the merger of school campuses in both districts. The VIDE visited some school sites as recently as June 3, 2022, to identify the level of appropriation for campuses have done to address such challenges as school fighting, active shooters on campus, student earthquakes, and fire drill. There is no evidence of a clear plan to address the excessive school fights and school safety. The security challenges inherent in the territory's open campuses are further exacerbated by downed fence lines, broken doors, and gates. Campuses still have inadequate lighting and open perimeters that are not supervised but are easily accessible to outsiders during the school day. The new Charlotte and Molly High School ANIC, for example, is easily accessible to outsiders, has inadequate school security personnel, and is enclosed by glass without blinds or shutters. Other concerns identified in campuses include school intercoms are either missing or nonexistent throughout the entire campus. Walkie-talkies are available but not adequate to assist with large-scale incidents. School cameras are non-operational since 2020 hurricanes. Inadequate number of school monitors, limited drill practices specifically for active shooter lockdowns and earthquakes, the emergency response plan is not posted on campuses nor accessible to school populations. The Vibe looks forward to receiving the requested update on the department school plans and facilities that includes updates on the most recent inspection salary completed and the timeline for implementation and completion of projects identified through the department's architectural and engineering consultants as high priority areas of concern.

1:29:49 Maintainer's priorities for the 2022-2023 school year, including the results of environmental and life and safety inspections. Results from the safety and security tours, including the input provided by the Virgin Islands Fire Services, VI Police Department, both districts rescue and emergency medical services unit. Previously requested school crisis management plans utilized in the 2021-2022 school year, a requirement of VIBE school-based comprehensive emergency response plan and drills. At all school crisis management plans updated after the June 2022 safety and security tours. School Guidance Division. There is no doubt that the educational landscape has changed drastically, especially in the Virgin Islands due to the global pandemic. The Vibe recognizes school guidance divisions are an essential part of supporting each student's attainment of his or her full potential. Unfortunately, there is very little data and or evaluation provided by the department on guidance division areas for all students. For example, efforts made during that report period to direct academic growth and vocational maturity. Special education students. In absence of data, the VIBE is unable to confirm the VID's assertions that they continue providing special education services to students during the report period. This includes a report from the special education professionals they identify as being responsible for executing tasks through various mediums that are linked to their caseload and based on each individual's child's individualized educational plan, IEP. Socio-emotional wellness programs for students and staff. There was no confirmation of the stated additional school counselor's training required to meet the current and updated, upcoming salary needs of VIDE students. The St. Croix District has adopted a collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, CASEL, framework, which lays out key district activities

1:32:06 for high-quality systematic implementation of social and emotional learning, SEL, which is integral to the education and human development. The Sistema St. John District reported that its mental health wellness plan accomplished many of its goals within its three-part strategy, current, immediate, and long-term. Additionally, while far-reaching and well-articulated, VIBE has been unable to confirm the actual implementation of various school emotional learning, SEL, and specific academic objectives for each grade level, i.e. self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, self-management, and responsible decision-making. The VIBE was unable to observe and or confirm the school year 2021-2022 implementation of these programs. Pass rate dropout. No data was available for the entire report period regarding student pass fail rate. The VIBE was able to discuss in detail the reports provided by VIBE on the day of the meeting. VIBE's reported pass fail rate in the first semester showed that seventh grade level had the lowest passing rate of 61.1%, and first grade level had the highest of 88.5%. Female students were reported a slightly higher pass rate, 78.8%, than male students, 73.5%. No information was provided on the dropout rate for the reporting period to compare to the data provided earlier this year regarding prior school years. Furthermore, the VIBE did not receive a response its request for an analysis of these findings based on VIBE's evaluation of the data presented and any corrective measures implemented or that will be implemented to decrease the dropout rate. The VIBE also requested information on possible reasons for dropout rates above 3 be provided if available. School administration.

1:34:11 The ultimate goal of both the VIBE and VIBE is to deliver a quality educational experience for all students teachers and administration principal reports details include school staffing guidance information including special education and early childhood programming school site maintenance the status of regular and hazard drills confirmation of safe working conditions and reported incidents these reports should be also include challenges or deficiencies and school improvement

plans for the upcoming school year in september 2021 school administrators through the Commissioner were required to submit principal reports to VIBE after the end of the first marking period. During the walkthrough, administrators confirmed all reports were completed. Unfortunately, despite repeated requests for these reports, none were received prior to the completion of the SMAR. High School Transformation Plan. As reported in the SMAR, the VIBE provided VIBE with information on plans for major changes to take place in all four high schools in the upcoming school year. The Board immediately provided its concerns, including the implementation of flexible schedule formats in the absence of adequate staffing and giving short implementation turnaround time once the final plan is completed. Lack of data, research, and or evaluation of one, the hybrid approach currently in place in SY 2021-2022 and how said data guides to propose approach for the SY 2022-2023 include timeline for implementation. Promotion slash retention data, for example, what are recurring themes associated with a nine grade retention rate of almost 50% and how is this data used to guide a new plan, including support services? Alternative strategies the department has used to address root causes of low performance as shown in the slide shared. Assessment platforms and tools utilized to support student success. The maximum class enrollment versus decreasing student population, what realistic impact will this change have on improving the school proficiency data represented in VIDE's presentation? The current process for evaluating, coaching, slash mentoring, and when necessary, disciplining underperforming school personnel. Student retention is an indicator of how well a school ensures academic success and promotion, slash graduation. Few details on the new program offerings and how and when they will be implemented.

1:36:48 For example, virtual, in-person, grade levels, scheduling, impact on graduation, requirements, et cetera. The need to review the reference principal master plans and or any documentation to support proposed changes to the current black schedule, including documented feedback from principals, irrespective of whether they are in favor or opposed. The Vibe needs to review a complete and detailed high school transformation plan to be implemented in the upcoming school year with targeted strategies to address student achievement. For example, smarter balance assessments, more than 17 of students have been performing below proficiency expectation in ELA and over 80% in MAT for years, and specific measures being implemented address efficiency as revealed in the data they presented. VIVA, Virgin Islands Virtual Academy. As reported in the SMART, the Virgin Islands Virtual Academy, VIVA, was represented by VIDE as a pilot program to address theater shortages and to address the needs of students who may have had underlying conditions preventing them from attending school in person. VIDE did not inform VIDE that VIVA would be a permanent online school as part of the educational product. On June 7, 2022, the VIDE discuss VEBA with the VIDE's professional staff and higher education committee, along with other members of the governing board. The overarching concern is that VEBA will continue with many concerns left undressed by VIDE concerns.

1:38:25 The VIDE maintain this position, sorry, that VEBA is a program, not a school. However, VIDE has assigned VIVA its own administrators, counselors, specialists, et cetera, which are key components with a standalone school environment. As it pertains to the Smarter Balanced and iReady assessment, VIDE did not confirm that VIVA students were allowed to go to their home school to test, and the data reports regarding student performance, including grades, attendance, and standardized test results, This aggregated by grade level, school, and subject slash courses are available. Confirmation from school-based principals that Viva vendor collaborated with them to build Viva students' schedules and disseminate them to students. There has been no submission of the following important pieces of information on Viva. Principals and school counselors, yeah, and reports for both districts. Information regarding students who regain access their home school schedule upon completion of a semester in the VIVA program and before the end of the year. Divide VIVA personnel's tool used to perform virtual observations, copies and results of students and parent opinion surveys, evaluation of all VIVA students, submission of data that conforms compliance with existing curriculum and standards utilized by school students attended prior to VIVA or submission of the actual curriculum and standards utilized by VIVA vendor. The target date for upcoming summer projects to align Converse and PowerSchool. Explanation as to how students enroll in VIVA will meet the physical education requirement for graduation. Submission of the complete plan for elementary inclusion since the department indicated that VIVA would expand to include students in K through 12 grades. Clare plan for completion of VI history requirements by the 35 VIVA instructors recently conditionally certified by the VIBE and for ensuring that all online teachers hired by proximity learning contractor are certified and teaching in the area of certification. Recommendation for online learning.

1:40:37 While VIBE recognizes the value of online learning and embraces that VIBE efforts to provide options and address teacher shortages, the board requires that VIBE provide critical information on such a major initiative that impacts students' education. There must be frank conversations, genuine collaboration, monitoring and evaluation, and data reports to ensure that our students are getting the best possible learning experiences. Expansion to involve all students from kindergarten can present getting the best possible learning experiences. Expansion to involve all students from kindergarten can present other challenges that should be given consideration. A thorough analysis of VIVA, its

challenges and successes, as well as student and staff data, so that decision can be made for continuation and improvements to VIVA. Both above all, there must be submission of a clear plan of continuation of VIVA in the 2022-2023 school year, including criteria for student acceptance in VIVA, local staffing, VIDE observations and evaluation protocols, access to students' daily attendance and grades by home-based principals and other issues related to how students will meet promotion and graduation requirements. 20th Virgin Islands Board of Education 2021-2022 recommendation for VIBE and the legislators. Funding. The VIBE recommends that the legislature provide funds specifically to provide school sites and facilities greater security and safety measures in addition to much-needed interagency online tracking database, school ground maintenance equipment and ongoing environmental monitoring of air and water quality in all occupied school plants and facilities. Jurisdictional authority. The VIB requests authority under the law to authorize the opening and closing of schools, including emergency shutdown or permanent site closures. The VIB recommends amending 17 Virgin Islands Code, subsection 24 language, to one, require auxiliary agencies to annually submit a report as provided in subsection D of this section, and two, establish a clear timeline and deadline for submission of this report. For example, no later than 30 days following the start of the school year. We also recommend all reports from said agencies be simultaneously submitted to VIBE and VIDE. The VIBE recommends including language under Title 17 that mandates a commissioner of education to report on the state of education to VIBE two weeks before the reopening of school to inform all education stakeholders. The VIBE recommends adding language to Title 17 stating 60 days after receiving the SMAR,

