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December 26, 2022

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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EMBARGOED THROUGH 2 P.M. ON 12/27

2021-2022 Territory-wide Assessment Results Show Decline In Test Scores, Ongoing Need for Acceleration Programs

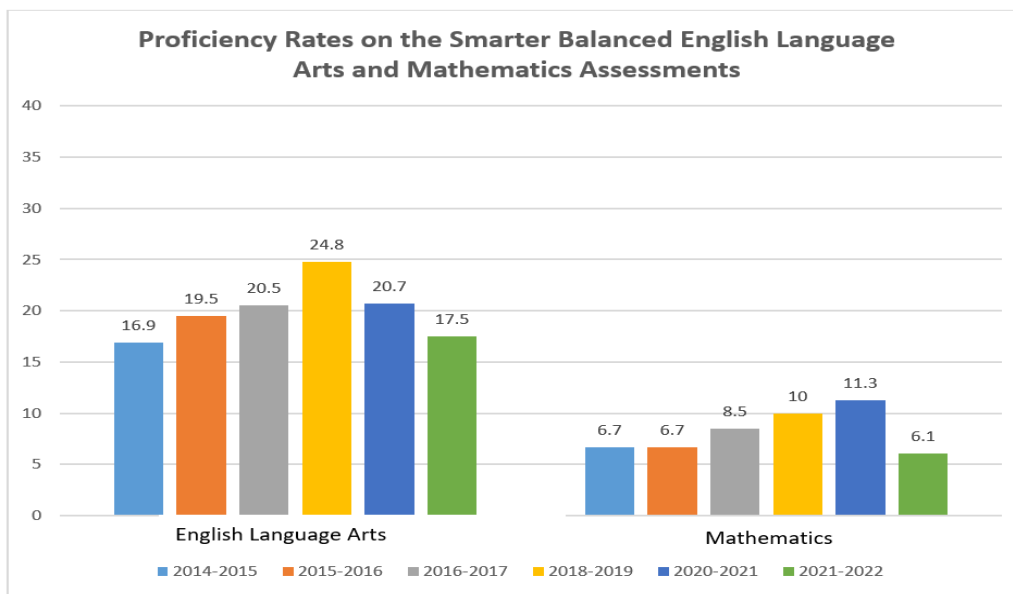
ST. THOMAS, USVI –The Virgin Islands Department of Education’s annual Smarter Balanced territory-wide assessments in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics for school year 2021-2022 have seen a sharp decline in student scores compared to previous years (see graph below). The test results underscore the Department’s ongoing need for acceleration programs to address learning loss.

The last two years have had a major impact on students and schools in the territory. The unprecedented interruptions to schooling have negatively impacted students’ learning and thus, the proficiency rates on the territory-wide assessments have decreased. The decline in academic performance in the territory is consistent with national trends. Data released from the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as the Nation’s Report Card, revealed that test scores for fourth and eighth graders across the country dropped to the lowest levels in decades.

In the territory, the pandemic upended every aspect of life and resulted in students learning from home for almost two years (March 2020 to February 2022) in most grade levels. The spring 2022 summative assessment results reflected these impacts. The percentage of students meeting or

exceeding the standards in literacy in spring 2022 was 17.5 percent, which is a decline of 7.3 percentage points from the spring 2019 administration of the tests. In mathematics, the percentage of students scoring at or above proficiency was 6.1 percent in spring 2022, which is a decline of 3.9 percentage points from spring 2019.

From 2015 to 2019 (pre-pandemic), however, the percentage of students that met or exceeded standards in ELA and math increased annually. In fact, data from the 2019 assessments showed that student achievement was increasing in all subject areas and among all student groups.



