CRACKING THE CODE

Making the Case for a Comprehensive Policy Analysis of the Virgin Islands Public Education System to Achieve Whole-System Reform

ST. CROIX FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
20/20 EDUCATION POLICY STEERING COMMITTEE
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Cracking the Virgin Islands Code

ABSTRACT

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BEARERS & THE ARGUMENT FOR A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO REFORM

Educators around the country and the world are racing to 'crack the code' to find the formula for reforming underachieving educational systems. The same is true for the Virgin Islands as policymakers and education stakeholders analyze how to improve the Territory's public school system. It is a race against the clock that underpins state economies, global competition, and the viability of entire civilizations. And based on an examination of international reform models, many countries around the world have successfully met the challenge of investing in broad-scale reform with subsequent economic rewards (Sahlberg, 2006).

According to Michael Fullan, a leader in the reform of the Canadian education system,[1] in order to sustain measurable impact on student learning, **system-wide** reform must be the objective because it capitalizes on the collective capacity of the entire system by focusing on "spreading practice across districts". As defined by Fullan, "**whole system reform** means that every vital part of the system – school, community, district, and government – contributes individually, and in concert, to forward movement…" (2010). In contrast to school-based reform or top-down efforts, **system-wide** reform ensures that **a)** the system is fully understood by all key stakeholders, with every person in the system understanding their roles and responsibilities, while **b)** modifications that are instituted, whether at the policy level or school-based, are carefully analyzed to determine how each change will affect other parts of the system.

Since 2005, St. Croix Foundation for Community Development[2] has also sought to crack the code, investigating national and international models of educational excellence with the overarching mission to advocate and support strategies that will lead to rapid public education transformation and improve student achievement. In 2013, St. Croix Foundation launched its 20/20 Education Policy Steering Committee to conduct a comprehensive review of the Territory's educational policies to understand our **system** and problems interfering with the Territory's collective efforts for reform. Led by the Foundation's Policy Officer, the Steering Committee has spent three years examining legal codes as well as national and international educational policies related to five specific priority areas: **(1)** Organizational Structure, **(2)** Instructional Management, **(3)** Student Support Systems, **(4)** Facilities Management, and **(5)** Funding.

As the framework within which all other priority areas function, to date, the Committee has reported on *Priority #1: Organizational Design*. Evaluating key components of the system independently and collectively with the goal of developing a comprehensive policy map, the Committee presented the following findings to key stakeholders.

1. While the Virgin Islands Code mandates that there are clearly defined roles for State Education Agencies and Local Education Agencies, the VI Department of Education functions as a unitary system.
2. The highest performing education systems in the nation align the organizational structure and operating policies governing their departments of education with their boards of education.
3. High performing systems in the United States have specific criteria for membership on the Board of Education. The Virgin Islands does not.
4. Most education stakeholders and policy makers who took the Foundation's pre and post surveys do not *effectively* understand the VI Codes that govern their roles and the system as a whole.
5. It is impossible to fully evaluate the efficacy of the VI Public Education System at this time because there are too many critical areas where the VI Code is either ambiguous or not being followed.

The Steering Committee formulated recommendations based on these findings that are presented within this document.

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Making the Case for a Comprehensive Education Policy Analysis

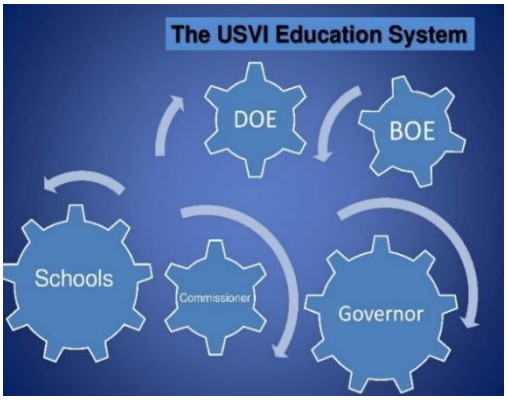
Current macroeconomic research about the growth of nations strongly indicates that the future health of an economy depends on the cognitive skills of its workers. ~ Eric A. Hanushek and Ludger Woessmanny

WHY POLICY?

Over the course of twelve years, St. Croix Foundation for Community Development has invested in excess of $1 million into the Virgin Islands' education system. This is but a fraction of the 41.33 billion charitable dollars that were directed toward education nationwide in 2012 ("Charitable Giving Rose…") and the over 107 billion expended by the federal government (Delisle, 2013). Yet, in that same year, the PISA[3] exam, administered by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, reported that the United States scored below average in mathematics, ranking 27th among 65 countries. In reading proficiency, the United States ranked 17th and in science it ranked 20th (2014).

After investments of billions of charitable dollars, time, and talent into education, among American students "***There has been no significant change in these [academic] performances over time.***" *~ Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development, 2014*

In light of these facts, the Foundation was motivated to shift our approach away from funding niche programs and toward conducting a thorough analysis of the policies and systems that govern public education in the Virgin Islands.