1:43:51 the Legislature's Education and Workforce Development Committee shall hold a hearing to address concerns and recommendations made by VIBE. Administration recommendation. The VIBE recommends divide to hire a person with education and experience in project management, mechanical and electrical engineering, planning and logistics, construction management, maintenance and facilities management to provide oversight for school plants and facilities maintenance. It is the role of the VIBE to recommend to the legislature appropriation of funds for public schools public schools and public education. The board has consistently supported requests to fund major repairs of schools. However, data is needed to make informed decisions regarding these responsibilities. As such, the VIBE requests the governor to support compliance with three Virgin Islands Codes of section 96A5 by directing the commissioner of education to provide VIBE with quarterly status reports on the use of federal funds received and spent. Collaboration and recommendation. The VIBE should be invited to participate in meetings with the VIBE regarding the use of federal funds and receive timely reports from VIBE on such expenditures, including project status updates. Compliance with VIBE's authority to recommend the establishment of public schools, 17 Virgin Islands Code, Subsection 21A, requires a vibe to include in discussions that impact school plants and facilities, for example, school consolidations and new school construction. In conclusion, all public school facilities

1:45:40 through the Virgin Islands are in various stages of disrepair. Given the age of our schools and the decades of inconsistent maintenance practice, process and progress, the territory must realistically re-imagine its public school facilities. The VIBE remains committed to working with the department in support of creating a safe and healthy learning environment for our students, teachers, and support staff. The SMARL highlights the information collected through the 2021 school year and reflects the dedicated work of the VIBE, specifically School Plans and Facilities Committee, chaired by Emanuela Perez-Cassias, to conduct multiple and thorough site visits of the territory's public school. We hope that the information provider will assist all lawmakers, the VI Department of Education, officials, and the Brian Roach Administration in making informed evaluation of the territory's public school facilities, school guidance, and school administration. We remain available to respond to your inquiries at the appropriate time. Thank you, Chairwoman Whitaker.

1:46:53 Thank you Dr. Colwood and before I move to the next testifier what is um what I really appreciate and you guys hit it spot on you um to this body we're going through the budgetary process we find get information that's necessary so that we can make those those changes and I will also note that as the chairwoman I've sent numerous principles letters and requests for work orders and so on um but I haven't received them myself either but we're going to continue move forward. I think one day we're going to see as we continue to move forward as a people and let's get the right people in the right positions. I will also emphasize too that I did on more than one occasion attempt through to revise Title 70, Section 24, and much of what Dr. Kahlwood just testified to as the chairman of the Board of Education, he indicated that in fact auxiliary entities should be mandated by law because despite the code requiring these as all is a azzlery agencies to do so they're not doing that we now move on to our next testifier we have assistant commissioner um sims um she who's in here in the commissioner husa and canastro instead thank you and welcome and you may proceed with your testimony on behalf of the department of health yeah good morning honorable senator genevieve whitaker chair of commission education and workforce development all other members of the 34th legislature of the virgin islands of the united states and the listening and viewing audience i'm dr nicole cragwell sims acting commissioner while the honorable

commissioner who's thinking is out of the territory i have with me today deputy commissioner hadia charles our legal counsel marquise taylor jones

1:48:45 and Director Wanson Harris of the Environmental Health Division. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in the Virgin Islands Department of Health's position regarding the status of the 2022-23 reopening of schools, specifically the school accountability report addressing the safety, health administration, maintenance, and overall operations of the territory's schools. The Division of Environmental Health conducts yearly inspections at the Department of Education's school lunch program. These inspections ensure the safe consumption of food served to students, best practices to prevent foodborne illnesses, and act as an intervention to outbreaks. While foodborne illness outbreaks are rare, unfortunately, they can still occur.

1:49:30 In the United States, between 2009 and 2015, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention received reports of over 5,000 foodborne disease outbreaks, making thorough inspections of this magnitude essential. There are five major risk factors related to food-borne illnesses and employees' behaviors and preparation practices to include improper holding temperatures, inadequate cooking, contaminated equipment, food from unsafe sources, and poor personal hygiene. The risk-based inspections conducted by the Environmental Health Division address control for risk factors and further establish five key public health interventions to protect the student's health these interventions include demonstration of knowledge employee health controls controlling hands as a vehicle to contamination time and temperature parameters for controlling pathogens and advisory it is a shared responsibility of the department of health and the virgin alice department of education to ensure that food provided to the students is safe and does not become a vehicle in a disease outbreak or in a transmission of communicable disease the shared responsibility is extended to ensuring that student expectations are met and that food is pure prepared in a clean environment and ethically presented inspections conducted by staff must align with fda food code as written to ensure the cafeteria and feeding area is safe these protocols are supervision presence demonstration of knowledge and duties employee health response to contamination events good hygienic practices approved sources observation labels and packaging protection from contamination time temperature control for safety foods consumer advisory highly sustainable populations food color add additives and toxic substances conformance with approved procedures safe food and water food temperature control food identification utensils equipment and venting and physical facilities further the department of health works collaboratively to protect the health

1:51:49 safety and wellness of the student population by offering immediate support to the department of education in establishing safe and reliable guidelines and increasing our capacity to respond in the event of health crises the virginal department of health maintains strong recommendations prior to the opening of schools these recommendations are based on the department of education's internal assessment ensure the schools buildings and facilities are appropriately cleaned and sanitized ensure all school restrooms are fully functional flushing water systems at every facility by running the water for five minutes establish a plan to frequently clean all surfaces and rooms with allowable forms of different effectants outline detailed plan for managing sick students employees or staff members educate staff teachers and faculty and how to monitor symptoms and recognize when a student should be removed from class and sent to the school nurse maintain a supply of hand sanitizers ppe or personal protective equipment and soap for emergency use and create and post signage that reinforce and teach good hygiene measures though the risk of cover 19 from touches low high touch surfaces within the school setting doors handles refrigerator handles desks chairs etc must be cleaned at least twice daily surfaces in contact with all food to include dishes countertops utensils and tables must be washed rinsed and sanitized as outlined in the virginal's department of health guidance the department division of environmental health will continue to fulfill its regulatory responsibilities which include education and training of the staff at the vide or virginality department of education to ensure safe food practices as always we would like to thank the virginal department of health staff and in particular the staff at our environmental health division who continue

1:53:54 to work towards a healthy community in conclusion senator whitaker the department of health is committed to reducing health risk increasing access to quality health care and enforcing health standards we're also very much willing and looking forward to continued collaboration and communication with the members of the 34th legislature we thank you for your support and continue our efforts in working collaboratively i welcome the opportunity to respond to any questions you may have thank you assistant commissioner sims for your testimony and we will now you're also there along with uh do you have any else anybody else who's going to be testifying along with you for department of health in today's era i do have on the call with me yes senator i do have deputy commissioner hadia charles i have our legal counsel miss marquise taylor jones and the director of environmental health mr wansan harris thank you we'll now move on to the fire services as represented by assistant director antonio stevens for director on behalf of director daryl george you may proceed assistant director stevens with your testimony good morning honorable chairwoman jenny buddhiker other members of the committee at education and workforce development and the listening and viewing audience i am antonio stephens the assistant director of the virgin enterprise service and medical services i appear before you today to provide

testimony on the role of this service in the annual assessment and evaluation of the public schools facilities title 17 section 24 of the virginia's cold tasks the virginia's board of education with conducting yearly assessments and evaluations of the schools with the assistance of several other agencies to include the fire service pursuant to this law upon request by the board we conducted fires and life safety inspections

- 1:56:08 at the school's facilities and submitted reports with the findings these inspections were conducted in accordance with title 23 chapter 9 of the version as code which establishes the version the territory's fire prevention code and the national fire protection agency codes adapted and adhered to by this service as it applies to schools within a territory prevention is the key to eliminating the conditions that may contribute to the cause of any fire or loss of life apart from arson major causes of school fires include improper handling and storage of flammable liquids overloaded electrical outlets and excessive cumulative combustible materials during the fire safety inspection some of the concerns of the inspector are as follows general housekeeping storage of all flammable materials timely servicing of extinguishers installation and upper upper ability of emergency lights the condition of covering electrical equipment and wiring the occupancy load and exits in areas of assembly such as auditoriums gymnasiums and multipurpose rooms and the visibility of signs indicating the load and exits the frequency of fire drills the accessibility of emergency access points for fire department apparatus the proper maintenance of means of egress stairways doors and other exits must be proper being proper working condition exit doors must be easily open from the side of egresses for example only one locking or latching device is permitted in
- 1:58:06 any exit door lacking devices that require the use of a key tool or special knowledge to open from the eager side of the door are strictly prohibited exit discharges areas of outside the area must be clear of debris accumulation accumulations that could impede egress a comprehensive inspection of the school includes but is not limited to the following an inspection of every room and building on the school campus including classrooms closets storage rooms hallways stairwells evaluate elevators offices kitchens restrooms hvac units boiler rooms and electrical rooms i check of all out buildings bleachers and the campus grounds including the review of maintenance records for fire hydrants fire department connections a check of critical life safety systems such as fire alarms sprinkler systems and a review of their test reports a review of the school fire logs and the school's emergency plan a check of all exits the means of egress to ensure that they are clear and accessible and all emergency systems and devices are operational when possible these inspections are conducted jointly with the school safety representative or an administrator a representative of the school is immediately made aware of any deficiencies or fire code violations a written inspection report containing a plan of action and schedule for corrections is sent to the school administrator and the department of education we at vi f ems take this responsibility seriously assessing the territory school remains committed to assisting the version as far i mean the version of the department of education keeping the learning environment safe senator i stand ready to answer any questions you
- 2:00:19 may have thank you thank you this is the director stevens we're going to now um before we proceed to run the questions i'm just going to take a very brief two minute break and then we're going to proceed with our first round of questions the committee on educational workforce development sands in recess for two minutes. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you.
- 2:06:10 Thank you. is now back on the record we're out of recess we're going to proceed oh if I want to just make a note hold on we have to hold tight committee on education workforce development stands in recess for one minute good afternoon if you're just also just tuning into today's hearing welcome again to the committee on education workforce development we're back out of recess back on the record we're going to proceed and we're going to do seven minutes of questioning and our first I um over there St. Thomas, Senator Carla Joseph. You may proceed with your questions.
- 2:08:00 Thank you so much Madam Chair and a pleasant good day to you and to our colleagues as well as the people of the Virgin Islands and to the testifiers today. I want to just commend the testifiers who came today prepared to answer questions and to make their presentation. I, for one, deeply appreciate that you made some time to be here with us and to have a discussion and you found it important and critical to appear and to do your work as you are called to do by loss. I really want to commend you for that. I would start out my questioning with the Board of Education.
- 2:08:47 First of all, again, I want to commend the Board of Education. I think you're doing an awesome job, a really stellar job in keeping up with a lot of these assessments that you are charged with in our code to perform. And you see the seriousness of providing this information to the legislature as you are mandated and required to do by law. And I also want to commend the chair of the Committee on Facilities, Ms. Emanuela Perez Casillas, for doing a really good job on getting these assessments done so that we could really see what is happening and something is written and articulated and memorialized in print on your efforts to do this work.
- 2:09:52 Because it takes a lot of effort, I know, and to get all the persons and stakeholders at the table to perform and do their due diligence and the work that is required. So let me just start off with the Board of Education. Mr. rather, Dr. Calwood, I wanted to ask you, when were these assessments done? What time frame did you do the assessment to produce the actual

2021-2022 school management accountability report?

