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Teacher Shortage Concerns Raised Once Again by Department of Education, Sparked by New Round of Pending Retirements

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Elesha George **March 24, 2023**

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Whether there will be enough teachers to fill classrooms across the U.S. Virgin Islands when the 2023/2024 school year begins is a very real concern for Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington, commissioner of the V.I. Dept. of Education.

The commissioner, who appeared before the Committee on Education and Workforce Development on Thursday, raised concerns over the 127 teachers who will become eligible to retire at the end of this school year – increasing the chances of having even fewer teachers to tackle learning deficiencies within the territory.

“Those are the people who could go at any given moment,” she stressed. “I pay attention to that and look for ways to create environments where they want to stay and assist the department in that effort.”

During the 2022-2023 school year – between August 31 2022 and March 13 2023 – D.O.E. reported that 33 teachers separated from the department, leaving a staff complement of 888 teachers. To compound the situation, there are also 187 pre-existing vacancies - 65 in the St. Thomas/St. John District and 122 in the St. Croix district. Of the 65 in St. Thomas district 13 are teaching vacancies and of the 122 in St. Croix, 30 are teaching vacancies.

Plans are afoot to recruit teachers from outside the territory to fill existing staffing gaps — a strategy the department has been using for years. Melene Cooper-Shelford, acting human resources director said her office has been conducting both local and international interviews. “We have a high shortage especially in special education and that has been redundant every year. So right now, we are seeking international teachers to help fill that gap because we tend not to find locals to come fill that gap.”

Last August, Education launched a [special appeal](#) to recruit retirees and degree holders to fill substitute teacher positions at a rate of \$22 per hour, as severe teaching shortages took hold. “We are looking for caring, enthusiastic individuals to fill these critical roles so that we can have continuity of education as our recruitment efforts for full-time teachers are ongoing,” Wells-Hedrington said at the time. “Teacher shortages are not unique to the Virgin Islands—they’re happening everywhere across the country. However, we are calling on our local community to be a part of the solution and encourage all retirees and anyone with a college degree from an accredited institution to apply.”

Nearly 200 teachers and support staff resigned or retired from the public school education system between June 2022 and August 2022, Wells-Hedrington [told lawmakers](#) last year.