The question at the root of the Foundation's policy analysis of the VI Public Education System: **by Virgin Islands *law*, what entity is ultimately charged with the oversight of funding and management of the education system?**

St. Croix Foundation's Approach to Reform

St. Croix Foundation's educational work began in 2005 with the launch of our Model Schools Initiative.[4] At that time, the Foundation was just 15 years old but had already amassed a long record of successful initiatives in all priority areas including community revitalization, economic development, public safety, and fiscal sponsorship. To gain traction and deepen our impact, the Foundation concluded that a focus on education and workforce development as organizational priorities was the most effective insurance for the future prosperity and economic health of the US Virgin Islands.

In the 11 years since the launch of the Model Schools Initiative, St. Croix Foundation has invested over 1 million dollars in the Territory's public education system. But it cannot be fully quantified how much, beyond the financial investment, the Foundation has done in support of the Territory's public schools, local educators, and students. We adopted schools, created auxiliary libraries, bought countless books, sponsored Territory-wide professional development activities, and hosted roundtables and educational symposiums with key stakeholders on everything from best practices for classroom management to exploring charter schools. We also funded large delegations of educators to national conferences and launched strategic grantmaking programs that supported literacy, STEM, behavioral/student incentive programs, and arts initiatives, in addition to awarding individual scholarships. Seeking to quantify our investments and create a record of our effort and impact, we also published a case study on our work, conducted surveys, and published a 20-week editorial series.[5]

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Like many education reform strategies in America, our attempts to improve academic achievement had varying results. Back in 2011, the conclusion we had drawn from our efforts indicated that although some measurable gains were made, those gains occurred in isolation, and sustained improvements were not achieved proportional to the investments made. As an operating foundation, our core philosophy is that if a strategy for change has not resulted in success, then either the root cause has not yet been identified or the right approach has not been undertaken. Because the Foundation's work afforded us the opportunity to compile a comprehensive data repository on education reform in the Virgin Islands, we were motivated to gain a deeper understanding of the system, relying heavily on the statistics depicted in Tables 1 and 2 to guide us.

Table 1 – Virgin Islands Educational Attainment & Academic Proficiency

	THEN	MOST CURRENT DATA
High School Completion	In 2008, 47% of youth ages 18-19 had not completed high school ("USVI Kids Count," 2014).	For the 2013-2014 school year, 41% of students ages 18-19 had not completed high school ("USVI Kids Count," 2015).
English/Lang. Arts Proficiency	77.5% of 11th graders were not reading at grade level on the 2004-2005 VITAL exam ("USVI Kids Count," 2006).	In 2015-2016, 81% of VI public school students were not reading at grade level[6] (VI Dept. of Ed., n.d.).
Mathematics Proficiency	63% of 11th graders were not proficient in mathematics on the 2004-05 VITAL exam ("USVI Kids Count," 2006).	In 2015-2016, 93% of public school students were not proficient in math (Virgin Islands Dept. of Ed., n.d.).
University of the Virgin Islands (UVI) Skills Classes	In 2008, 63% of freshman students at UVI scored below 500 on the SAT exam in reading and/or writing, requiring they take skills classes (Blake, 2017).	Since 2008, the number of incoming freshman scoring below 500 points steadily increased, spiking to 90% in 2015 (Blake, 2017).

Table 2 – Virgin Islands/United States Socioeconomic Comparisons

Teen Violent Crime Rate	**THEN**	**MOST CURRENT DATA**
Virgin Islands Average	In 2005, the rate of violent crime arrests was 483 per 100,000 youth ages 10-17 ("USVI Kids Count," 2010).	In 2013, the number of teen violent crime arrests was 559 per 100,000 youth, ages 10-18. ("USVI Kids Count," 2015).
United States Average	The national rate of teen violent crime in 2005 was 276.7 per 100,000 youth ages 10-17 (Office of Juvenile Justice, n.d.)	In 2013, the national rate was 168 per 100,000 youth. ("USVI Kids Count," 2015).
Homicide Rate	**THEN**	**MOST CURRENT DATA**
Virgin Islands Average	In 2005, the V.I.'s homicide rate was 41 per 107,000 people ("Homicides in 2005," n.d.).	The V.I. reported 33 homicides in 2015, per 100,000 people, ranking the VI as having the highest murder rate in the nation (McCarthy, 2016).
United States Average	In 2005, the national homicide rate was 5.6 per 100,000 people ("Crime," 2006)	In 2015, the national rate was 4.9 per 100,000 people ("Crime," 2016.)
Unemployment[7]	**THEN**	**MOST CURRENT DATA**
St. Croix Average	St. Croix's 2005 unemployment rate was 8.2% (VI Dept. of Labor, n.d.).	In 2015, the unemployment rate was 12.8% (VI Dept. of Labor, n.d.).
St. John/St. Thomas Average	St. John/St. Thomas reported a 6.2% unemployment rate in 2005 (VI Dept. of Labor, n.d.).	In 2015, unemployment on St. Thomas/St. John was 11.2% (VI Dept. of Labor, n.d.).
United States Average	In 2005, the national unemployment rate was 5.0% (Bureau of Labor, n.d.)	In 2015, the average increased slightly to 5.3% (Bureau of Labor, n.d.)

