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USVI Launches Customized Civics Textbook to Educate Future Citizens

VIDE has launched a locally customized civics textbook, integrating local government and history into high school curriculums. Officials emphasize its role in preparing young Virgin Islanders for active democratic participation

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The newly launched locally customized civics textbook on display at Government House, St. Croix, on Saturday, Jan. 11, 2025. By. GOV'T HOUSE

The V.I. Department of Education has launched a locally customized civics textbook to fulfill the mandate of Act 7934, which requires the use of materials relevant to the Virgin Islands in structured civics courses for grades 9 through 12.

“The success of a democracy largely depends on its citizens being knowledgeable and skilled enough to engage in the political process,” said Yvette McMahon-Arnold, State Director of Instructional Development at VIDE. She explained that the textbook was developed to meet the law’s requirements and to prepare young Virgin Islanders to take on their civic responsibilities.

“The course, which is required to educate on the three branches of government and the role of public officials in the territory, is meant to ‘introduce young Virgin Islanders to ideal use of civic duty and better prepare them for their roles as responsible citizens,’” McMahon-Arnold said.

The new textbook, launched on Saturday, is an existing civics resource enhanced with local content. “This has been a focal point of this department since the law passed in 2016,” McMahon-Arnold noted. She added, “The customized textbook provides our high school students with the opportunities to learn about the structure and function of our local government and institutions alongside our national government and institutions.”

Lauren Larson, VIDE’s social studies coordinator and the project’s lead, highlighted the importance of connecting students to their local context. “The reason for public schools in the United States was to prepare people for democratic citizenship,” Larson said. He provided examples of the changes made to localize the textbook.

“There was a little biography of some other congresswoman from a state...we replaced it with our Delegate Christiansen,” Larson pointed out. “That’s what gets our students excited – making that relevant connection to home.”

Additional chapters, such as those focusing on local government, were heavily modified to reflect the Virgin Islands’ unique governance structure.

Larson thanked Senator Novelle Francis, who sponsored the legislation alongside former Senator Nereida O’Reilly, for his vision and leadership. He also expressed gratitude to the team of individuals who contributed to the project, noting that the effort involved multiple government agencies, departments, and private stakeholders.

“It was a collaborative effort which spanned several government agencies and departments as well as private individuals,” Larson said, praising the spirit of cooperation that made the project possible.

Several individuals who played key roles in the project were recognized with personal copies of the textbook. Honorees included WTJX Chief Executive Officer Tanya-Marie Singh, Sergeant Arthur Joseph of the Virgin Islands Police Department, former Congresswoman Donna Christian-Christensen, former and incoming Senator Kurt Vialet, and Senator Novelle Francis.