- 2:10:31 Because it's really thorough. Go ahead. These assessments would have begun from last school year. School year usually begins in September all the way up to May when it's out. Okay, so it's an ongoing process with you, and you have conversations with all the stakeholders, correct? That's correct. So this is a report that we do every year, so we're getting ready to prepare for the new one for this upcoming school year. Very well, very well. I noted that we you are missing some reports from your partner agencies who are also mandated to provide reports who did not submit you any report based on the report with criteria I believe the Department of Public Works we didn't get none from the department of planning and natural resources and as well as osha and department of labor yes true department of labor osha and so it's three three entities that you haven't gotten any type of reporting response and they did not fulfill their requirements to provide and to do their duties i also noted you mentioned and i'm on page four of your of your testimony you indicated that there were no reports page 4b there were no reports provided for the saint thomas saint john district and not every school was reported on in the saint croix district this is for the fire miss mr stephens what's happening with that how is it you aren't reporting on every school which schools are missing uh fire prevention arson and fire
- 2:12:25 prevention reports dr carwood from the fired services i will have to look in the um our report to give you that information if you give me a second yes because it wasn't clear in your report here and then i also noted dr sims i i don't mean to chop up are you really i really want to tell you i really appreciate it but it's it's a little incomplete it's incomplete work i know everybody is busy i know we have a lot on our shoulders and it's how we just manage our time so dr sims and this may go to also the chairman of the board of education the board of education Which reports, it's stated here in C as well, on page four, the Department of Health did not report on every school in the districts. And especially, let me let you know, Dr. Sims, we had a major issue here in the St. Thomas, St. John districts, and I'm sure you're aware that there was an occasion where we had teachers, paraprofessionals striking outside of the legislative building. This was a couple months back, and they were talking specifically about the conditions of the cafeteria as well as the conditions of the school lunch program.
- 2:13:57 It's imperative. I know, I believe, Ms. Sims, you graduated from a local public high school. Dr. Sims? I did, yes. Charlotte and Molly. Yes, and I'm sure it's painful to you to see all of these findings and where we are right now with the state of education because you have some level of onus and you have a chicken hog pride in your schools and how you were educated here in the Virgin Islands and you're staying here to provide the services that are needed to uplift our people, your people. And so it's disheartening for me when I look at reports and I'm seeing incomplete, because I know from Charlotte Amali High School, they didn't turn out any persons who are incomplete. And so sending in an incomplete report. So tell us, Dr. Sims or Dr. Carwood, where are we with getting these reports completed? I could respond in terms of your question regarding what reports weren't received from fire or the Department of Health. If when you're ready let me know.
- 2:15:13 Kindly. Okay. Tell us. Run it down for us now. Dr. Carwood. You got your information. For fire service in the St. Croix district we didn't receive any information. Turn. Go ahead. You want to proceed on the Chair's time. Madam Chair. Yes. You want to proceed on the Chair's time. any information for Paul B. Laskin pre-K through eight, for Fire Lumuckle K through six, Ricardo Richards K through six. We didn't receive one for Alfredo Andrews, John H. Woodson, Yulalie Rivera, and then of course in St. Thomas, Lachlan Elementary School, Alaef Muller Elementary School, Joseph Gomez, Charlotte and Molly High School, both the CBER Shelter, and Joseph Siboli.
- 2:16:00 For the environmental health, for innocent... Don't go too far, Dr. Carwood, wait for me. Wait for me. Now, you didn't mention St. John at all. You received any for St. John? No. We didn't receive anything from fire for St. John either. No, no. Okay, continue. For environmental health, we didn't receive information for Alfredo Andrews, John H. Woodson, and St. Croix, I'm sorry, Yulia Rivera, and Claudio Marco.
- 2:16:44 Okay. Thank you. Madam Chair, I just want to wrap up because I think you equated seven minutes and i think it's two less of time i'm hoping that we'll have a second round because i do have a significant amount of questions to ask the board of education as well as fire and health because i i would like to follow up and ask them really when are they going to do these inspection or is it going to be for this school year mr antonio stevens hi good uh good morning what a good afternoon and and i i thank you for the question i'm i'm not here to um have any conflict with anyone uh but let me be clear i'm looking at both reports for both districts uh in the sanctuary district uh the date that the the report was completed was april 6 2022 it was sent to um miss emmanuel perez cassius um and the only school that was missing on that report and it was an oversight by by us was the lumaca school um for the saint thomas and john district um it was sent to mr carwood um i didn't list all the schools i i could go down the list to the schools that was that was done but these reports madam madam chair i know my time has been called but this is vital information because it goes towards something that mr callwood said about communication so so senator joseph and get this straightened out this house have to get in order um i agree hold tight so what i what i want to emphasize it's um senator it's okay if you go beyond the time it's just if you

look around the room and see who the number of senators are here we're going to be fine with you doing a file. If you just want to wrap up so we can move on to Senator Potter,

2:18:46 then we can definitely circle back. But as you indicate, as we as committee members request additional documentation, the schools and certification reports that have not been received, that's something that we're doing during this process. And as you know, I request information following the hearings, also during the hearings, so we can also see if they would be able to, between the board and the fire service, we'll be able to reconcile their files. and send to the committee that document for which they're to validate that. But we need to move on to the next senator, but we can certainly circle back.

2:19:21 And you all of us, of course, welcome to ask your additional inquiries. Understood. So if they could complete their thoughts and their assessment on your time, Madam Chair, that would be helpful. And because I have 10,000 questions to ask, and I'm hoping to get answered at least one. Thank you so much, Madam Chair, for the time. And your question was directed to Assistant Director Stephens as well, Dr. Calwood. And also Acting Commissioner Dr. Sims. Okay. And what is the exact question in terms of the schools that have not been certified? So Assistant Stephens said that he has the list that he provided to Mrs. Perez-Casias.

2:20:11 Assistant Director Stephens, you want to provide the list of students, sorry, list of certification reports for those schools. What other schools? I think it needs to be on the record, Madam Chair, that what was submitted by FHIR, because it's represented on the record here by the Board of Education, that they were lacking certain school reports and also help. I think it would be beneficial for the record to be clear on that, Madam Chair.

2:20:43 That's why I'm asking that they respond on your time. Thank you. He's about to answer. Both of them will be answering. Assistant Director Stephens and then Dr. Sims. So, again, Assistant Director Stephens here, was asked for our service. Senator, there was only one school that was not submitted in the St. Croix District, and that was the Little Muckles School. might have been an oversight or just not on the report but um and then in the st thomas st john district um the list of schools the lockout elementary school the cancrine high school joseph gomez elementary school alamala elementary school the um jane e toit elementary school the Beretta C. Bushelty Junior High School, the Joseph Sibley Elementary School, the Joseph Sibley Monroe Annex, and the Yvonne Wysbowski Elementary School, Charlotte Merley High School are the schools that were inspected by the Virgin Islands Passage.

2:21:54 I didn't hear you say Eudora Keane on in the St. Thomas District but we instead of this gap of time what I would just ask to you Assistant Director Stevens if you can send to the committee you can certainly respond to my chief of staff and you can get that that rectified and also part of today's official record dr sims if you want just a follow-up for regarding the department of health submissions to the board of education sure dr nicole craigle sims acting commissioner department of health uh so the environmental health division for the department of health's responsibility is to do food inspection and for those schools that appear to be missing or no report submitted that is because they've indicated to us that they were not providing food service so all schools were inspected from a covid crisis health crisis standpoint and the schools that indicated that they were not doing food or handling food are the ones that were not inspected because all of our reports dovetail the department of education's internal reports and my directors here as well if you have any detailed questions relative to that director harris is also available to respond to those thank you senator joseph any other follow-up to that then we'll move on to senator potter i'll wait madam chair i will wait um my next round because we have other senators who are here as well thank you thank you senator joseph senator potter you may proceed for your questions And I also want to recognize at this time, if I am seeing clearly, Senator President Donald Frank Gregory. Welcome. Good afternoon. Senator Potter, you may proceed with your questions.

2:23:54 Thank you very much. Senator Saru is also present. Oh, my apologies. Madam Chair. Yes, thank you, Senator. Please mark also Senator Saru as present. Madam Clerk. All right. Good afternoon, all. Good afternoon, Madam Chair, to the people of the Virgin Islands, and a special good afternoon to our testifiers who are here with us today. To be honest, I am really a little lost as to what question I'm going to ask the testifiers here today. I must confess, most of my questions really were going to be directed towards the Department of Education, since we were dealing with the accountability report that the Board of Education did, and they had a slew of recommendations and just a whole lot of unanswered questions that I believe only the Department of Education will be in a position to answer. Not showing shade at the commissioner, at the acting commissioner, because I understand that he is out on a medical, dealing with some medical issues.