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While the social realities of our young people were grim, economic indicators painted an even more compelling picture on the state of the Territory. Between 2007 and 2012, revenue for the island of St. Croix decreased from over $16 billion to $3.5 billion due to the closure of Hovensa, LLC; on St. Thomas, the decrease was nearly $52 million (VI Bureau of Economic Research, 2014).

With educational and public safety data inextricably linked to economics, in 2012, St. Croix Foundation deduced that a Territory-wide investment in public education (in dollars and commitment) could allow the Virgin Islands to not only recover but to thrive socially and economically. This remains true for any community facing similar challenges based on research of successful systemic reform efforts around the world.

VIRGIN ISLANDS CHILD POVERTY RATE:
35%

St. Croix: 41%
St. John: 24%
St. Thomas: 29%
US Average: 22%

("USVI Kids Count," 2015)

CONDUCTING A SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

Reflecting on the research, the data, and our entire body of work in education, the Foundation concluded that even if the Territory could implement all the best programs with all the funding needed to support them, programming and grants alone were unlikely to produce sustainable results. Instead of making *everything* a priority, we decided to shift resources away from buying books or supporting programs and began to focus on understanding some of the deeply entrenched inhibitors to sustained improvements. In 2012, we formally identified two of the most critical trigger points that would have a multiplier effect throughout the system: teachers and the system itself.

The Foundation investigated the viability of our new approach and found several sources that supported our theory. Peter Senge, senior lecturer of Systems Leadership and Sustainability at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, states on the issue:

> The systems perspective tells us that we must look beyond individual mistakes or bad luck to understand important problems. We must look beyond personalities and events. We must look into the underlying structures which shape individual actions and create the conditions where types of events become likely (2006).

With a growing understanding of the *whole-systems approach* to education reform, in the spring of 2012, the Foundation began a deliberative policy mapping of the Territory's educational system. Grounded in data analysis, the strategy we employed included the following:

1. Formed the 20/20 Vision Education Steering Committee

The Foundation carefully selected a cross-section of local community stakeholders consisting of business leaders, educators from public, private, and parochial schools, as well as representatives from the University of the Virgin Islands and public sector agencies. Facilitated by a Policy Officer, the Committee has served as a research engine, compiling policies, examining VI Codes and building consensus for the development of final recommendations.

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2. Determined Research Priorities

Upon establishing the Steering Committee, we focused attention on the interconnectedness of each part of the Territory's educational system by identifying five key research categories:

PRIORITY #1: *Organizational Design* – Seeking to understand the overall organizational structure of the Virgin Islands education system, the Committee examined governing authorities and hierarchal relationships within and between the Department of Education, the Board of Education, the Commissioner of Education, and the Governor.

PRIORITY #2: *Instructional Management and Teacher Quality* – Reviewing personnel policies, formal job descriptions, selection and hiring criteria, union contracts, and performance appraisals, the Committee gathered data surrounding key facets of the system that govern curriculum as well as teacher and administrative effectiveness.

PRIORITY #3: *Student Support Systems* – Examining the legal codes and existing standards that exclusively address the health and welfare of the most important educational stakeholder (*students)*, the Committee researched the formal structures that provide educational, social and emotional support systems and guidance for children.

PRIORITY #4: *Facilities Management* – Honing in on working environments and conditions, the Committee investigated issues pertaining to the maintenance and safety of learning spaces and educational facilities as an element of health, morale, and student engagement.

PRIORITY #5: *Public Education Funding* – Identifying funding as a primary component of a healthy educational system, the Committee waded through funding spreads to decipher funding formulas and budget allocations (federal and local).

3. Compiled the Data

Committee members began their research by mining through a maze of existing educational statutes and researching policies and procedures outlined by the Board of Education, Department of Education, Virgin Islands Legislature, individual schools, and other relevant policymaking bodies.[8] Dedicating the first stage of our research to *Priority #1: Organizational Design* as the framework within which all other priority areas function, the Steering Committee compiled and vetted data from a myriad of sources including but not limited to the following:

a. Organizational charts
b. Job descriptions
c. VI Codes
d. Policy manuals
e. School handbooks
f. Standard operating procedures
g. Previous research, including the University of the Virgin Islands' 2002 Study on the structure of the Department of Education[9]
h. Reports from the Board of Education, Department of Interior, and Department of Education on facility maintenance

4. Analyzed the Data

The committee identified the most critical trigger points that stand in the way of systemic change and at the same time present the most promising pathway for *ripple impacts* on the whole system. Deliberate

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focus was directed to the interrelationships between divisions, agencies, and boards to include the following:

a. Management of the system: the authorities, roles, and responsibilities of the Virgin Islands Board of Education versus the Virgin Islands Department of Education
b. High performing states' education governance models

5. Hosted Focus Groups

Having compiled a mountain of data on Organizational Design, the Steering Committee developed a formal presentation and then began convening focus group meetings. The objectives for these meetings were to 1) initiate a conversation, 2) build awareness, and 3) facilitate a more collaborative and holistic approach to system-wide education reform.

