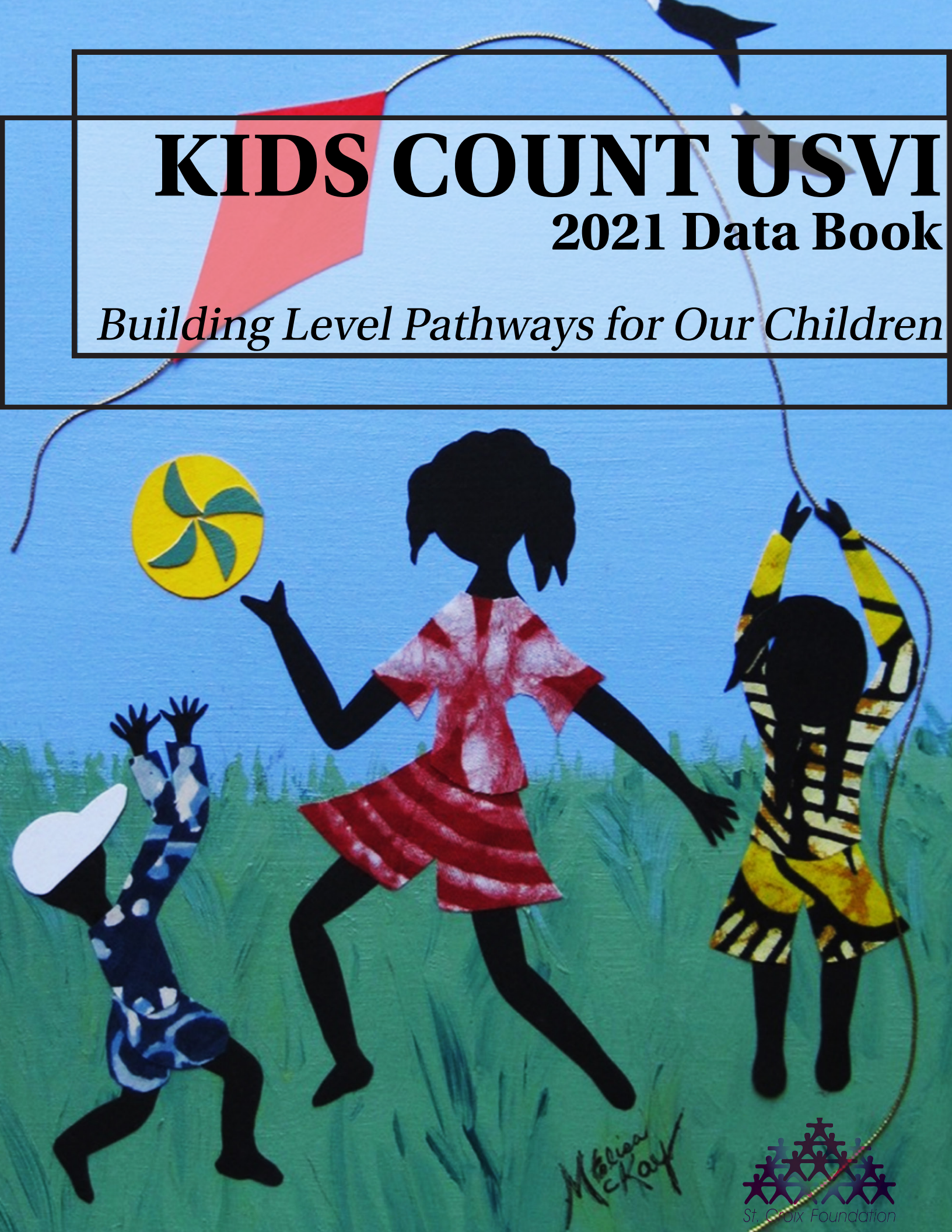


# KIDS COUNT USVI

## 2021 Data Book

*Building Level Pathways for Our Children*







On the cover, local Crucian artist Elisa McKay's *Child's Play* ©2011 embodies the framework of the KIDS COUNT USVI 2021 Data Book. The aspirational vision of St. Croix Foundation's KIDS COUNT Team is that the overall landscape in which our children live offers every child in the U.S. Virgin Islands the opportunity to grow up healthy, educated, and safe in loving and financially secure families and communities.

