

Board of Education Urges Bold Overhaul as Report Exposes Crisis in V.I. Public Schools

With 83% of 8th-graders on St. Croix below math proficiency and 71.9% of 4th-graders in St. Thomas–St. John reading below grade level, the board is calling for a unified government response and immediate action to meet students’ foundational needs.

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The V.I. Board of Education has delivered its 2025 School Management Accountability Report to Governor Albert Bryan Jr., issuing a frank assessment of the public-school system and a roadmap for what it calls “measurable, transformational change.”

In a cover letter titled “Turning the Tide: Reclaiming Promise in Public Education,” Board chairman Dr. Kyza A. Callwood writes, “We may be bruised, but we are not broken. We are ready

to rise.” He urged a “unified, urgent, and courageous response” from Government House, the Department of Education and the 36th Legislature, and requests a meeting with the governor to hammer out next steps.

Data paint a sobering picture

Achievement gaps: Territory-wide Smarter Balanced results show modest gains in English Language Arts (ELA) but stubbornly low proficiency. In St. Thomas–St. John, 18.7 percent of students were on grade level in ELA this year, up from 15.1 percent two years ago, yet 60.6 percent remain below standard. Fourth-grade reading is “furthest behind” at 71.9 percent below benchmark. On St. Croix, ELA proficiency improved to 28.3 percent, but 4th-grade reading still lags at 59 percent below.

Math crisis: More than seven in ten students tested below standard in mathematics, with eighth- and eleventh-graders posting the weakest scores: up to 83.4 percent below proficiency on St. Croix and 81.9 percent in St. Thomas–St. John.

Science plateau: Science showed the strongest growth, yet roughly half of eighth-graders still failed to meet proficiency targets.

Leadership under strain

The [report](#) identifies 24 public-school campuses staffed by 21 principals and 43 assistant principals—80 percent of them women who “moved through the ranks as teachers or counselors.” Despite their experience, leaders struggle with chronic vacancies, delayed special-education evaluations, and late arrival of operational funds, hampering their ability to plan and to keep campuses safe.

Counselors and deans stretched thin

With 48 guidance counselors, six attendance officers, eight career specialists and only seven Deans of Students for the entire system, mental-health crises, chronic absenteeism and discipline are “beyond the reach” of existing staff. The board backs the national standard of 250 students per counselor and calls for a psychologist or social worker in every secondary school.

Class-size and staffing fixes

VIBE recommends cutting K–1 classrooms to no more than 15 students (with an aide) and capping grades 2–12 at 25. Current limits allow up to 30 pupils in the elementary grades and 27 in high school. Smaller classes, the report argues, will let teachers tackle wide learning gaps documented in the Smarter Balanced exams.

The board’s most urgent academic prescription is a territory-wide, phonics-based reading initiative from pre-K through third grade, along with a bigger role for certified media specialists and community partners—churches included—in after-school tutoring. “Reading should be prioritized as a foundational skill,” the report states, urging library periods rich in graphic novels, poetry, news and culturally relevant texts.

Why are math scores so low? Teachers cite outdated materials, large classes and “inequitable coursework.” VIBE wants intensive professional development, stronger certification rules, and early mastery of multiplication facts to prepare students for algebra and statistics. Manipulatives, real-world problem-solving and “show-your-work” protocols top the Board’s recommended

strategies.

Under 17 V.I.C. § 24, amended by Act 8717, VIBE must evaluate curricula, instruction and administration annually and submit findings by June 15. This year's report lists detailed checklists for classroom observations, leadership interviews and parent-engagement metrics meant to hold every campus accountable.

Strengths worth building on

Despite grim numbers, the report applauds teachers who “deliver concrete, explicit, and engaging instruction” and notes a wealth of career-prep pathways—from JROTC to Advanced Placement and dual-enrollment programs—that already exist but need wider access.

Citing inconsistent PTA turnout and parents' fear of retaliation, VIBE urges clearer communication of policies, lower out-of-pocket costs and bilingual outreach to “create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all families.” Business groups and the University of the Virgin Islands are encouraged to join curriculum design and internship efforts.

The board asks stakeholders to respond with concrete timelines, policy drafts and budget priorities that align with the report's recommendations. Without decisive action, the authors warn, fourth-graders reading two grade levels behind today may become high-school dropouts tomorrow.

“By acting together decisively and with integrity, we can achieve the attainable goals our students deserve,” Callwood wrote.