

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Dept. Of Education Working Hard To Spend All Federal Dollars Available

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ST. CROIX -- The Department of Education is attempting to break the habit of returning millions of unspent funding to the federal government by working hard to meet the many guidelines before the money can be spent, DOE Assistant Commissioner Chermaine Hobson-Johnson told *VI Consortium* on Tuesday.

Hobson-Johnson, a former principal, was at the Claude O. Markoe library where she spoke to students in grades K-6, giving away books and challenging them to read five or more before September 11. The initiative is part of the 7th annual Governor's Summer Book Reading Challenge, a program started during the John P. de Jongh administration and continued with the current government.

"We're going forward and we're going to make things happen. We intend to spend as much of our federal monies as possible, down to zero," Hobson-Johnson said. The assistant commissioner said the territory needs all of the funding that the federal government allocates to the islands.

But getting the money won't be easy, she admitted, revealing that "there are about 29 steps before we could get anything; it's a lot of bureaucratic rep tape."

Hobson-Johnson said while she is not aware of the processes those who ran DOE in the past used, the current team is working overtime to utilize every single dollar, and that the results of their efforts will become tangible to students, faculty and staff of the territory's schools.

"There are three main priorities that we're really pushing forward, and it's something that's being done nationally -- everybody's pretty much doing the same thing," she said. "We're working on school climate and culture, student achievement and teacher/leader effectiveness."

Hobson-Johnson said students should start seeing technology devices such as iPads in the classroom. New textbooks should also be available in the near future; there's also a new teacher evaluation system DOE is considering, and a lot of professional development experts will be meeting with educators. There will also be many opportunities to attend off-island workshops -- all funded by federal dollars.

It's known that the Government of the Virgin Islands has, on numerous occasions, missed out of federal grant monies that are readily available to the territory, and sometimes what have been made available have been sent back because the government could not identify proper usage for it. Mapp, speaking at his first [State of the Territory Address](#), said those days are over.

"Unfortunately, we have not done a very good job of managing and properly utilizing our federal grant funding," the Governor said. "This has been costly for this territory. I am therefore putting our federal grant managers on notice that the people of these Virgin Islands demand accountability and performance, especially where the funding of this government is at stake."

"Our ability to survive as a government requires it. As such, this Administration will not transfer any employment cost to the General Fund to retain federally funded positions when federal grant managers fail to perform and lose," he said.