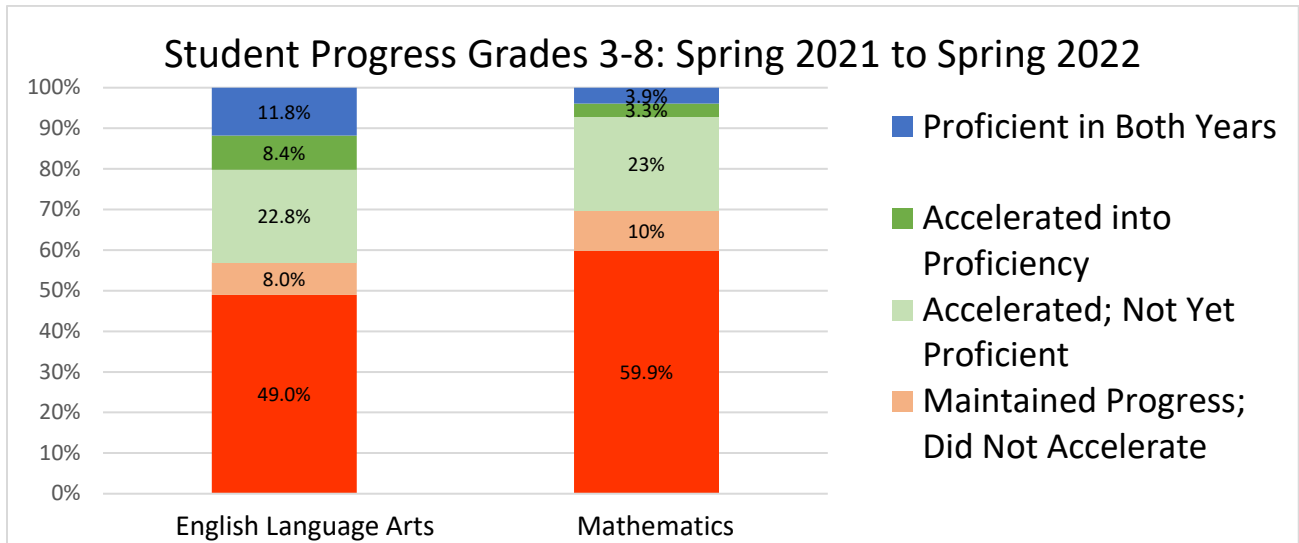
Spring 2022 also marked the first administration of the VIDE Science Assessment, which is aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). A strong science education is the foundation of continued innovation and critical to success in the evolving workforce. The NGSS shifts the focus from memorizing scientific facts to practical application of scientific concepts. The Science Assessment requires students to think critically, analyze information, and solve complex problems. Students in grades 5, 8 and 11 took the Science Assessment, and the baseline scores show that 27.3 percent of students scored proficient or higher on the assessment.

While teaching and learning looked different in the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years, the Department maintained high expectations—or standards—for all students. The territory-wide assessments were more critical than ever, as the results are used to coordinate resources and design strategies to support student learning moving forward. Students took a shorter version of the Smarter Balanced end-of-year math and English language arts tests in spring 2021 and spring 2022. Although the tests required less time for students to complete, they measured the same content as previous years.

The spring 2021 assessments were administered remotely, meaning that students completed the online assessments from home and were monitored by an educator virtually. On the other hand, students had a typical testing experience in classrooms in spring 2022.

Student Progress from Spring 2021 to Spring 2022

The assessments, which track student learning and measure the Virgin Islands’ academic standards by testing students’ ability to listen, read complex texts, conduct research, problem solve, and apply knowledge, aim to provide stakeholders with data to inform planning and decision-making, evaluate programs across the territory, and prioritize appropriating funds and resources to students in greatest need. The following figure provides information about progress for students in grades 3-8 that participated in the spring 2021 and spring 2022 assessments. The yearly assessments measure student proficiency in literacy and mathematics for grades 3-8 and 11, with students falling into one of four categories: Level 1-Not Met Standard, Level 2- Nearly Met Standard, Level 3- Met Standard (Proficient), and Level 4-Exceeded Standard (Above Proficient). In 2022, 43 percent of students in grades 3-8 were proficient or demonstrated progress toward proficiency in English Language Arts; and 30.2 percent were proficient or demonstrated progress toward proficiency in mathematics.



Students in 11th Grade on Track to Meet the College Readiness Proficiency Standards

From spring 2021 to spring 2022, there was an overall decrease in the percent of students in grades 3-8 and 11 scoring proficient or higher (see table) in ELA and math. However, sixth and eleventh graders showed slight improvements in ELA. High school students continue to demonstrate the highest level of proficiency in English language arts in comparison to other grade levels. This is of vital importance as the high school results are an indicator of our students’ preparedness to enter the workforce where demands are higher than before.