The Committee began by inviting representatives from several civic organizations to participate and collaborate in our first focus group meeting. Subsequent meetings were held with the Virgin Islands Board of Education, state representatives from the Department of Education (including legal counsel), building representatives from the American Federation of Teachers, the Senate Committee on Education and Workforce Development, senatorial aspirants in advance of the 2014 election, University of the Virgin Islands senior representatives, and members from key stakeholder groups such as the Parent Teacher Student Association and the Chamber of Commerce. In May of 2016, ten senators from the 31st Legislature convened in the Foundation's conference room for a 3-hour deep dive into *The Organization and Structure of the VI Public Education System*. Consistently, the data presented to participants aroused interest, sounded alarms, and neutralized tensions, resulting in unanimous consensus around the need to amend and align outdated, ambiguous, and incongruent educational statutes and policies.

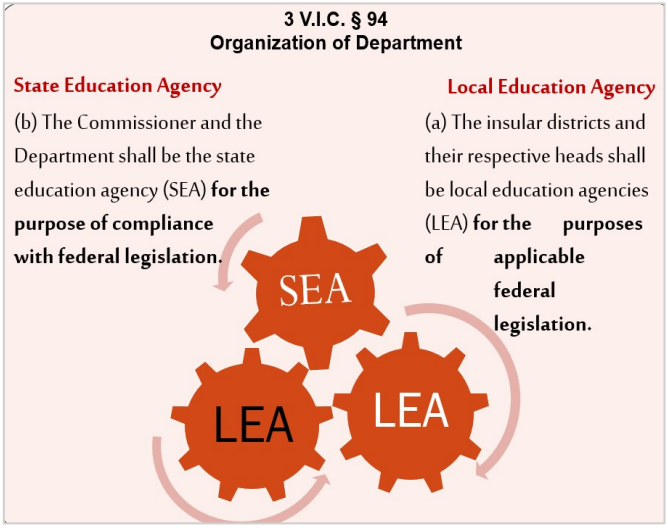
KEY FINDINGS: ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN BY VIRGIN ISLANDS CODE

In reviewing the data, what became immediately evident was the glaring complexities between and within the Virgin Islands Department of Education (VIDE) and the Virgin Islands Board of Education (VIBE). Also noted were critical statutes that were not enforced, such as the requirement that a Dean of Students be in place at all secondary schools to support school administrators with disciplinary problems. But what was most profound was the ambiguity in the VI Code surrounding the Board of Education's role relative to the Department of Education's role in the leadership of the education system (as seen in Figure 4). The Committee ultimately outlined five key findings:

(1) ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

By VI Code, the Virgin Islands Department of Education is structured as a decentralized State Education Agency (SEA) with two Local Education Agencies (LEA) as shown in Figure 1; but the Department really functions as a centralized unitary system, wherein almost all decisions are made at the state level (SEA), and the two district offices (LEAs) primarily execute those decisions.

Figure 1 – State & Local Education Agencies



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As reported by the University of the Virgin Islands in 2002, the Virgin Islands' system differs from common practice:

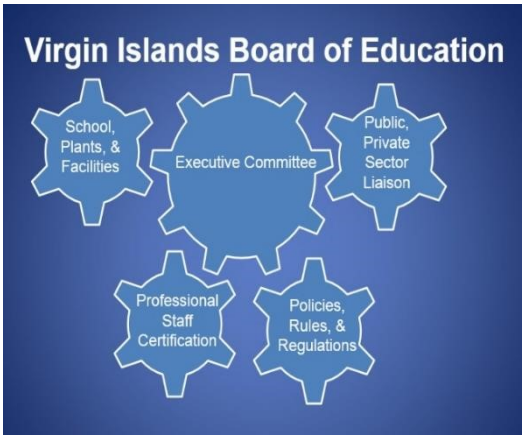
> Most states have the equivalent of a politically appointed or elected commissioner of education who heads up a civil service-staffed SEA. Most heads of SEAs work with a board to establish policy, receive and disburse funds, and monitor and report on the quality of education in the state. Traditionally, LEAs, normally headed by a superintendent who reports to a politically elected or appointed board, accomplish the delivery of education. This division ensures common standards for education and reporting of results while granting LEAs freedom to deliver education within standards. This clearly defined SEA/LEA organization does not function in the Virgin Islands Department of Education.

(2) ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Historical Context

According to VI Code, prior to 1955, the Virgin Islands had a "Committee on Education" and the School Boards of St. Thomas and St. Croix. In 1955, the Virgin Islands Board of Education was officially established by law as an independent agency, *within the Department of Education,* for administrative purposes. As the VIBE was an independent agency within the Department of Education, it was implicitly granted authority to recruit, hire, promote, and discharge personnel to carry out its duties. Nonetheless, the VIBE's employees were employees of the Department and had no power to order the Commissioner of Education to carry out the Board's directives.[10]

Figure 2 – Current Structure of the VIBE



Today, the VIBE is an independent agency operating *outside of the Department of Education* that oversees the Virgin Islands' two districts. Its bylaws state that "The Board is responsible for the general policy and direction of education in the Virgin Islands," reflecting that the VIBE's legal responsibilities mandated that the Board take a direct leadership role in the operation of the VI education system (2002). Under the VI Code, the VIBE became more accountable, though, as it is now an elected body with broader policy making power that included establishing the school calendar.