2:25:02 But it would have been nice for someone or a team of persons from the Department of Education to be present to attempt to offer some explanations or some answers. We are on the eve of a new school year. And to be honest, and I want to ask Dr. Callowell this question. from hearing and reading the report and reading the summary and the recommendations, if I were grading the Department of Education with respect to our schools and the physical plant of our schools and the readiness to accept our young people for the 2021, 2022 school year, the grade would not be a good one. So I would love

to, it probably, I don't know, I think it would be a D at best.

2:26:05 And it is something that should concern all of us. And I am just a little unsure as to what questions to ask. But Dr. Caldwell, I'm going to start with you. Since I know the Board of Education, the primary authors of the report, and you are the one, you and the folks at VIBE who are on the ground assessing the conditions of our schools. And just right off the bat, what jumps out to you as your biggest concern with respect to the condition of our schools and their readiness to accept our students for the upcoming school year?

2:26:46 Well, what jumps out for us will be immediately the safety and security concerns of our campuses. IN ADDITION TO MANY OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS, TO ENSURE THAT OUR STUDENTS ARE IN A COMFORTABLE SETTING FOR A SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND A SAFE SPACE. IN TERMS OF, I KNOW YOU MADE A COMMENT ABOUT THE STUFF THAT WAS IN THE REPORT, BUT OF COURSE, ABSENCE OF INFORMATION RECEIVING FROM THE RESPECTIVE AGENCIES, HENCE WHY THE REPORT WILL PAINT A PARTICULAR PICTURE. IF WE WERE ABLE TO GET ALL THE DOCUMENTATION AND PUT IT TOGETHER, MAYBE A DIFFERENT PICTURE would have been painted. So I would say the absence of the information, not getting from the agencies or on time or if they have it and it didn't come true directly to us, of course the report is due at a certain time and we can't be just waiting. But however, in our wisdom, true, the executive director, I know I harass her sometimes, but she's very good with following up and following through and reminding you very, very, very good with that. That is excellent.

2:27:49 And I know, so really and truly, the question really is we've asked the Department of Education to provide feedback on certain aspects of the report, but you have been unable to receive timely responses. So hearing that, maybe the conditions of the school might be better than we might think. But the fact is that we haven't received the feedback. from the Department of Education, so it just leaves more questions than answers.

2:28:27 I know that the Board of Education is statutorily required to develop a schedule and propose timelines for addressing the concerns identified in the inspection and assessment and evaluation process. Has there been any timelines discussed with the Department of Education regarding timelines for addressing concerns? I mean, has there been any sort of high-level discussions with the Department of Education on anything relative to addressing some of our most pressing concerns?

2:29:07 good afternoon everyone dr. Stephanie Berry executive director for the Virgin Islands Board of Education senator in reference to you your inquiry there has been repeated discussions verbally and in writing regarding the timelines for inspections for updates we've had various meetings with the education Stakeholders including the Department of Education. We even had a preliminary meeting with the Honorable Governor Albert Bryan, Jr relative to encouraging a more collaborative environment our schedules We remain flexible as the governing board of the Virgin Islands The department for the most part has been amenable to inspections However the follow-through and the follow-up with specific guidelines or timelines for we're implementing, or when things don't go according to what was discussed, providing a status, there has been some challenges in receiving that information during our follow-up inquiries.

2:30:17 Okay, thank you for that, Dr. Berry. I know one of the things that we, I mean, there's no secret, we've been seeing this in the national news almost on a weekly basis, and there's been a string real high-profile mass shootings in our public schools, resulting in large numbers of our young children dying or being injured. I know we haven't had, thank God, knock on wood, any significant feedback of any sort of mass shooting or crisis on our school campuses, but because it hasn't happen. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't prepare. Is there any discussion, and I know I think Dr. Calwood mentioned the openness of our campus, are there any discussions particularly put out there regarding how do we address, how do we safeguard our children from experiencing any of these major high-profile disasters on our school campus, and I know the school campuses on St. Thomas tends to be a lot more open. Are there any discussions on addressing, you know, how do we ensure, I don't know if we have cameras on the the campus. Are there any intentional dialogue and discussions concerning the safety of our schools with respect to outsiders just gaining ready access from a school that really doesn't have a perimeter fencing and the like? Is that a specific discussion that we've had?

2:32:09 And Dr. Carlwood, I'm asking you, and Dr. Berry, because you're the only ones here, with an education connection. Is that something that we've had some discussions actively on? Safety and security of our school campuses have always been a priority with the Virgin Islands Board of Education. For many years now, we've had a policy entitled School-Based Comprehensive Emergency Responses Plan and Drills. And part of that requirement is that the department provide us on an annual basis with a crisis management plan for each of our schools. We have in the past let's say 6 to 12 months reminded the agency, the department rather, of the need for us to continue to update based on the footprint of each campus. More recently as a result of us being notified publicly about the tours that they had.

- 2:33:06 We reached out to Acting Commissioner Victor Soem III to again remind them of their commitment through our policy to provide us with the crisis management and also to give us the opportunity to look at the results of those school safety and security tours. So the dialogue has been going on. Unfortunately as a result of the national media events that have taken place, it's come home to roost that what the board has been asking for by policy over the years is now becoming a reality and i appreciate the fact that the department is taking it seriously and we look forward to the opportunity to read those updated crisis management reports for each school thank you for that i know i know it's easy to have things on paper and sometimes having something on paper is just that it's on paper but my concern and my hope is that we have you know some specific and some specific action plans actionable items that can realistically be implemented it. I'm looking at page six of your testimony, Dr. Calwood, socio-emotional wellness programs for students and staff. There was no confirmation of the stated additional school counselors training required to meet the current and upcoming needs of Virgin Islands Department of Education um, students. Um, can you elaborate a little bit on, on that?
- 2:34:56 Senator Potter, uh, uh, please, through the chair, excuse Dr. Callwood, who has to leave at this time. So I will answer your question. Um, with regards to the SEL, social emotional learning, uh, there have been plans, uh, put in place and discussed at length with us. However, However, we have not been able to observe those plans take effect. With regards to the counselor training, it was reported by the department that in school year 2020, I believe, that there was an initial training for the school counselors and that was just supposed to be the first part. However, during the report period, which is 21-22, there was no indication or confirmation that the school counselors continued to receive any additional training in that area.
- 2:35:42 the need for us to note that in the report okay i'm concerned because just the issue of our students mental health is something that is very very critical i think we've been hearing a lot more about the importance of us addressing the psychological and mental health and behavioral health needs of our young people particularly i think we've shined a light on that particularly in the wake of COVID-19. Just shifting gears a little bit, Dr. Berry, and I want to ask you, to your knowledge, how does one get enrolled in VIVA? That's your vocational, the virtual program that you mentioned.
- 2:36:32 it has been represented to the board of education by the department that students are identified through a recommendation process that's been conferred with the administrator of their home school meaning their camp home campus in consultation with the school counselor and the parental guardian and that's what has been represented to the board of education by the department okay um and it's not that it's not that there isn't any structure to the program it's just that we have not we have not received any um you have not received any feedback as to the structure and the rules and the guidelines We've had discussions but we were not able to observe any of the structure that was reported as being in place by the Department of Education. In our presentation we also list as a result of a recent discussion with the department relative to VIVA what our concerns were. As a pilot program the assumption can be made that they're still trying to work out the kinks and that there are some deliverables that they are trying to achieve prior to the new school year which includes reporting on the items that are listed senator okay thank you dr barry i mean we you know and i appreciate you i appreciate your feedback um you know but most of the really most of the answers that we're seeking would come from the Department of Education, in my view.
- 2:38:24 Dr. Simms, good morning, good afternoon to you. I know you mentioned about the issues of the role of the Department of Health with respect to... It's seven minutes, Senator. I know you mentioned the issue of foodborne illnesses and the role of the Department of Health in that regard. Under your watch, while you have been serving in that capacity, has there been any issues relative to any significant foodborne illnesses with respect to in our public school system? No, there haven't been any that have been, no. Short answer, no. Director Harris is also here if you had any further details, but no, we have not received it, sir.
- 2:39:17 Okay. All right. Thank you very much, testifiers. Madam Chair, thank you very much for the time. Most of my questions would have been directed towards the Department of Education, but, you know, they aren't here to respond. So thank you very much. Thank you, Senator Potter. I emphasize the same. I did request that, obviously I requested the Department of Education to come to today's hearing, but I just want to zone in on the fact that in order for the Board of Education to promulgate the report that was submitted to us on July 1st they needed all these entities who were responsible some have greater responsibility than others in section 24 and so today's and specifically the focus is on both the board education and the department education and I understand made every effort for this hearing to occur which also and we're up against a school year that is about to begin and then and I also emphasize that the 137 million dollars for this which for which this has been this matter has been before this committee on three separate occasions for those who are interested on the public you can actually read the entire report it is on the public drive it's also on the United States Department of Education's website because when we speak about dropper prevention there has been monies allocated to address those issues and learning loss. I'll now move on to Senator Saru for your questions. Thank you. Thank you Madam Chair and

good afternoon to all. I promise to be brief because um education isn't really here to respond to the questions that are um that we really have because we gave them five million we programmed five million from the pfa i think about 10 000

2 : 41 : 27 of that was spent um we have different tranches of money we have cga grants um we have arpa funds We have COVID funds, CARES Act, so when they come, I'll ask them, but education, grading policy, so education has a grading policy, and I realize the Board of Education sets the policy, and it's 40-40-10-10, 40% marking period, each semester, and then 10% is final, and 10% of the grade is mid-term. Schools will be giving the mid-term exams. So are you aware of that? What is this discussion the Board of Education have? Because yes, our school structures are them. So So Chairman Caldwell or Director Berry, are you aware of the change in the grading policy by the districts?

2 : 42 : 40 Senator, Dr. Stephanie Berry, Executive Director for the Virgin Islands Board of Education. I cannot say that I am personally aware of any modifications to the current graduation requirements or the grading systems. Okay. Chairman Caldwell, you? Oh, he left? Yes, he did. Just we asked Dr. Berry and Ms. Cassie. So I promised to be brief because it's not much for me to ask Dr. Sims and the assistant chief for the fire department.