# Welcome



St. Croix Foundation for Community Development (SCF) and our *KIDS COUNT USVI* Team are pleased to present the *2021 KIDS COUNT USVI Data Book*.

As the new steward for the territory's KIDS COUNT Data Book [a national initiative funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF)], SCF has established strategic priorities for KIDS COUNT USVI within the context of ongoing recovery efforts from 2017 Hurricanes Irma and Maria, now compounded by a sweeping global pandemic. In reality, the multitude of natural and manmade disasters that the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) has endured over the past four years has disrupted and displaced many families. With that in mind, we asked one fundamental question - Where are our children? - honing in on two key data categories: housing and education.

Our KIDS COUNT Team also analyzed child well-being in the areas of health, economic security, family support, and community resources. In addition, we decided to add several targeted indicators that represent specific vulnerabilities for families in small island states like ours. The second overarching goal of this year's KIDS COUNT USVI Data Book is to highlight a particularly overlooked subpopulation of our children: adolescents. Commonly referred to as *Opportunity Youth* (aged 16 to 24), we seek to identify data that will help us build a profile of our adolescents and young adults as we delve into the full spectrum of our children's lives as they develop from birth to adulthood.

**In this Data Book you will find statistics and information tracking four primary domains aligned with the national KIDS COUNT Data Book: Family and Community, Education, Health, and Economic Well-being.** SCF's strategy for KIDS COUNT USVI is also grounded in two central premises: (1) that data is information that can and should provide insight for decision-making; and (2) that while collecting data is necessary, it is also insufficient without a commitment to leveraging it for advocacy, policymaking, program development, and equitable resource distribution. Toward that end, our principal goal is to activate the data, to shift public policy, and to move the needle on improving the lives of children and families in the U.S. Virgin Islands. In the years ahead, we will also be drilling more deeply into issues surrounding racial equity - a strategic priority shared by both SCF and AECF.

Today, with the release of our KIDS COUNT 2021 Data Book, SCF is framing a new agenda, seeking to tell a more comprehensive and contextual story about how children in the Virgin Islands are faring in order to motivate every member of our community towards action in addressing areas of opportunity for our community's young people.

Deanna James  
President

Willard John  
Chair, Board of Directors

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**IN THIS DATA BOOK YOU WILL FIND STATISTICS AND INFORMATION TRACKING FOUR PRIMARY DOMAINS ALIGNED WITH THE NATIONAL KIDS COUNT DATA BOOK: FAMILY AND COMMUNITY, EDUCATION, HEALTH, AND ECONOMIC WELL-BEING. ADDITIONAL DATA ARE AVAILABLE AND MAY BE ACCESSED VIA THE ONLINE DATA CENTER AT [WWW.DATACENTER.KIDSCOUNT.ORG](http://WWW.DATACENTER.KIDSCOUNT.ORG).**

# USVI DATA CLIMATE

On the national level, KIDS COUNT data are derived from many sources. One of the more important sources is the American Community Survey (ACS), a national survey conducted annually by the United States Census Bureau. The ACS contains housing, economics, demographics, and social data such as ancestry and marital status. Designed to help local stakeholders understand changes in their community, the ACS is billed as the “premier source for detailed population and housing information about our nation”<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, the ACS is not conducted in the USVI, so this vital data set that states use to complete their KIDS COUNT data reporting is not available locally.

In the absence of the ACS, the Eastern Caribbean Center of the University of the Virgin Islands conducts a Virgin Islands Community Survey (VICS), collecting data similar to that included in the population and housing components of the decennial Census. The VICS has provided valuable information for past KIDS COUNT reports and can help to fill in many of the gaps that exist due to the lack of ACS in the USVI. Unfortunately, the last published VICS was released in 2018 (reflecting 2015 data), with the release of 2018 data expected in 2022. It should also be noted that the initial 2020 Census results for the USVI were published in late October 2021, reporting total population counts for the USVI and the individual islands. However, detailed demographic data (including a count of children and poverty status) were not available as of the publishing of this *2021 KIDS COUNT USVI Data Book*.