Figure 3 –VI Board of Education Membership

48 U.S. Code § 1572
Legislators (b) Qualifications of members
No person shall be eligible to be a member of the legislature who is not a citizen of the United States, who has not attained the age of twenty-one years, who is not a qualified voter in the Virgin Islands, who has not been a bona fide resident of the Virgin Islands for at least three years next preceding the date of his election, or who has been convicted of a felony or of a crime involving moral turpitude and has not received a pardon restoring his civil rights. Federal employees and persons employed in the legislative, executive or judicial branches of the government of the Virgin Islands shall not be eligible for membership in the legislature.

Board Membership

In high performing education systems in the United States, substantial criteria for membership on boards of education is legislated. In the Virgin Islands, qualifications for our Board of Education are the same as for a member of the legislature.[11] In many high performing states, as seen in Figure 6, membership on boards of education included high school students, military personnel, representatives from manufacturing and trade, and post-secondary administrators. **Moreover, in the majority of states, the superintendent/commissioner sat on their boards.**

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Figure 4 – Roles and Responsibilities of the Board and Department of Education[12]

RULES & REGULATIONS		
BOE	**SHARED**	**DOE**
	17 V.I.C. **§24** The Board of Education in consultation with the Commissioner of Education, shall make recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor through an annual report … The report shall include (1) findings of administrative deficiencies and the recommendations for addressing the deficiencies; (2) findings of guidance and counseling deficiencies and Recommendations for addressing the deficiencies; and, (3) identification of strengths and weaknesses of each school to include achievement and standardized test scores and statistics for dropouts, attendance college entrance and vocation program entrance	**3 V.I.C. § 92** The Commissioner administer, supervise and direct the Department
	3 V.I.C. §94 (b) The Commissioner set policy for, plan, oversee and monitor public education **17 V.I.C§21.(a)(1) Powers and Duties of the Board** prescribe general regulations and orders; recommend laws and amendments; recommend appropriations required for the operation of the public schools and Department of Education; and in general do anything necessary for the proper establishment, maintenance, management, and operation of the public schools	**3V.I.C. §100** The Commissioner may prescribe rules and regulations, not inconsistent with law …., for the proper administration of the Department, the conduct of its officers and other personnel the distribution and performance of its business and the custody, use, and preservation of the records, papers and property appertaining to it **3 V.I.C. §96 (a)** The Department shall have authority and jurisdiction to exercise general control over the enforcement of the laws relating to education
PERSONNEL		
	BOE **17 V.I.C. §21 (a)(5)** approve or disapprove, subject to the final approval of the governor, the recommendations made by the Commissioner of Education to the administrator of the Personnel Merit System…..; **17 V.I.C. §21 (a)(6)** approve or disapprove, subject to the final approval of the governor, the rules and regulations proposed by the Commissioner of Education, …, for the certification, selection, determination of salaries, …, and appointment of teachers, librarians, supervisors, and other professional personnel of the department; **DOE** **3 V.I.C. §96 (a)(6)** administer and operate, subject to the approval of the Governor, the certification, selection and appointment of Department personnel, except Department professionals, and the activities directly related thereto;	**3 V.I.C. § 92** The Commissioner employ/appoint teachers and other employees

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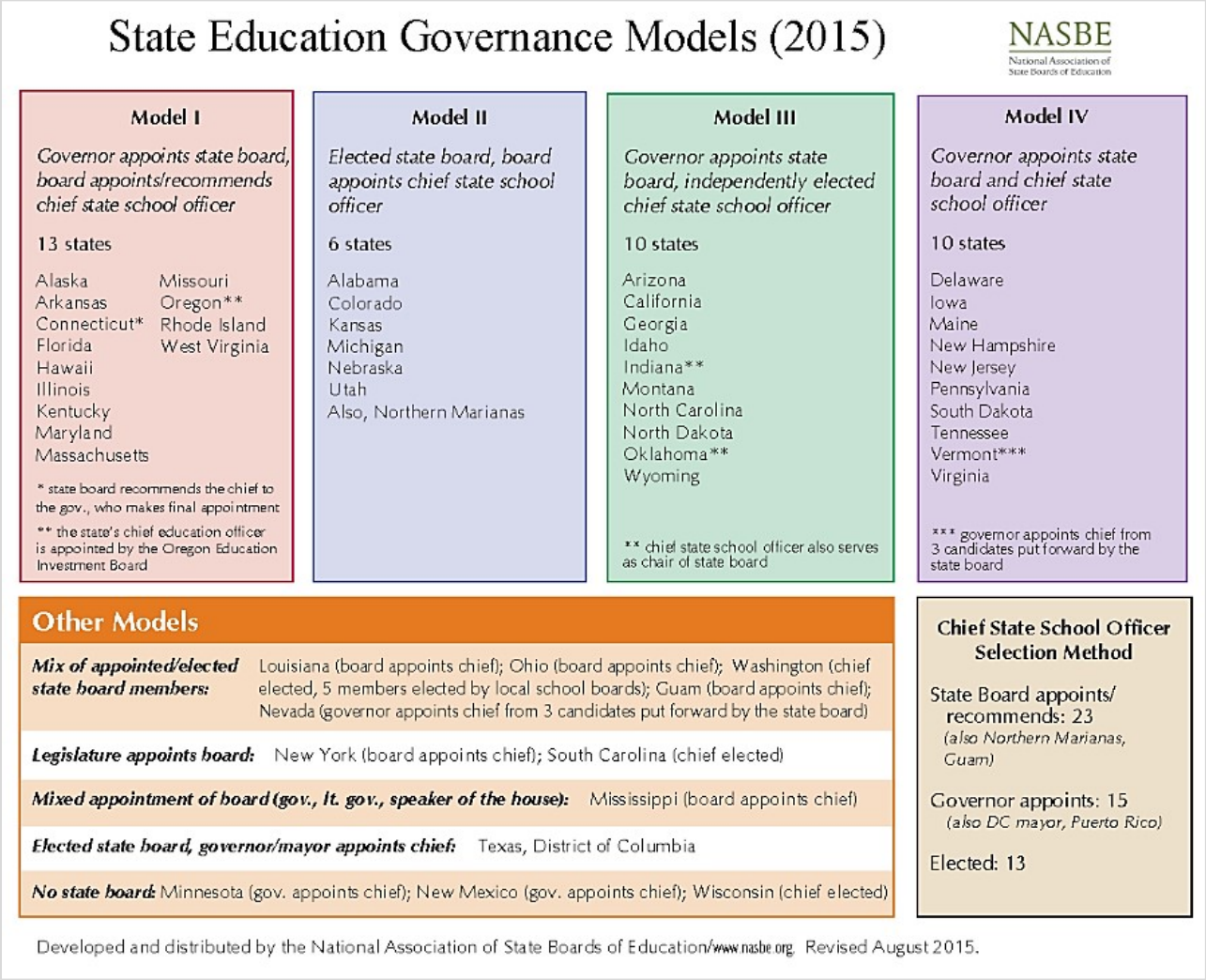
(3) NATIONAL MODELS

