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Board of Education Report Flags School Safety Gaps, Low Math Proficiency and Fragmented Student Supports

Campus inspections found limited emergency signage, no basic hazard warnings and unmonitored risks, while the Board of Education report also flagged weak literacy momentum, very low math proficiency and delayed referrals for student support services.

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The Virgin Islands Board of Education's latest School Management Accountability Report identifies gaps in campus safety, disaster preparedness, academic performance and student support services across the public education system, while calling for coordinated action ahead of the 2026-2027 academic year.

Board Chair Dr. Kyza Callwood described the report as a “clear-eyed assessment of the current state of public education,” saying it identifies “persistent structural challenges, while setting forth a disciplined, actionable path toward recovery and long-term stability.”

The report found that recent school site inspections exposed shortcomings in campus safety and emergency readiness. Inspectors observed limited signage, posted guidelines or visible emergency instructions for major events including bomb threats, earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, active disturbances and fires.

The report also found that basic hazard warnings for everyday risks were absent. Those included warnings for fall hazards, stairs, uneven surfaces and hazardous substances. In several instances, inspectors also encountered unmonitored safety threats, including unattended ladders, exposed wiring and debris.

The report raised concern about the level of awareness on public school campuses regarding those risks, stating that "this oversight causes grave concern for safety, readiness, and plans for emergency action at schools".

It further stated that "schools are too comfortable and miss the importance of environmental stewardship," and said personnel ranging from administrators and campus monitors to custodians and school nurses "must be EVER READY for chaotic changes at school sites".

To address those safety gaps, the Board of Education recommended the immediate deployment of standardized, color-coded drill charts near classrooms and hallways to provide clear guidance during emergencies.

Academic findings in the report also pointed to instructional challenges, particularly in foundational subjects. The territory’s Smarter Balanced Assessment data for English Language Arts showed incremental year-to-year gains, but the report found that schools often struggle to maintain that progress.

The Board attributed that issue to foundational literacy challenges at the elementary level, noting that "early literacy gaps tend to widen over time, which helps explain why weak elementary outcomes continue to surface in middle and high school performance".

The mathematics findings were more severe. According to the report, proficiency rates across many local campuses were in the single digits or low double digits.

The report said the mathematics data "reveal a system experiencing gradual improvement but continuing to struggle with extremely low overall performance levels".

Analysts concluded that the results reflect students being denied access to rigorous, grade-level material. According to the report, "across most schools, proficiency rates remain in the single digits or low teens, indicating deep, systemic challenges in mathematics instruction rather than isolated school-level issues".

Beyond academics and school facilities, the report identified fragmented approaches to student wraparound services. School counselors are overextended, and referrals to external social and human services are often delayed by administrative bottlenecks.

The report also found that teachers have been forced in many instances to step in as makeshift child care providers and use personal funds to assist struggling families.

Student transitions between grades were another concern. The Board said the current approach is too narrow, noting that relying primarily on school visits and tours is "deficient because it does not significantly prepare students for the responsibility and accountability of their academic progress".

To address the issues identified in the report, the Board has formally invited the Commissioner of Education and district superintendents to present their institutional goals and accountability plans for the 2026-2027 academic year to the public.

The Board said the goal is to create a transparent dialogue around resource allocation and operational expectations.

Callwood said public education cannot recover through fragmented actions.

"The time before us, calls for disciplined collaboration across all branches of government and education leadership to confront long-standing issues with resolve," Callwood stated, adding that "together, we can move from crisis to clarity and from intention to impact".