**Given the lack of an annual ACS or a current VICS, St. Croix Foundation’s KIDS COUNT team has worked directly with private and public agencies to gather information on children in the USVI.** While not having current Census or VICS data presents challenges in terms of calculating some rates for comparison to national indicators and providing a fully parallel product compared with other states, it did create an opportunity to look for new indicators and produce a compelling and unique data book with targeted data that are specifically relevant to the USVI community. To that end, our team consulted with government and private agencies to assess how the prior KIDS COUNT data books were used and what types of data points were most relevant to them.





### **SOME KEY FINDINGS:**

- Most government agencies and nonprofits we polled utilize KIDS COUNT reports for policy drafting, research, and grant writing.
- Most government agencies and nonprofits polled also expressed interest in additional information on 14–18-year-olds, an age range that falls into the subgroup we are referring to in our report as *Opportunity Youth*.
- In the domain of Family and Community, most government agencies and nonprofits expressed interest in data on community-based services and crime prevention programs.
- In the domain of Health, most government agencies and nonprofits expressed interest in data on child abuse/neglect, mental health, and health insurance.
- In the area of Education, most government agencies and nonprofits expressed interest in data on graduation rates, attendance, K-12 subgroups (such as special needs students and English language learners), and Head Start programs.
- In the domain of Economic Well-Being, most government agencies and nonprofits expressed interest data on child poverty, employment, wages, and food security.

This Data Book provides updates to information reported in the 2019 Data Book, which was published by the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands (CFVI) and drew on the 2015 VICS and on 2016–2018 raw data when available. Importantly, this year’s Data Book also presents new data points, based both on the stakeholder needs outlined above and on data made relevant due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Most of the statistics included are for the years 2017 through 2020, with every effort made to incorporate the most current available data sources. Whenever possible, we provide data disaggregated by race and district (or island).

As we gathered data from agencies throughout the territory, we found that data at a district level proved easier to collect than as a territory. On the other hand, differences in data collection between districts at times made comparison difficult. Additionally, we found that many organizations - within both the public and civic sectors - collect data that is not only useful internally but for other agencies as well. Regrettably, the majority of organizations do not possess the capacity and/or tools necessary to adequately aggregate consecutive years of data needed to tell their story.

Despite these challenges, and through the tireless efforts of our local data partners, we were able to retrieve and compile relevant 2017–2020 data. Collectively, we are most interested in answering two compelling questions: Where are our children, and how are they faring? Moreover, inspired by this journey, participating agencies expressed intent towards systems-building to improve and activate data collection processes.

**To that end, as this Data Book is being published, St. Croix Foundation and nine agencies within the Government of the Virgin Islands are finalizing the territory’s first inter-agency Memorandum of Understanding to sustain collaboration that will improve and build coherent data systems with our partners.**

# CHILD AND FAMILY DEMOGRAPHICS

To understand how our children are doing, we begin our inquiry by identifying basic demographic characteristics. At a high level, these data provide context for the detailed information shared across each of the following domains: Family and Community, Education, Health, and Economic Well-being .

## USVI Overall Population

Detailed demographic data, including a count of children, were not available as of the publishing of the 2021 USVI KIDS COUNT Data Book. However, according to early *2020 U.S. Census* data, the population of the USVI has declined significantly over the past decade, from a high of approximately 106,405 in 2010 to an estimated 87,146 in 2020 - an 18% drop<sup>2</sup>. As discussed in the *Education* section of this Data Book, the overall population decline aligns with those seen in public and private school student enrollment. Although such declines are not a recent phenomenon, the dual category-5 hurricanes in 2017 accelerated migration trends.

- **On St. Thomas**, the *2020 Census* population count of 42,261 was an 18% decrease from the 2010 population (51,634), following a 1% increase from the 2000 population (51,181).
  - From 2000 to 2020, the population decreased by 17.4%.
- **On St. Croix**, the *2020 Census* population count of 41,004 was a 19% decrease from the 2010 population (50,601), following a 5% drop from the 2000 population (53,234).
  - From 2000 to 2020, the population decreased by 23%.
- **On St. John**, the *2020 Census* population count of 3,881 was a 7% decrease from the 2010 population (4,170), following a 1% drop from the 2000 population (4,197).
  - From 2000 to 2020, the population decreased by 7.5%.