The Committee also conducted research on the structure and the role of boards and departments of education throughout the United States as charted by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE). There are several organizational models NASBE has identified, which can be seen in Figure 5 below. Looking at the fifteen top states in education for 2015, the committee highlighted the roles of superintendents/commissioners of education, focusing on the functions of boards in each state's organizational structure.

Figure 5 – National School Boards Models



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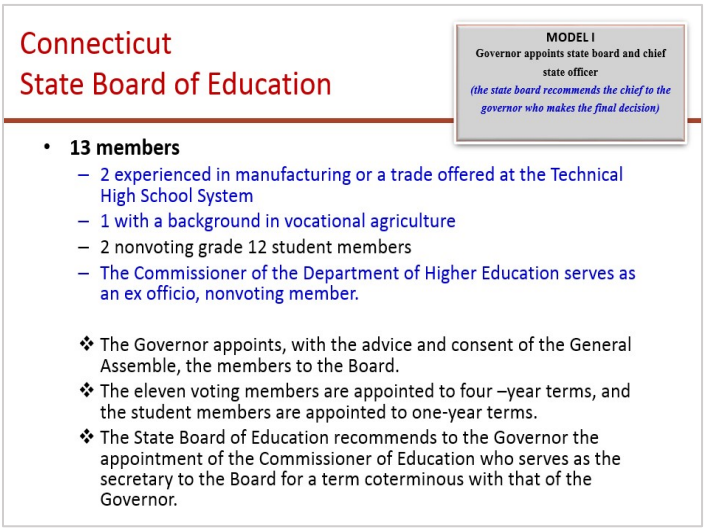
Board Membership & the Commissioner of Education

Most department of education state heads, whether elected or appointed, work with a board to establish policy, receive and disburse funds, and monitor and report on the quality of education in the state. In the Virgin Islands, most policies governing our education system require the VIBE to work in partnership with the Commissioner of Education, but the Commissioner does not sit on the board. Amendments to VI Code Ch.7 §97 (b) in 1967 deleted the provision that the Commissioner be a member ex officio and secretary of the board. Yet, in subsection (d), a second sentence was added stipulating that the Commissioner of Education should be the executive secretary of the Virgin Islands Board of Education. Today, "No employee of the Department of Education or Board of Education is eligible; No employee or official of the Department of Education and no employee of the Board of Education may be a candidate for the Board of Education" (Election System, n.d.).

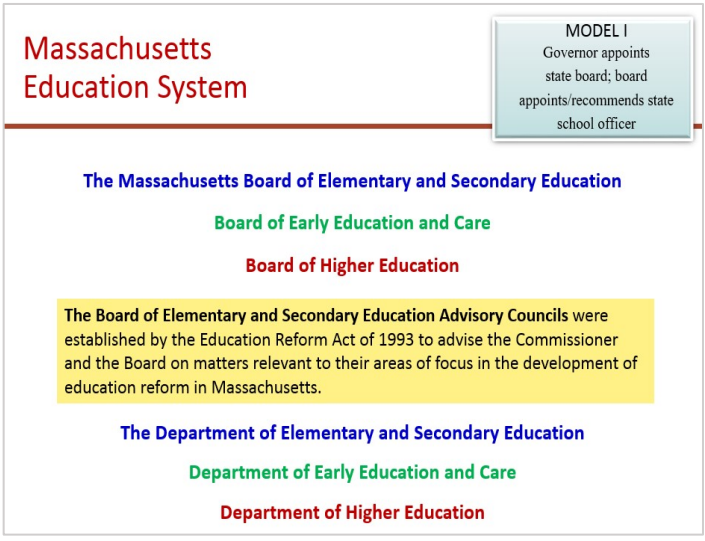
Figure 6 – Board Requirements in Connecticut