2 : 43 : 18 But I'm concerned that every day I open a newspaper and there is a full-page ad for free adult education. And we have some summer programs happening for K-12, like Kinder Camp. But I'm concerned about the fact that we didn't really conduct targeted assessments of our students. So over the summer, we could identify in this third grade class, these students aren't reading on grade level. therefore we have all this federal funding how do we approach the unions and say listen we're going to use this money to fairly compensate you for an additional month month and a half of school to get these students on the appropriate reading level math level that has not been done that has not been done and then our promotion rates education comes on boast about 100% graduation rate are these students doing well and then the test scores come out and they don't correlate with the promotion rates this territory has engaged in social promotion so while it looks good that we have a generation of children have passed their grades are they prepared for the next step are they prepared for college in college nobody gives you a pass you show up and you have to pass the test there's no multiple choice fill in a blank matching word options and we're doing them at this service in a way that we're educating our students and it really is funny at this point it's a travesty and we're going to see the the fruits of this when our crime rate increases because a child usually acts out when they are frustrated

2 : 45 : 07 with their academics. We see it, we're in a classroom. So I don't have much to say, but I'm really concerned about the altering of the grading policy that the board sets. I'm concerned about the lack of targeted assessments and the fact that schools aren't identifying those who are performing poorly. I'm concerned about the lack of academically talented classes in our schools because you do have students who are performing above grade level that we're not pushing and we're not demanding excellence from because we have this total inclusion policy i'm concerned about the lack of pre-k granny we have we the law pass we have a few there should be more at this juncture given where we are with a global crisis we should have already expanded the granny pre-k i'm concerned about the learning loss what are the plans to address the learning loss in this territory these are valid concerns so we can't talk about capacity and high unemployment rate and everything else education is a great equalizer it is so facilities do concern me but equally what is more concerning to me is how we're teaching, how we're educating. Teachers are burned out. What are their plans to do with our teachers' emotional wellness, mental days? How are we helping our educators recycling them in professional development? So Madam Chair, I don't know what to ask in this hearing but to just babble and I will end at this at this juncture because who I have the

2 : 46 : 54 questions for um they're unable to answer the fire department has done their job health has done their job miss berry continues to do her job and the board and i don't see a plan to address the learning loss i have a niece who's going to 12th grade never had a proper year of school So I'm babbling and again I have the mic now but Madam Chair we need a hearing on how do we address every time we come here we talk about reports reports reports and more reports that doesn't help us I need to know what is a plan to address the law and the last of our students. Thank you Madam Chair for the time. Thank you Senator Saru. Yeah plans and reports because I've been asking for plans um it's going to be we're going into about we start from january of last year for the first week of our service i've been asking for the plans a series of plans over and over again so we need the plans to match up with the reports and then we need the actual implementation and action plan so that they proceed forward move on to our next senator senator fred gregory you may proceed with your questions good morning colleagues good morning to the testifiers and good morning to the well it's actually afternoon to the people of the virgin islands you know as i sit here and i listen to the conversation around the virgin islands department of education and our students and learning loss and maintenance of our schools and mental health issues etc you know i have to say that it just seems like we like to hear ourselves talk because we talk about the same

- 2:48:54 things over and over for the past two years that i've sat in this institution year and a half we continue to talk about these things we continue to put pressure or apply pressure around these various reports etc but then we appeal back the layers we have not gotten any further and that is a problem and where I'm going with this is so we know that there's been a challenge over the years with regards to the maintenance of our schools maintaining our schools and while we us here in this institution want to talk about the fact that this hasn't been spent and that hasn't been spent as a release of maintaining our schools there was a report done I think sometime in 2010, 2008, 2010 regarding the state of the schools, the state of the structures here in the Virgin Islands of our schools and that report said that we needed at minimum 1.5 billion dollars to get our schools up to speed in a decent condition for our kids to enter the decent classrooms.
- 2:50:24 And yet, this institution over the years, as I look at it, we've appropriated \$2 million each year. The funds that we continue to talk about around PFA, those funds have been sitting on the books for quite some time. Those are bonds that we floated sometime in 2008 or 2009. So we continue to have the same conversation, and I'm going somewhere with this. A few months ago, I moved legislation that I've been working on for, I'm gonna say three years, to at minimum try to address this issue and remove the responsibility of the maintenance our schools from the department of education so they can in fact focus on the mental health issues the learning loss challenges the curriculum matters but you know what members in this very body voted no against it so what are we gonna do are we gonna is it it briefs well for us to come in front of our community every time we have an education meeting to talk about the same thing But it's time that our community hold us accountable. What are we doing about it, colleagues? What are we willing to do about it? It's all good to beat up on the education folks, the Board of Education people, the people from FIRE, DPNR, etc. But what are we doing about it?
- 2:51:59 Nothing. We ask the same questions over and over. And I've said to myself that I am going to be relentless in moving that legislation forward because I cannot continue to participate in this conversation. It's hypocritical for me to participate and continue to participate in this conversation with regards to how our schools are maintained. We see the situation, it has been tested and tried and it hasn't worked. It's time for us to change the narrative. It's time. It's time. but I'm going to move on from that because I'm not going to ask any questions about maintaining our schools today because we've asked it over and over and we see what the situation is. Allow the education folks to focus on what? Our curriculum matters, the mental health of our students, etc. So let me ask this question. So in the 33rd legislature I moved legislation around virtual learning and one of the responsibilities was for the Board of Education as well as the Department of Education to work together to establish the policy around the virtual learning legislation established the rules and regs and I'm getting a lot of complaints coming to my office that the Department of Education is establishing standalone virtual learning office if you will with a principal and that kind of thing. So I need to understand from the Board of Education, what's the status of the policy? What's going on with the rollout? Because I think I heard someone of my colleagues asked a question and it was that they're still working out the kink. So
- 2:53:45 I'm trying to figure out what is the Board of Education's role? What have they done? What has the board done? What's the status of the policy? I think I saw a policy come through. And how are you managing that? Because the Department of Education cannot arbitrarily decide that they they are going to set up a virtual school because we don't have virtual schools in the Virgin Islands. The intent of the legislation was to ensure that in instances where we have students or vacancies in English, science, or if our students want to participate or learn a different language that's not offered in the Virgin Islands, like Mandarin, et cetera, then they would have the opportunity to do it, not for them to have no virtual school building. So I need to understand what is the role of the Board of Education, what have they been doing? Because we don't want to head a board complaining about it. You have full power and responsibility to ensure that this legislation is in fact implemented, enacted and implemented in the appropriate way.
- 2:54:52 So help me, help me to understand because we need to ensure that the intent this legislation is in fact followed and the department of education is not doing what they want to do as it relates to this particular uh legislation that was passed in the 33rd legislature thank you senator for that question dr stephanie berry from the exec from the virgin ellis board of education in addition to implementing the distance learning policy the board also has on the books um implemented a policy for electronic communication devices in the classrooms As a result of the time, Madam Chair, if I may continue.
- 2:55:30 You proceed on my time. Let's do it at distance learning that I asked about in particular, please, Dr. Berry. Yes, that policy was implemented and has been shared repeatedly with the department. We have also had meetings where we talked about the distance learning policy. And it's a constant reminder every time we talk about VIVA as well. so that what i don't understand what we're saying so the department of education is implementing the distance learning uh bill in whatever manner they want but you are you guys are responsible for writing the policy so what this is why we don't have no accountability what are we saying what are we actually saying here i'm not clear on that response senator we met with the viva team from the department and the board expressed their concerns about it not being implemented in a manner

that we expected. What you have just described is what we said.

2:56:29 The board also told the department that given what they represented they would not support an opportunity for them to continue this Viva Academy without additional information being provided to the board. board is adamant that we need more information and we made that clear to the department. We should not have a viva academy. This is for students at the end of the school year where there are delayers in the classroom meaning teachers will be absent for the specific subject areas. Those students will still have an opportunity to be taught from a distance learning teacher so they could get the requisite uh course this is not for them to set up a virtual academy our students need to be in front of a teacher a classroom because we know that we have social and economic issues here in the virgin islands and we have to ensure from a social perspective that our students are getting what they need so i don't understand how in the world the department of education can decide that they could use this legislation to do that and we are not making our voices heard on this i'm just learning about this today so madam chair this is a major issue that we have so we're talking about all kind of other things here we need to get focused on what we're doing when it comes to the department of education colleagues we need to get focused on what we're doing when we're talking about department of education all of this fluff and all these things that we talk about that's not getting us to where we need to go so um i know that my time has been called but um you know another day another meeting where we're not getting anywhere when it comes to vide board of education they have any recommendation and conversations the board of

2:58:23 education have a lot more teeth make your voices heard take them to court do what you have to do too. That's how I see it at this point. This has to stop. Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Senator President. Dr. Berry-Houch, you wanted to make a comment. Before you make your comment, I too, we have to hold ourselves accountable. I did, specifically for this specific section of the law 24, did offer, and I too will remain relentless in the way we execute this accountability report because throughout this country the Caribbean and the world the way in which education stakeholders address education through a similar type report it is all-encompassing and it's not just up to the board we have to better prepare ourselves fire service has to step up the Department of Health has to step up the Department of Planning Natural Resources environmental division has to step up the Department of Labor OSHA division has to step up specifically when it comes to OSHA it's all these interim measures for the mitigation to ensure that they're doing what we're doing to safeguard our schools OSHA has a role they give they assist departments and agencies and it should be the assistant department education and you have public works with the engineers and the like to help them in this reporting and then we now as a body because they've given numbers to the needs of the interim needs to do the repairs they have given out that information and I have drilled down over and over again engaging the territorial he's out the territorial management mr. Charlemagne Charlemagne I've called for numerous meetings the learning loss information all of that we continue to ask for and I am NOT in the position to direct the Commissioner of Education as to what to do that person is led by the governor and I've drilled down and we have us collectively I have individually and also we have collectively drilled down today is about this accountability report and I did not get collegial support for us to amend this and that's

3:00:32 what we're going through this today I will move on dr. Berry you had a response to Senator Senator Frederick senator I echo your sentiments and the Virgin Islands Board of Education is going to be more forceful and direct with regards to this viva program because we did not authorize the development and creation of this academy and we will continue to keep the senate abreast as we go through the process under our jurisdictional authority thank you for the opportunity madam chair thank you dr barry madam clerk you put um seven minutes on for me i'm going to proceed with my questions okay to okay so to dr bear a lot of questions have also been answered already regarding the submission of the reports particularly in the area of curriculum how is the how has the board been working on the all the curriculum required by law particularly the curriculum also as outlined in section 41. um you did um you all did not appear for the last um previous hearing but the question um concerning curriculum where is the board with respect to curriculum mandates thank you for that question um through our policies rules and regulations committee the governing board did develop 9 through 12 revisions for their promotion retention and grading systems policy, which includes offering the opportunity through our course requirements for courses such as agriculture and the others included in the statute or through statute. We're also in the process of revising our pre-K through seventh grade or eighth grade

3:02:37 incorporate some of those requirements as well to the best of our ability to start to have our younger learners think about agriculture, think about all the other areas that are required by statute so that when they do get to the ninth through twelfth grade that they'll be able to have not only the academic instruction but also a vocational career pathway as well. With regards to curriculum, we recently received the Virgin Islands standards of achievement from the department and the board is currently reviewing those standards that will also be reviewed probably in the next two weeks by our Policies, Rules and Regulations Committee.