**THE POPULATION OF THE USVI HAS DECLINED 18% BETWEEN THE 2010 CENSUS AND THE 2020 CENSUS.**



# USVI Overall Population, cont.

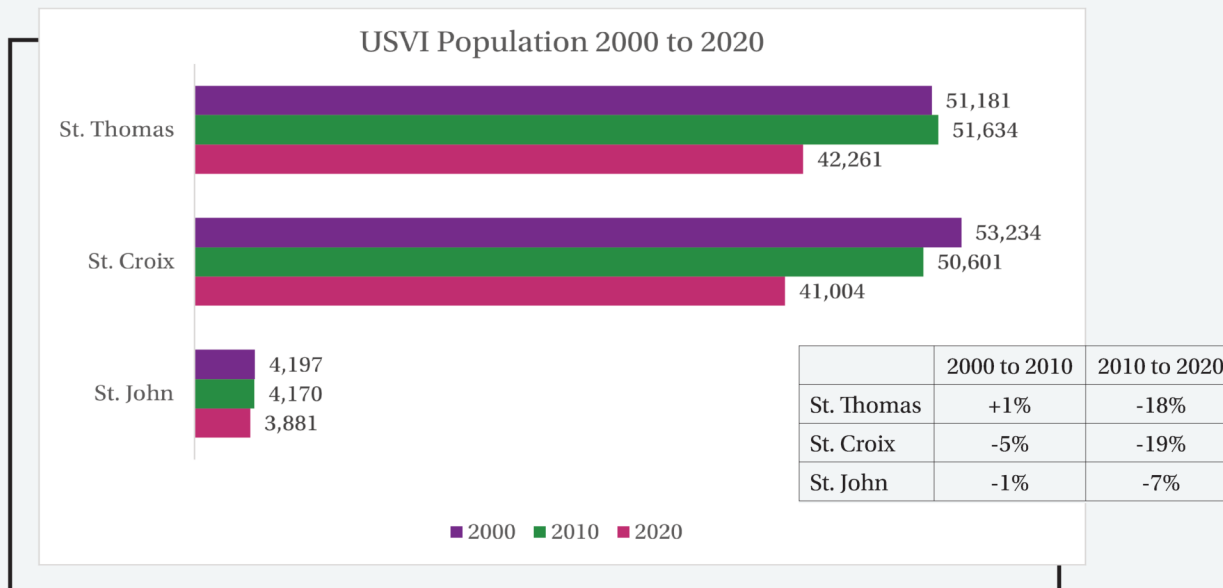


Figure 1. USVI Total Population, by Island (2000 - 2020)

## USVI Child Population

Data from the *2020 Census* reflecting the population count disaggregated by age had not been released at the time of this Data Book publication. The most recent data available that reflect the child population in the USVI are from the *2015 VICS*. While these data are not current, they provide useful information on patterns and trends.

In 2015, the number of children (under 18) living in the USVI was 19,730.

- This was a slight increase compared to 2014 (18,238); however, looking more broadly at trends over time, the child population has diminished significantly since the year 2000.
- From the 2000 Census to the 2015 VICS, the number of children (*under age 18*) had decreased by 42% or over 14,500 children: from 34,289 to 19,730.

In 2015, children represented 20% of the total population.

- The proportion of children in the total population of each island was similar for both St. Croix (20.7%) and St. Thomas (19%). On St. John, children made up only 11.7% of all residents.

Since 1990, the distribution of children (*under age 19*) categorized as Black, White, and “Other races” as well as the proportion of children of Hispanic origin (of any race), has been relatively stable. In 2015:

- Black children made up 86% of the total VI child population (18,374).
- White children made up 4% of all VI children (887).
- Children of Other Races made up 9.6% of all VI children (2,066).
- Among children of all races, 18% were Hispanic (3,919).

