

PRESS RELEASE

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Education in the Virgin Islands Moves Full S.T.E.A.M. Ahead with Historic Gains

Release Date: 15 September, 2025



The Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports has reaffirmed its commitment to transforming education in the Virgin Islands, announcing key achievements in school infrastructure, teacher development, student performance, and curriculum reform. The updates were shared during the Ministerial Retreat on September 10 and further highlighted on the Virgin Islands Voice programme later that evening.

Minister for Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, Honourable Sharie de Castro, described the Territory's progress as a turning point. "We believe education is a powerful investment in our future, a legacy written in lives and measured in generations. Every project, every programme, every resource we provide is about ensuring our children thrive in a system that is resilient, modern, and student-led."

This year's budget increase of \$11 million has allowed the Ministry to accelerate critical works across schools, many of which are more than 40 years old. Over the summer, roofs were sealed, plumbing and electrical systems were upgraded, and new water storage tanks and hurricane-proof windows were installed. Safety and recreational spaces also received attention, with fences repaired, CCTV cameras mounted, playgrounds rejuvenated, and new basketball courts constructed. The Eslyn Henley Richiez Learning Centre, the first purpose-built special education school in the OECS, has already welcomed its students, with a formal public opening slated for a later date. The facility stands as a milestone in the Territory's commitment to inclusive education.

Acting Permanent Secretary Mr. Claude Kettle said the upgrades reflect the progress already made and the planning behind it. "We have done a lot of major rehabilitation work on schools over the summer, largely because we had the funding up front in the 2025 budget and the benefit of two engineers on our team to guide the process. I am pleased to say that we have made incredible changes at most of our schools in the Territory, with more improvements still to come as the year progresses."

While infrastructure is critical, the Ministry highlighted that it is teachers who drive student success. The "Let's Teach VI" initiative has expanded, with twelve new teacher trainees added this year and more than 200 applications received. Teacher retention has also improved, with resignations dropping dramatically from

seventeen in 2023 to only one by May 2025, due in part to higher compensation and expanded professional development opportunities. More than thirty educators have graduated from certificate programmes in teaching and leadership at H. Lavity Stoutt Community College, and a postgraduate diploma in arts integration is currently being pursued by ten teachers with funding support from Unite BVI.

Students are already benefiting from these investments. This year's CSEC results showed a 52.61% percent pass rate in mathematics, a 6% percent improvement over 2024 and 14% above the regional average. Schools are also being modernised with 60 smart boards already installed and a goal of equipping every classroom before the year ends. Updated computer labs, furniture, and teaching resources are also transforming classrooms into interactive, technology-rich spaces.

Chief Education Officer Mrs. Orlandette Crabbe said these changes go hand in hand with curriculum reform. "The last comprehensive curriculum review was more than a decade ago, and we are now restarting that process with classroom observations and data collection already underway. Our goal is to produce a curriculum by 2026 that integrates S.T.E.A.M., raises academic standards, and reflects the values of the Virgin Islands. We have asked ourselves: what does the ideal Virgin Islander look like, and how do we prepare our students to become that person? Part of the answer is relaunching our core values curriculum, beginning with respect, so that every child grows up knowing who they are, where they come from, and how they can contribute to society."

The Ministry also confirmed that planning is underway for the construction of a new secondary school on the eastern end of Tortola, continued legislative reviews, expanded teacher training partnerships, and accreditation of HLSCC to offer four-year degree programmes.

Honourable de Castro emphasised that these next steps will require collective effort. She said, "You can't get change if you give exact, but if you give more, you get change. We are giving more as a government to education. We're asking our teachers, our students, our parents, our community, and our private sector partners to give more as well. If you believe in education, then join us in this

mandate. Education is the currency of change, and together we can transform it.”

For more information or to share your ideas, concerns, and suggestions with the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports, persons can stop by the office at the **E.A. Creque Building, Main Street, Road Town, Tortola**, or **call (284) 468-2151**.

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