- 3:03:26 We've already started coming up with certain questions that we'd like to ask the department as a result of our preliminary review of those standards. Thank you. And in terms of the reporting process, so I know the board members do take part in traveling and meeting with other board members. And to Mrs. Perez-Casius, what can you lean in on improving the method in which we're reporting? I'm sure you heard from the public a lot of the concerns with how the report is being compiled. What can we do to improve this report and have more stakeholder input?
- 3:04:05 What are your suggestions? Emanuela Perez-Casias, Chair of this School Plans Facilities Committee. My suggestions is exactly what was in the report, the legislature, and I hear what the Senator Fred Gregory is stating in regards to going to court. But a lot of these matters are really legislative matters and language matters. And I really think that accountability is very important. And right now, our standard that we have in the legislature, the law, does not provide clear accountability and being able for us to hold different agencies accountable for not reporting. For example, three of the five agencies did not turn in a report. However, there is nothing that we can do besides write and write and write and ask.
- 3:04:56 and then when it comes down to the data, we have to complete our obligations, then we just have to put statements inside of these reports. The legislature can ensure through language in some of these legislative lines, we're clear the agencies must report to the Board of Education by this date. Specifically, the Commissioner of Education must report to the Board of Education. Right now, the suggestive language that is in the law allows for people to choose or not choose whether they want to participate in this process. And with the only person that they are held accountable to is the governor who appoints them within our current structure.
- 3:05:41 It leaves space for their version of how they feel like showing up without anybody holding them accountable other than the boss who put all trust and confidence in them when they've recommended them for the position. So if you're asking what can be done, legislative language that clearly defines roles and accountability and measures in which we can clearly hold them accountable. Thank you. Because the law already speaks to these auxiliary entities being responsible to help you put the report together. However, it doesn't say. But it doesn't mandate. Now, our power as a body, which we've done before, I've subpoenaed the Department of Education.
- 3:06:28 We've done that. We can subpoena the documents. And so if that's what it takes as well. But I would submit that even if we put in the word shall, right now I still don't understand and what is preventing them from consulting with you all, at least providing tertiary information. And I will submit that through my work, I understood that once upon a time, Public Works was doing their responsibility even before the statute was actually promulgated. So it's just a matter of, yes, legislative mandate, which we spent last year doing. I made several attempts. They weren't successful because I needed my colleagues to support measures. We had other measures as well with school maintenance. With or without the measures, folks are responsible to carry out their duties. Over to the fire service, this is Director Stevens. How going forward, before the report is submitted, is the fire service going to help, even working with OSHA, to help address these mitigating issues, to make our schools a lot safer than they are? are. And I also submit that last year the schools were what has been confusing Assistant Director Stevens is last year the fire service did certify that the schools are ready for reopening but this year addressed concerns that I would safe assume were the same concerns of the previous year. Schools have not gotten any better and they weren't they weren't they were not in the best shape last year either so if you can really speak to going forward what is it that the fire service is going to do in response to making our schools safer or helping to assist in being safer good afternoon again madam chair and thank thank you for the question
- 3:08:21 like i said in the beginning the fire service has a responsibility to the community and to other students to making sure that our schools are safe what we try to do is to yes there may be issues in a particular area of the school what we try to do is work with the department of education to give us a timeline to say okay we can get this problem rectified within a certain amount of time and most of the times they we trust that that will be taken care of um yes we understand that there's some uh issues that have not been taken care of over the years but uh within dialogue with the schools and trying to find ways to uh mitigate and to do any love for example if a particular area let's say the auditorium needs uh should have sprinkler systems or the sprinkler system isn't working then we try to find ways around and say okay let's put more fire extinguishers or make sure that a school monitor um is in the vicinity of a fire extinguisher therefore you know so to eliminate you have to be able to find a balance we can't say well hey we're going to shut down the school because we shut down the school where are students going to go so we try to make sure that there are ways that we can mitigate and and um work around uh in the meantime given the school department of education the opportunity to to get things fixed we understand that sometimes a chance there are some challenges and we try to work with them in that manner but what I ask is that as we said I mean the documents that are submitted have to be accurate and when the concern particularly from the fire service was that last
- 3:10:13 year these concerns that were brought up this year weren't brought up last year and these and these issues were already present last year so our responsibility is to ensure that what you submit when people sign off on documentation they have

to be accurate and truthful and they're gonna it's gonna come a time when it's not gonna i don't accept that i don't accept folks submitting reports that are inaccurate so we have to move forward i am happy this year that the fire service department put out exactly what needs to be fixed but last year they did you all did not do that and the board can only take the information and take your all's word for it other than of course obviously as we've gone ourselves to the schools and see what's going on. To Dr. Simms, Assistant Commissioner Simms, you spoke about the school lunch program and I have been really trying to get to the bottom of that directly engaging with Department of Education. How often does the department of health go out to do inspections of um the food services and also you notice the safety of the food and within schools i'm going to ask director harris to respond senator okay good afternoon director harris here from uh department of health so we we conduct uh two inspections for the school lunch program um six months apart we try to do the first or five months apart we try to do the first inspection uh at least right after school uh the closing of um schools and then halfway in between so it's twice twice per school year do you think that is sufficient though based on what um the report does come out um what is your

3:12:12 plan to actually do that a lot more regimentally and regularly and i know a number of our kitchens i mean for example when they're like we have a series of schools that have missing kitchens have issues how what how do what does the department of health do um in response to those issues with kitchens and the cafeterias what response um what what have you all done about that okay so what we do uh the with the with the inspections we go out and do two mandated inspections uh based on the uh food and drug administration if we find files within or violations within these uh the the inspections then we conduct what it called follow-up inspections to try to get the administration of the school to meet the minimum requirements as indicated by the FBA, who regulates all the food industries.

3:13:12 We also put recommendations in terms of having schools satellite from other school launch programs. We, I don't want to say that we don't close them down, but we work with them and we look, our inspections are risk based. So we look at the risk, we look at the five major risk based, as Dr. Sims mentioned in her testimony, and we work closely with education and consult with them to get them to the level of compliance. compliance in the event that they just can't meet the compliance then we issue a public health order and work with them and getting um a school lunch from another school uh to the schools that that seems to have the problem i'm going to submit that you're all going to have to be a lot more regimental and i'm requesting um to be sent to this committee um those reports okay from the the department of health whatever reports you've submitted in the past um in the last year be submitted to this committee okay thank you for that my pleasure senator yes we need those reports what we what is going on here there are a series of information being passed and a lot of documentation going back and forth but in order for me to do my job and make my responsibility before we get into the subpoenas um because we we really got to get a real framework for what's going on and beyond this meeting we're gonna have to actually have a serious huddle for what we need to deal with and I will then we'll move on to our second round I don't see okay and before moving on I want to go back to the Board of Education the Board of Education is responsible also for a lot of the federal funds that support and address administration and they're like well how

3:15:11 is it what is your spirit I mean what what do you all what is the board doing right now to address what is really the Department of Education's spending of federal funds, not updating you and facilitating, what is the board doing about that in respect to all of the current federal funds that the Department of Education is responsible for? Dr. Stephanie Berry, executive director for the Virgin Islands Board of Education. The board has had several meetings with the department where they have provided information relative to the expenditure of their funds by different funding sources. We've looked at those for facilities specifically and the slew of other funding sources that came through as a result of the pandemic as well as the hurricanes. We have communicated with the department after reviewing those documents that we needed additional information.

3:16:12 As part of our testimony today and in the SMAR report, we're asking for, or we're making the recommendation that it be mandated that we are involved in the conversations and allow us the opportunity to be able to review everything as it occurs and receive status updates on a more periodic basis. They have done it, but not as consistently, and we have not received responses to our probing into the expenditures that they have provided us information on.