<sup>2</sup> United States Census Bureau. (2021, October). *Census Bureau Releases 2020 Census Population and Housing Unit Counts for the U.S. Virgin Islands*. Release Number CB21-TPS.74. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2021/2020-census-us-virgin-islands.html>

# FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Where children live and who cares for them are critical factors in a child's life. Children who live in nurturing families and supportive communities have stronger personal connections and higher academic achievement<sup>3</sup>. And, when communities are safe and have strong institutions, good schools, and quality support services, families and their children are more likely to thrive.

## Public Housing in the USVI

As we seek to unpack one of the overarching questions that has grounded the KIDS COUNT project this year – *Where are our Children?* – data collected from the USVI's Housing agencies led us to some answers.

According to 2019 combined data from the Virgin Islands Housing Authority (VIHA) and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD):

- There were 7,779 residents in public housing in the USVI<sup>4</sup>.
- In addition, there were 3,371 persons who were not living in public housing but received vouchers and other forms of rental assistance from HUD.

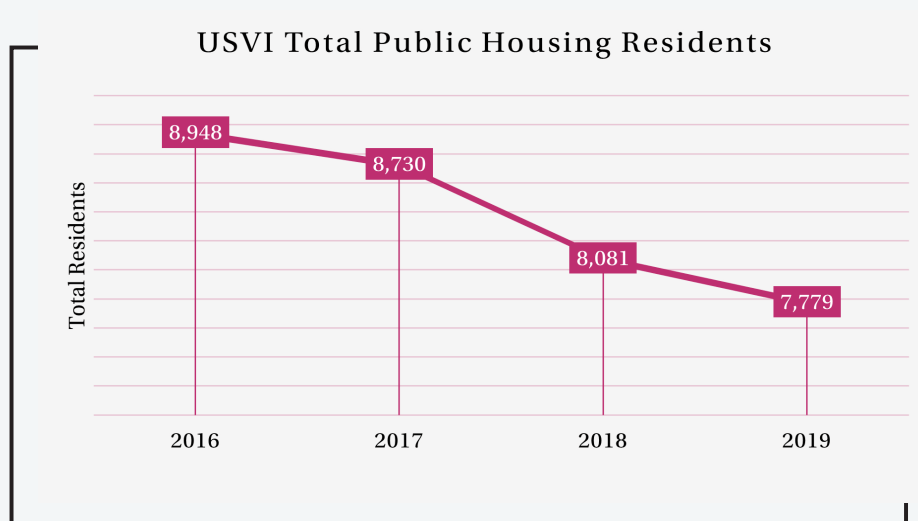


Figure 2. USVI Total Public Housing Residents (2016 - 2019)



**“It is hard to argue that housing is not a fundamental human need. Decent, affordable housing should be a basic right for everybody in this country. The reason is simple: without stable shelter, everything else falls apart.”**

**-MATTHEW DESMOND, EVICTED: POVERTY AND PROFIT IN THE AMERICAN CITY**

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<sup>3</sup>Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2021, June). *2021 KIDS COUNT DATA BOOK: STATE TRENDS IN CHILD WELL-BEING*. Retrieved from <https://assets.aecf.org/m/r>

<sup>4</sup>Note: Housing data for this section were provided by both HUD and VIHA, and while there were overlapping community data, there was also community information specific to HUD and VIHA. The acronym for the respective agency is used in each chart or data point to denote source.

## Family and Community

Figures 3 and 4 show the location of residents in public housing (green markers) and public schools (red markers) on St. Croix and St. Thomas, respectively. (No HUD or VIHA public housing data were available for the island of St. John.) The resources and supports that schools can provide to their surrounding communities, especially those with low-income families, are important considerations for future school-site locations.

### On St. Croix:

- The Frederiksted area shows the most densely populated public housing on the western part of the island followed by the Christiansted area, with the smallest population in public housing located in Center Island.
- Only two schools were located in the most densely populated area of public housing at the west end of the island.

### On St. Thomas:

- Public housing communities are primarily located along the island's south side.
- Five schools were located along the south shore, which is the most densely populated area of public housing on the island.