Board & Department Alignment

Among some of the highest performing states there are also different organizational structures for each state's educational system. In some, the board is elected while in other states the board is appointed by the governor. And some states do not even have a 'board of education' at all. Further, according to the National Association of State School Boards, 23 states choose to have their board of education hire their commissioner. But in some cases, states *elect* their commissioner and in others the choice of a commissioner is a gubernatorial appointment. The common thread among high achieving states, based on our research, is a high level of collaboration among all the key stakeholders and policymakers. An example of this is the Massachusetts Education System, which demonstrates precise alignment between the organizational and operational structure of the state's board of education and their department's divisions (Figure 7).

Figure 7 – Organizational Structure of Massachusetts



(4) STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

Most education stakeholders, *policymakers*, and external community stakeholders (including St. Croix Foundation) did not effectively understand the system that they govern, work within, or support. In many

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cases, participants knew that a policy existed but did not know how it related to the entire *system*. **Recurring questions raised in focus groups by education policy makers/stakeholders included:**

1. Is the Virgin Islands Board of Education (VIBE) needed? Why or why not?
2. If yes, should the VIBE's organizational structure (committees, etc.) align with the VI Department of Education's Territorial and district organizational structure?
3. Should board members continue to be elected, should they be appointed, or a combination of both?
4. Should membership to the VIBE be reassessed?
    a) How many members should be on the VIBE?
    b) What should be the qualifications for VIBE membership?
    c) Should the commissioner sit on the VIBE?
5. Should the VIBE be responsible for hiring:
    a) District Superintendents?
    b) Commissioners?
6. How long should members sit on the VIBE?
7. How is the VIDE structured in reality versus by Code? Does it align with the VI Board of Education? How are the SEA and LEA structured?
8. What should be the relationship between the VIBE, VIDE, Executive, and Legislative branches?

EFFECTIVE SCHOOL SYSTEMS

The big difference between effective and ineffective school systems – and all organizations for that matter – is the 'collective or shared depth of understanding among members about the nature of their work'.

~ Michael Fullan, 2011

(5) SYSTEMS ASSESSMENT

Finally, the Committee found that it was ultimately impossible to fully evaluate the efficacy of the structure of the Virgin Islands Public Education System, because there are too many critical areas where the VI Code is either too ambiguous or not being followed relative to organizational structure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon the conclusion of the first phase of our research, focusing primarily on organizational design, our final recommendation was directed at the Virgin Islands Legislature and was very simply this: *take action.* St. Croix Foundation has led the research to identify issues that affect the organizational structure of our Territory's education system as it relates to the VI Code. It is now the responsibility of the VI Legislature to make the revisions needed in the Code that can lead to more cohesive laws. Additional recommendations presented to the Legislature included:

1. Conduct further research and assign a code reviser responsible for the task of ensuring the congruence of VI Codes.
2. Determine *who's on first base* in the hierarchal structure of the educational system to ensure governing entities have adequate funding (and experience/credentials) to fulfill their duties; and then enforce the law.
3. Establish clear criteria for board membership.
4. Re-assess, clarify, and codify the LEA and SEA inter-relationship.
5. Finally, we believe that it is vital that the Legislature analyze the process by which the Territory selects education leaders (i.e. appointed, elected or hired) and determine the policies that govern their roles and responsibilities.

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SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

St. Croix Foundation for Community Development's effort to crack the code and support our educational system and students' academic success has evolved since 2005. Beyond grantmaking, the Foundation is now focused on identifying the pressure points that will cause ripple impact throughout the Virgin Islands education system. We are more convinced today than ever before that, rather than diluting resources across many priorities, the Territory's strategy must be directed at gaining a deeper understanding of the **system** while concurrently excavating the critical role of **teachers**. We ultimately believe that if the emphasis remains on niche reform strategies like academies, charter schools, STEM/STEAM programs, vouchers, or even Common Core as panaceas, sustainable whole-system reform will elude the Virgin Islands and other American districts like ours for that matter.

In the second phase of our research, St. Croix Foundation's Steering Committee has begun an analysis of our next two priority areas:

> (1) *Instructional Management and Teacher Quality* – To date, personnel policies, formal job descriptions, selection and hiring criteria, union contracts, and performance appraisals have been collected and the Foundation's 20/20 Education Committee is now building a presentation that contains the key facets of the system that governs curriculum as well as teacher and administrative effectiveness.
>
> (2) *Student Support Systems* – The Committee has also been examining legal codes and existing standards that exclusively address the health and welfare of our most important educational stakeholders—*students.* The Committee will explore VI education policies to map the interrelated structures that provide academic, social and emotional support systems and guidance for *children*.