3:16:54 Thank you. And we're going to take a recess, a few minute recess. But I want to submit to you, Dr. Berry, that one of the things I'm committed to working on is giving the power the board more power i've mulled the statute over um analyzed and everything with my team and we're going to need to give you all more power um as we sit here today i'm even i mean let's put in perspective i asked for the department education to appear um but they were able to go on the radio which i knew about which they informed me of we have individuals who are even online as we speak who who are part of department education commenting um as i get information but yet um you know we are having this hearing today um i don't take lightly at all that the department education is not doing their responsibility with respect to but it comes now to

us exercising our oversight um for the information to come in a regular interval basis and beyond the hearings we're going to have to have uh this next series of meetings which i do submit that i've had All last year, we had a series of meetings, which I appreciate the board education, invited my colleagues as well, and we're going to continue to move forward because the only way we'll get this done is by the critical work. We're going to have to dig in deep and get the work done. And if we have to request by subpoena, I'm fully ready. I'm always ready to get information. And yes, you also have the option of taking it to court when we get to that stage. I'm going to take just a brief it's 1.15 we'll just take a five minute recess so we can close out and wrap up on block one the committee on education workforce development stands in recess for about five minutes thank you Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I'll see you next time. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

3:26:28 The Committee on Education and Workforce Development is now back out of recess, back on the record. Madam Clerk, we're just going to finish up with, I'm going to put the timer on for three minutes, and to my colleagues with their concerns over more time, we will have follow-up meetings and hearings and the like as we usually do to get this information also if you're just tuning in welcome good afternoon to all I really encourage for those if anyone's interested of course in the report and the documents for today's hearing you can obtain it on the public Drive okay senator Joseph you're up for your three minutes hello a good day again thank you so much Senator Whitaker a pleasant good afternoon I just wanted to follow up with some questions I had an in in a attempt to be very proactive and dr. Berry are you still in the chambers I am senator okay because we're not seeing the st. croix chambers on the screen thank you have you or your team of board members and the board of elect i'm sorry board of education previous board i served on have you done any type of research into education reform that may be viable options here in the Virgin Islands, knowing all of the findings and the lack of communication

3:28:24 and the Department of Education operating outside of its jurisdiction. Have you done any type of research on what type of management and operation would be the best to operate here in the virgin islands and so that our students are in fact learning and we can see that the buildings are being repaired timely have you done any type of research you or the board members there has been discussion and limited research over the years regarding education reform especially in light of the fact that the governing board's structure is very different than that on the mainland where the governing board here is not responsible for let's say hiring the superintendent on the mainland they um those boards are um in more recent times we have not done official research with regards to that but that is an item that i will take back to our governing board because it's always at the forefront of their mind to ensure that we're improving our public education system here in the territory Thank you. My question, and I was going somewhere with that, is because I have been a senator here for a year and seven months. And when we came on board in the 34th legislature, we hit the ground running in this committee and did site visits. And so it's very concerning for me that I'm not seeing the amount of progress happening in the board with the Department of Education. I've seen some with the Board of Education, but the dialogue, the

3:30:16 discussions, the plan of action, looking at where we can, because we have a lot of highly educated persons, and I know we have the ability to do it here. If we would just have some discussions and plan it and plot it out and come up with a viable solution. We have to look at it from the perspective that it's our young people, these are our children, and it's not even the young people, it's even the working class people. Education, as a previous senator said, is a great time equalizer uh madam chair i'm going to wrap up if you would allow me to yes it is a great equalizer it helps with crime prevention it helps our workforce grow it helps our community and territory grow so i'm hoping that you and the board you would take this to the board to look at some serious measures to do education reform it is critical right now because we can no longer make all of these excuses on why you're not getting the reports why you're not uh where why we're not seeing any sizable and significant progress being made in the department of education it is unacceptable thank you so much madam chair for this time thank you senator joseph now proceed to senator potter for your three minutes as we wrap up thank you very much madam chair uh good afternoon again everyone um i'm gonna just talk a little bit about my um uh mental health the issue of mental health it concerns me that

3:32:09 more and more of our states in the United States, most more and more of them are enacting laws, creating a mandatory mental health education in the K through 12 curriculum. I think it's really important. It is something that I proposed earlier. I had a bill presented here in this body to make that a reality. And I know we have a large comprehensive mental health bill that is making its way through the process also. But specifically, this bill was geared towards mandating that mental health education is a part, becomes a part of the K through 12 curriculum.

3:33:04 curriculum. It also focused on providing mandatory training for all school-based personnel who interact with children on a daily basis. It's an extra pair of eyes to focus on the signs and the symptoms. It focused on destigmatizing the process, destigmatizing mental health, mental health illness illnesses or issues I think as a Caribbean persons it is something that

we are not as comfortable talking about and I am really hopeful that in the coming weeks and months that my colleagues will support the initiative to make mental health education in our school something that is mandatory and it may require some more support and input from the Department of Health, the Board of Education to shape it correctly. I think the feedback that we had gotten was that we're creating an additional burden for teachers, something else for them to have to be required to do. But the importance of it, the significance of mental health, I think it warrants us, if necessary, providing our school personnel with the required training so that they would be more equipped to handle some of the issues that that we see on a day-to-day basis that may go unnoticed, that we are allowed to fester into more significant and more serious problems down the line. So that is something that I hope that we can,

3:35:01 you know, that can become a reality. So I just wanted to ask Dr. Sims and Dr. Berry to comment for their comments on that. you on the chair's time and yep you may proceed dr sims and dr barry uh thank you senator dr nicole craigwell sims that's this acting commissioner department of health uh senator potter i completely agree it really just is a matter of a partnership between the department of education and department of health we do have the bill that is coming up and within that bill we have embedded a tier process or tier system for educators for schools understanding and identifying as you've mentioned the signs and symptomology for behavioral and mental health there is also a recommendation to include a lot of these areas into the curriculum i think when we speak about mental health a lot of persons still go all the way to the extreme left with it mental health mental wellness behavioral health behavioral wellness is an everyday occurrence and it should be something that is embedded into your everyday learning and existence and work life and so these are the discussions that we are having we're more than happy to have those so that we can help to structure and train so it becomes part of the everyday existence within the education system thank you very much for your comments Dr. Berry I concur with Dr. Sims it needs to be part of a systemic change we need to move away from the stigmatism that's often created by the word mental

3:36:51 it's the word mental alone my name is Dr. Stephanie J Berry I am the daughter of a mentally ill person who was highly functioning and it is something that is near and dear to my heart because as a child growing up especially going to public school and having my parent be the mentally ill individual it was a very challenging experience for me and I would like to see more effort given to educating our children and adults as to the fact that mental is not just on the far left as Dr. Simms has described, it's in your everyday approach to life and sometimes even if you can see that they're highly functioning you have no clue and the sensitivity that is needed is something that is significantly lacking here in the territory and I look forward to the opportunity as a person of the community as well as the Executive Director for the Board of Education in any initiative to encourage legislation for birth to death regarding this matter.

3:38:09 Thank you very much, Dr. Berry, for your very candid input. Thank you very much. Thanks, Madam Chair. Thank you, Senator Potter. Move on to Senator Gregory for your three minutes. you Madam Chair. So I have a quick question to ask the Board of Education and it's tied to bill number 33.0207 that was enacted sometime in October of 2019 and it's around all persons teaching pre-kindergarten through third grade in our public schools, requiring them to have certain requirements. I'm interested in finding out from the board, the board was responsible for promulgating and getting training. I think there was monies set aside for \$170,000 was appropriate, is appropriated annually for this purpose. And I am up to 2023. We are now in 2022 fiscal year, but we have one more year.

3:39:38 and i want to find out from the board of education if the rules are promulgated and what's the status of working with those teachers who are k pre-k four actually pre no it's pre-k three third grade teachers who um are working with our early childhood uh students where are we with that Thank you for that question, Dr. Stephanie Berry, Executive Director for the Virgin Islands Board of Education. The board did develop policy and circulate it regarding the early childhood education requirements for those individuals that are teaching pre-K through third. We have circulated it as well as what we've done is we received a list from the department and we started contacting those individuals that are certified, and any person that comes to us for certification since that policy was implemented, we've been making sure that we tell them about it.

3:40:43 Okay, so this is a law, so this is a little more than telling. So let me ask the Board of Education, have you done an assessment to determine whether or not the, because this legislation has been in effect since 2019 and the years that the training was to begin was October 1 of 2020, 21, 22, and moving into 23. Have you done an assessment to determine how many teachers in our pre-K three have gone through this program and how many remain outstanding? What are we assessing? Because we continue to talk about ensuring that our students are reading on grade level and we're doing what we're supposed to do with regards to our primary, early childhood grades in particular. But are we doing the assessment to determine whether or not this is actually happening in our schools?

3:41:49 You might answer on the chair's time because time has been called. Thank you, Senator. we have started doing an assessment we are currently um making our confirming our information and we will in fact be uh contacting the

department's hr department to confirm what we have so we're doing a comparison analysis to ensure that these individuals are being compliant and if not they will be notified accordingly my time has been called so thank you for your response however um through the chair i'm requesting that the virgin ann's board of education provide this uh body with the information as it relates to bill number 33-0207 what's the status and what they're doing to ensure that this um program is in fact in effect for our teachers and if in fact additional time is needed so we can continue to appropriate the necessary funding for the training. Thank you, Madam Chair.

3:42:54 Thank you, Senate President, and we will definitely honor that request, and I will also emphasize that also ties to my request for the curriculum. So we have a series of requests as we compile our requests, but I have actually dove into, let you have passed in the 32nd and 33rd legislature, and also that was the purpose of on the previous hearing where we asked them to be here over curriculum mandates. So that, we're gonna now conclude today, the Block 1 for today's hearing. I will now, if we have no more burning questions from my colleagues, we'll now proceed with closing, allowing the respective entities to provide their closing statements for Block 1. I'll first turn to Dr. Stephanie Berry on behalf of the Board of Education to close out.

3:43:42 Madam Chair, on behalf of the Virgin Islands Board of Education, I'd like to thank the committee for allowing us the opportunity to give our testimony here today. I would especially like to thank our ancillary departments who showed up and showed out. We really appreciate your cooperation in providing the information that is critical to us improving our School Management Accountability Report to all senators who have expressed their feedback and comments and concerns. It has been duly noted and I can assure you that it will be addressed as quickly as we possibly can. And I'd like to encourage everyone to make a positive approach to really focus on what we can do to move forward. We've planned a lot and implemented, but there's really no true assessment of what we're doing, and I'd like to see an improvement in that, and we're gonna work towards that, because we do need change for educational excellence, mission-based leadership, site-based management, and strategically-driven governance to improve the quality of public education here in this territory. Thank you for your time, Madam Chair.

