

Remarks by
Minister for Education, Youth Affairs and Sports,
Honourable Sharie B. de Castro

At the
2024 Professional Development Day
The Eileen Parsons Auditorium
H. Lavity Stoutt Community College Campus

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A Call to Action for Educators

I thought long and hard about what to say to you this morning, and I know that there would have been a number of speeches. And so I decided to resurrect the 'Watchmen' and put my contribution in the form of a poem. I really pray that, as I say it, that it impacts you and that it encourages you. Because truly, as a poet, when I write, I write firstly to encourage myself and then other persons become the beneficiary of those words.

And I believe at the beginning of a school year, it's important to reassess and to rejuvenate. And so I hope that this poem serves as a call to action to each and every one of us.

Poem: "A Call to Action"

I always knew that I wanted to be an educator. It's been my life's dream as far back as I can remember from way back in Isabella when I was asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" I said, "A teacher". Proof that you can speak into the future.

Now, many years later, I stand before you today, as minister on the shoulders of giant educators who saw the best in me, who nurtured and molded me on my journey from primary to secondary to tertiary.

I am a proud product of Virgin Islands' education of H. L. Stoutt's vision, that from inception was seen by many as hallucination.

Why on earth would the Virgin Islands need a community college? But he looked throughout the ages. He didn't see a bird sanctuary. He had an eagle's eye that saw me.

Unborn at the college's conception. Barely made my entry during the year of its inception. Yet I benefited from his wisdom, his courage, his audacity to believe that education was and is the key to unlock the Virgin Islands' destiny.

My tomorrow. Your tomorrow. Our tomorrow began the day.

He had the impudence and the unmitigated gall to believe that education above all, was and is the antidote to eradicate the poison of slavery. The remedy to heal the soul of a Territory. The passport to a self-determined future filled with endless possibilities.

That education was and is the foundation that we must build upon, that education is the most powerful weapon to safeguard generations.

But over the years, we've relented from that position. We've lost sight of the value of education as evidenced by a continuous decrease in budget allocation. We've surrendered the notion that education is inextricably linked to the economy of a nation.

And if I'm allowed to be brutally honest, can I? We've watered down the profession.

We've lowered the standard of entry into the vocation. We've lost the respect and admiration that came with the decision to choose education.

Not just as an occupation, but as a calling, not just as a paycheck, but as an opportunity to make a difference. That's why we're on a mission to reimagine education. That's why we have an obligation to move Virgin Islands' education full STEAM ahead with vision.

I have a vision. From knowledge, rote and memorization, to skills like critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration and innovation. I envision an education system that fosters inclusion. That sees the ambition of every child, despite their evaluation. That identifies gaps and giftedness with the same precision.

I have a vision of a revised curriculum that refutes the one size fits all approach to education that finds balance between traditional and technical vocation. That erases stigmatisation that

dismantles mass production of the same professions and inheritance of the industrial revolution. Yet so many jobs face potential automation due to digital transformation.

That's why we are developing a reimagined curriculum, where students are not just users of technology, but are equipped with the skills to become creators of industries. From the introduction of STEAM innovations and lower secondary to the expansion of robotics and coding in upper secondary, we have answered the call of our students to continue to nurture their curiosity and ingenuity through a focus on digital literacy and innovation.

I have a vision, for school infrastructure that fosters a culture that is conducive to learning. I envision modern, smart and green buildings that create an environment for effective teaching.

I have a vision of an education system that provides schools with the tools they need to function. That prioritizes the resources teachers need to diversify instruction.

I have a vision. For professional development and training to unlock opportunities for upskilling. Rigorous, relevant, responsive programming that can be applied immediately in the classroom setting.

I envision an education system that fosters discipline, respect and humility. Where students grow to become the agents of change in their community.

I have a vision. That was birthed out of your bosom. Through stakeholder consultation, we have labored together to deliver an education system that will nurture the dreams of our future.

I have a vision. That continues to face opposition, yet with perseverance and determination. We continue you to move full steam ahead with conviction, carrying the hopes and aspirations of future generations. Educators, this is your call to action. Let's continue to work together to be the change we wish to see in these Virgin Islands. God bless you and I open the school year officially.

Thank you. God bless you.