Territory-wide Overall Proficiency Rates for Grades 3-8 and 11 2019-2022				
Subject	2019	2021	2022	Change from 2021 to 2022
English Language Arts	24.8	20.7	17.5	-3.2
Mathematics	10.0	11.3	6.1	-5.2
Science			27.3	
Grade	Subject		2021	2022
3	English Language Arts		22.3%	13.6%
	Mathematics		16.9%	8.5%
4	English Language Arts		16.3%	13.1%
	Mathematics		14.2%	5.4%
5	English Language Arts		17.6%	15.8%
	Mathematics		7.3%	3.7%
	Science			31.0%
6	English Language Arts		16.6%	17.1%
	Mathematics		6.4%	6.4%
7	English Language Arts		23.1%	16.0%
	Mathematics		11.2%	4.9%
8	English Language Arts		20.0%	19.0%
	Mathematics		9.1%	6.1%
	Science			25.0%
11	English Language Arts		29.3%	29.4%
	Mathematics		11.9%	4.7%
	Science			26.0%

Proficiency by District

As territory scores declined, district performance reflects a similar trend. In the St. Thomas-St. John District, the percentage of students that scored proficient or above declined by 6.3 percentage points in ELA and three percentage points in math from pre-pandemic (2019) to 2022. In the St. Croix District, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding proficiency decreased by 8.3 percentage points in ELA and 4.8 percentage points in math from pre-pandemic (2019) to 2022. Students in the St. Croix District performed higher than the territory's average in ELA and math.

Proficiency Rates by District							
District	English Language Arts			Mathematics			Science
	2018-2019	2020-21	2021-22	2018-2019	2020-21	2021-22	2021-2022
St. Thomas/St. John District	21.4	18.4	15.1	8.3	11.0	5.3	27.4
St. Croix District	28.1	22.7	19.8	11.7	11.5	6.9	27.1

Testing Irregularities

The administration of the Smarter Balanced summative assessments in the territory's public schools has not been without its own unique set of challenges. While the Department of Education has heavily invested in its fiberoptic and internet infrastructure, there have been reoccurring issues with internet connectivity and power outages during testing; this may impact student performance.

Next Steps

In order to accelerate learning and close learning gaps in student academic achievement, the Virgin Islands Department of Education has clear goals in mind. Both the St. Croix and the St. Thomas-St. John districts have studied the data and will continue the implementation of the following initiatives in an ongoing effort to increase student academic performance:

- Focus on Teaching and Learning
 - Return to in-person learning
 - Data chats
 - Acceleration Programs/Flex Block from K-12
 - Development of an Instructional Model
 - Implementation of a Standards Mastery as a common assessment tool to determine how students are performing on priority standards
 - Standards-based Instructional focus
- Implementation of Extending Learning Programs
 - Afterschool Programs
 - Homework Hotline – Tutorial Services
 - 1:1 tutoring for students identified as below standard
 - Summer Programs and/or Saturday Academy
- Recognition of student performance

Additionally, an in-depth analysis of the Smarter Balanced data was conducted by claims and assessment targets to identify content-specific initiatives that would be implemented to increase student achievement. Claims are broad statements about what students need to demonstrate in each

content area. To demonstrate proficiency in English language arts/literacy, a student must read closely and analytically to comprehend a range of texts, produce well-grounded writing for different purposes and audiences, employ effective listening skills, and engage in research to investigate topics. District leaders are focused on the claims where a higher percentage of students scored below standard to identify specific activities geared toward addressing the data.

In the content area of English Language Arts, where 59 percent of students scored Below Standard in writing, the districts:

- have created ELA pacing guides with a focus on writing standards
- have prioritized student-centered writing initiatives to include Spring/Summer 2023, writing workshops
- are incorporating writing in all content areas and will provide additional training on Writing Across the Curriculum for all teachers

In the content area of Mathematics, where there were three claim areas in which more than 50 percent of students scored Below Standard in problem solving/data analysis, concepts/procedures, and communicative reasoning, the districts:

- have a keen focus on the Virgin Islands Standards of Achievement (VISA) – Mathematical priority standards
- have revised Mathematics pacing guides to ensure all key concepts are taught during the year
- will continue to implement training on Mathematics instruction with a focus on building content knowledge for PreK through fifth grade teachers
- will implement hands-on student workshops in Spring/Summer 2023 that engage students in problem solving/data analysis, concepts/procedures, and communicative reasoning

Finally, both districts are reviewing the association between the ELA and Mathematics content and grade configuration of K-6 schools, as the data indicates the need for sixth grade students to be instructed by content-area specialists.

Students are critical to the future of the Virgin Islands and therefore need to be prepared for the territory's current and future workforce needs. The V.I. Department of Education's singular goal is to have all students graduate from the U.S. Virgin Islands' education system better prepared to transition and thrive in life.

For more information on 2022 school and district results, visit <https://vide.vi/blog/1949-school-report-card.html>.

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