3:45:07

thank you dr Barry move on to assistant commission acting commissioner dr Sims you will proceed with your closing remarks thank you senator on behalf of the honorable Hussein Canasta Young and the Department of Health we thank you for the opportunity to be here this morning to present testimony I want to take this time to also thank my team for being here uh with me today we look forward to any feedback that's going to be beneficial to the overarching uh success of the discussions that we've had today uh the Environmental Health Division stands ready willing and able to continue to provide support to the Department of Education relative to not only food programs but anywhere that we can assist relative to any of the health crises that we may be facing so we look forward to any question that you may have any requests that you have of us for any information we will send those right over other than that just thank you so much for the opportunity thank you and we have and finally assistant director for the virtual fire services um director Stevens you may proceed with your closing good afternoon again madam chair and again I would like to thank you for the opportunity and your team for the opportunity to present on the behalf of director Daryl George who couldn't be with us in this setting today um we look forward to going out on the 20th and the 21st of this next week and island of St. Croix to do the continued assessments with the team that was assembled uh and we look forward to presenting those reports to the appropriate bodies whenever that time comes uh and the follow-up should be sometime the following week um in the same time of St. John District again we want to do whatever it is that we can to make our community safe and keep our community safe um at our levels so again thank you and thank everyone who attended

3:47:14 thank you and i want to again thank all the testifiers um for their testimony today and we're going to continue to move forward yes um or things will get better so just continue to and just be transparent in that and we're going to have to definitely put a lot more information out to the public so they are aware of what's going on respect to this matter of our schools and we're going to continue to push forward at this time the committee will stand in recess for for 15 minutes, we're just gonna take a break as we go into block two. The Committee on Education and Workforce Development stands in recess for 15 minutes.

3:48:09 We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. 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. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We'll be right back. Oh, no. We'll be right back. We'll be right back. Thank you. We'll be right back. Good afternoon.

4:37:34 The Committee on Education and Workforce Development is now back of recess, back on the record. We are moving now to block number two and I first want to do a quick quorum call. Madam Clerk, quorum call. Senator Donna A. Fred Gregory. Senator Donna A. Fred Gregory absent. Senator senator kenneth Lituens, senator kenneth L Gituens absent senator Carla J Joseph, senator Carla J Josef absent senator Milton E Potter Senator Milton E Potter absent senator Janelle K Saru Senator Janelle K Saru absence senator Kurt A Viale senator Kurt A Viale absent Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker. Present. Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker, present. Madam Chair, we have one present, six absent.

4:38:41 Okay. Thank you, Madam Clerk. We seem to have definitely lost a quorum. And also, too, we're going to go ahead. I just want, if you would please read, once again, Madam Clerk, the agenda pertains to block number two, and we do have a correspondence from the Board of Education relative to the bill that I've sponsored to address the teaching of Virgin Island's Caribbean history in our schools. Block number two for the Committee on Education and Workforce Development. The committee will receive testimony on the following bill, bill number 34.0238, an act amending Title 17, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 5, Section 41C relating to the courses of study in public schools to require that the Virgin Islands, to require that Virgin Islands and Caribbean history be taught specifically in kindergarten through 12th grade and for other purposes. Sponsored by Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker. Invited testifiers, Victor Soong III, acting commissioner, Virgin Islands Department of Education.

4:39:50 Dr. Kaiser Calvert, chairman, Virgin Islands Board of Education. Madam Chair, that is block two. Thank you, Madam Clerk. I'm seeing Senator Cerugi mark her as present. We still would need one more member because we need three people in order to proceed. But also as a measure is being considered, we'll need a majority of members to move it forward. Madam Clerk, we have a correspondence from the Board of Education. Yes, Madam Chair.

4:40:17 You may proceed. Letter from Stephanie J. Berry, Ph.D., Executive Director, Virgin Islands Board of Education, dated July 12, 2022. Dear Chairwoman Whitaker, on behalf of Chairman Kaiser A. Calwood, please be advised that the VI Board of Education VIBE will be available to testify at the Committee on Education and Workforce Development July 15, 2022 hearing in the morning up until 12 p.m. As such, the Virgin Islands Board of Education requests a recording of the agenda to allow for the discussion on the School Management Accountability Report to be first. We are currently prepared to testify for this discussion and will transmit it to your office by end of business tomorrow. Additionally, your consideration of the Virgin Islands Bureau of Education's previously submitted comments on bill number 34-0238 in lieu of our presence is requested. The Virgin Islands Board of Education has no objection to the Virgin Islands and Caribbean history being taught in public schools. Virgin Islands Board of Education has sought through correspondence to ascertain the extent to which the mandates are being implemented, specifically regarding the teaching of VI history and basic Caribbean history. While the Virgin Islands Board Department of Education has asserted that VI history is being taught, Virgin Islands Board of Education has asked specifically for evidence of a curriculum or outline that indicates the aspect of VI history that are being taught. The Virgin Islands Department of Education has, however, indicated to the board that it is in the process of completing a comprehensive curriculum framework which the board expects will be available to give the evidence needed to prove compliance with the statute. Lastly, in addition to the reoccurring need for additional resources, we remain mindful

4:42:24 that given the number of instructions hours required, there is not sufficient time in the current school day for all the courses, subjects, mandated by the legislature to be included as standalone courses for all students. While VI history is a standalone course and a graduation requirement for every student in the senior high level, Virgin Islands history must be taught within the context of the social studies curriculum on the lower levels, and the Virgin Islands Department of Education should provide the curriculum evidence that shows the specific content for VI history.

4:43:04 This is part of the social studies curriculum on the lower levels and available to all students. Your consideration of the Virgin Islands Board of Education's request to reorder the agenda to allow discussion on the SMAR to be first is sincerely appreciated. Regards, Stephanie J. Berry, PhD, Executive Director, Virgin Islands Board of Education. That is the testimony. Thank you, Madam Clerk, for reading that on the record. And as we want to move to closing, I want to just emphasize and encourage the public. We're speaking about Title 17, Section 41, Courses of Study. The Board, as per the law, subsection A, the Virgin Islands Board of Education, upon the recommendation of the Commission of Education, shall prescribe the course of study for all public schools, which shall not less than, shall not be less than the minimum

standards set by the acknowledged accrediting groups in the United States, provided that the basic course of study for high school shall be academic.

4 : 44 : 09 B, English shall be the basic language of instruction in all public schools, and it be the policy of the virgin islands board of education to ensure the mastery of english by all pupils provided that bilingual instruction may be offered in those situations when instruction is educationally advantaged to the pupils and specifically as it pertains to the specific subsection of the law as the bill is being offered today uh subsection c all public schools in the virgin islands shall instruct all students in one the history of the virgin islands and basic caribbean history and drug prevention and education such courses be part of the curriculum in elementary and secondary schools and then um number two is again all public schools in the virgin islands shall instruct all students into a virgin islands cultural curriculum for kindergarten through 12th grade as i emphasized when it was first offered the goal is that these provisions be congruent that we in fact ensure that the we make sure that we have the congruence and we ensure that in fact version of caribbean history is being taught in our schools we also have a active lawsuit as I've supported and as well as and I want to also really encourage the public to be empowered with knowledge and information that I also am putting on the record that pursuant to title 3 uh subsection uh section 96 uh in particular and the department education is already mandated to integrate united states virgin islands art culture and history into the educational curriculum so with those two statutes as well as my hopeful um push for my law to go through we will then have some congruence and we'll also continue to engage in oversight so that our children are educated in this is just one of the numerous curriculum curriculum areas as I do not have a quorum and enough members we're gonna go ahead and proceed I want to first off before closing out certainly thank my team my staff team I want to thank central staff madam clerk does everyone who makes possible me today possible so much goes into preparing for hearings and to the public yes I encourage you to go on to the committee folders, pull up the information. If you have any questions, I encourage you to always reach out to my office, 712-2379 is my phone number, direct line with email address, senatorwhittaker at lagva.org. Thank you to everyone, and we're going to continue to move forward into the questions asked by the public. I'll continue to advocate. I am passionate, just like you. I share the concerns about the maintenance of our schools about the instruction that's why every day um i drew we you know we have to continue to drill down drill down and keep pushing and pushing and pushing and we are gonna um as we work more together as a people as we strive uh to beyond the differences uh to as a people uh work hard for education and i also want to put out there i'm very excited to share that i've been working on especially when it comes to the matter of assessments working with some really strategic way and funding support so we can actually get from preschool really support our children is learning from the time they begin school so the work continues and so now this I'll go ahead and adjourn thank you all God bless and safety to everyone and those who've lost a loved one we sympathize with you our condolences to everyone who's lost a loved one and we're gonna continue down this road in support of our educators, our teachers, administrators, parents, the wider community. The Committee on Education Workforce Development is now adjourned. Have a blessed

4 : 48 : 05 weekend, everyone. Take care. Thank you.

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.

- 15x **Dr. Stephanie Berry**
heard in this transcript as: Berry
- 14x **Dr. Kaiser A. Calwood**
the surname alone also matches: Linda Calwood
heard in this transcript as: Callwood, Calwood, Carlwood, Carwood, Colwood, Kaisa Callwood
- 13x **Senator Genevieve R. Whitaker**
heard in this transcript as: Whitaker
- 8x **Senator Milton E. Potter**
heard in this transcript as: Potter
- 7x **Senator Janelle K. Saro**
heard in this transcript as: Saru
- 4x **Senator Carla Joseph**

heard in this transcript as: Carla J. Joseph

4x **Senator Donna A. Frett-Gregory**
heard in this transcript as: Donna A. Fred Gregory

3x **Senator Fred Gregory**
the surname alone also matches: Donna A. Frett-Gregory; Donna Frett-Gregory; Donna A. Fred Gregory; Frank Gregory
heard in this transcript as: Gregory

3x **Senator Kenneth L. Gittens**
heard in this transcript as: Kenneth L. Gittins

3x **Senator Kurt Vialet**
heard in this transcript as: Kurt A. Viala

2x **Governor Albert Bryan Jr**

2x **Senator Hubert Frederick**
heard in this transcript as: Frederick

2x **Dr. Stefan Juergen**
heard in this transcript as: Stefan B. Jergen

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.

Referred to but not found in our acts corpus: Bill 34-0238, Bill 33-0207