St. Croix Foundation for Community Development believes that education affects every resident in the Virgin Islands and that it is the foundation upon which our community's socioeconomic future rests. It is now our collective responsibility to meet our current challenges with sound data and aggressive action.

Over the past 12 years, St. Croix Foundation has spearheaded comprehensive educational initiatives, published editorials, and sought to raise awareness on the importance of public education to our economy and social wellbeing. Through our current policy research, we now seek to galvanize education stakeholders and policymakers *to learn the system*, to analyze it, and to reform it where necessary. In the final phase of our Policy Research Initiative, the Foundation's Steering Committee seeks to build a Policy Map that will overlay local policies with proven national *and international* education best practices and model policies. The completed map will provide policymakers and stakeholders with a databank, which will allow them to make informed decisions that will finally assist us in implementing **whole-system reforms.** This comprehensive systems analysis will also assist St. Croix Foundation in pursuing funding opportunities for the Territory through national funders and to understand how best to support students and teachers.

As we consider the impediments to forward momentum around education reform in the Virgin Islands over the past 20 years, we believe that the political and administrative 'revolving door' creates a cycle in which new visions and strategic agendas are rarely sustainable. This is true here and throughout educational systems everywhere. So the question remains: who carries forward a vision of equity, excellence and global competition? As a place-based operating foundation, the St. Croix Foundation for Community Development's philanthropic purpose is simply this: catalyze change and hold the vision.

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Endnotes

[1] In 2015, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development ranked Canada as 10th among 72 countries (and economies) who participated in the Programme for International Assessment (PISA). In past PISA exams, Canadian students have consistently scored well above the average in science, math and literacy. For more information on Canada's performance on the PISA, visit http://gpseducation.oecd.org/CountryProfile?plotter=h5&primaryCountry=CAN&treshold=10&topic=PI.

[2] St. Croix Foundation for Community Development is a hybrid community development organization that is a grantmaker and an operating foundation. Every program operated by the Foundation is designed to intersect for maximum impact through leveraging resources to achieve the socioeconomic prosperity of the US Virgin Islands. For more information on the Foundation, visit www.stxfoundation.org.

[3] The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a "triennial international survey which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students." For more information, visit the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development at https://www.oecd.org/pisa/.

[4] When St. Croix Foundation launched our MSI as a pilot project at St. Croix's lowest performing middle school in 2005, it was a targeted educational venture intended to directly support the Territory's schools. Over the course of almost five years, our Initiative grew to one of the most comprehensive public/private educational endeavors in the Virgin Islands in investment and in scope. In December of 2009, the Foundation captured the impact, challenges, and lesson learned through a published report entitled *Model Schools Initiative: Chronicling Five Years of Community-Based Work in the US Virgin Islands Public Education System*. To read the 2016 Edition of the Foundation's report, contact the Foundation or visit http://www.stxfoundation.org/who-we-are/publications/.

[5] To access the Foundation's 2014 Editorial Series, visit http://www.stxfoundation.org/who-we-are/publications/.

[6] In 2014, the Virgin Islands Department of Education moved from the Virgin Islands Territorial Assessment of Learning (VITAL) standardized test to the 'Smarter Balanced' Assessment through Common Core State Standards. The new Smarter Balanced exam is considered to be much more rigorous and as such, comparisons between the VITAL and the Smarter Balanced exams should not be made. The Foundation includes academic proficiency scores for both exams in this paper to indicate a general trend and to set context for the Foundation's programmatic priorities. Scores are rounded. For information on Common Core State Standards, visit http://www.corestandards.org/. For more information on the Virgin Islands Smarter Balanced Assessment, visit http://vide.vi/news/356-smarter-balanced-summative-assessments.html.

[7] Between 2007 and 2016 the unemployment rate on St. Croix spiked from 7.1% to 11%, with a high of 17.8% in 2013; on St. Thomas, unemployment rose from 5% to 11%, with a high of 14.2% in 2013. Many believe that these numbers were much higher, particularly on St. Croix, as to be counted as officially unemployed, a person must have actively looked for work sometime in the past month. For past and current data on unemployment in the Virgin Islands, visit http://www.vidolviews.org/gsipub/index.asp?docid=520.

[8] While organizations and public sector agencies in the Virgin Islands gather and store information, accessibility to the public is often lacking. Because the intricacies of the system are confusing to navigate, in some cases finding the correct division and personnel who could provide and/or authorize the distribution of the data was difficult or impossible. The Foundation thanks the many entities and persons who assisted in the collection of critical data.

[9] Act 6481, which was signed into law in 2001, gave the University of the Virgin Islands the task to "evaluate the administrative efficiency of the Virgin Islands Department of Education." In 2002, the University's report was released and published in the St. Croix Source here http://visourcearchives.com/content/2002/05/25/uvi-study-education-department-efficiency/.

[10] Title 17 §21 (10 VI op A. G. 36)

[11] The Election System of the Virgin Islands states that eligibility requirements for candidates to be qualified for election to the Board of Education are the same as those for the Legislature. For more information on membership requirements, visit https://www.vivote.gov/sites/default/files/Qualifications%20for%20Offices%20-ESVI.pdf.

[12] For a full listing of the codes, please contact the Foundation directly at 340.773.9898.

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