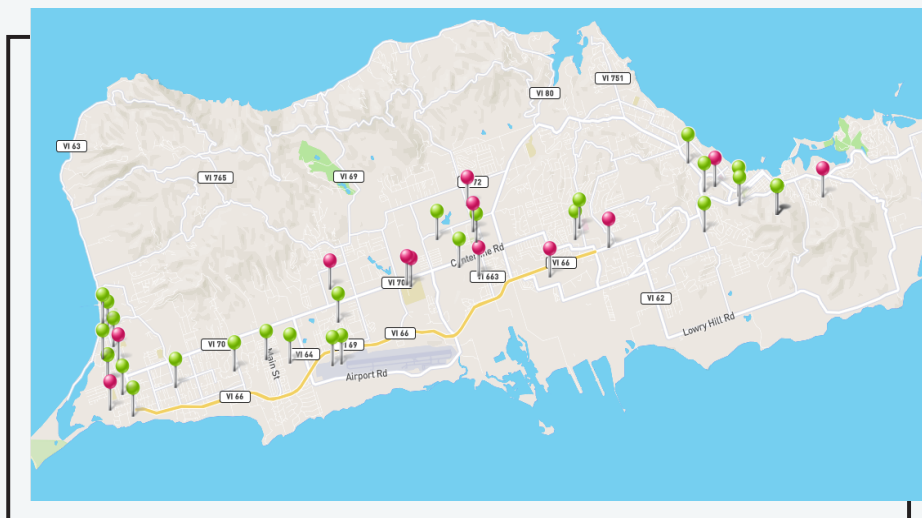


Figure 3. Map of Public Housing Communities and Public Schools on St. Croix (2019)

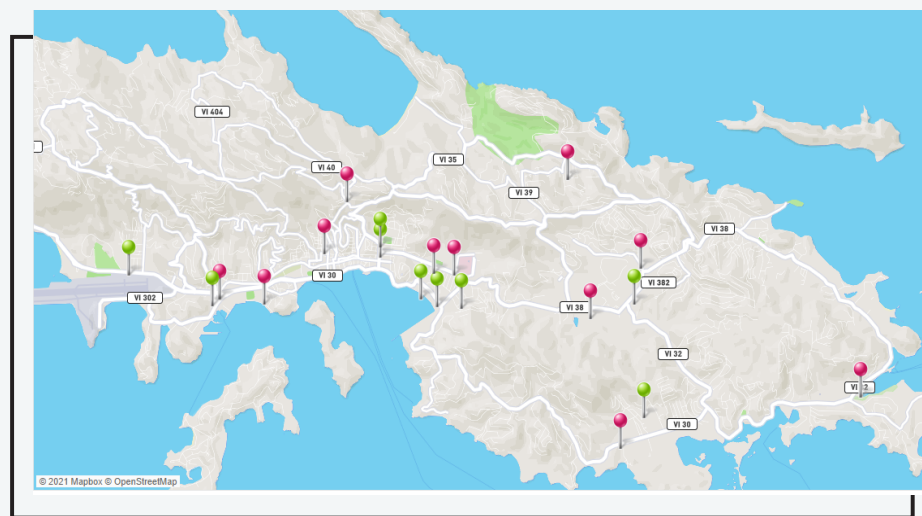


Figure 4. Map of Public Housing Communities and Public Schools on St. Thomas (2019)





In 2019, there were approximately 7,779 residents in public housing in the USVI.

# Characteristics of Public Housing Households

Public housing data came from two main sources: VI Housing Authority (VIHA) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Data from VIHA indicate that in 2019:

- 48% of residents in public housing are ages 25 and under.
- 94% of public housing residents are Black.
- 41% of heads of households in public housing were between the ages of 25 and 50.

Data from HUD indicate that in 2019:

- The average household income for those living in public housing in 2019 was \$11,454, up from \$9,562 in 2016, compared with the 2019 federal poverty threshold for a family of four, including two children under age 18 (\$25,926<sup>5</sup>).
- 69% of households in public housing were designated as “extremely low income” households, indicating that their income was below 50% of the island’s median household income (which was \$31,000 in 2019<sup>6</sup>).
  - **37% of public housing households reported an income of \$5,000 or less.**
- Only 34% of households reported wages as a major source of income, suggesting a significant dependence on social services to close the cost-of-living gap.

While the USVI does not have current data on housing costs, given the data on numbers of children in housing and rates of households reporting “extremely low incomes,” it is likely that families are struggling with high housing costs.

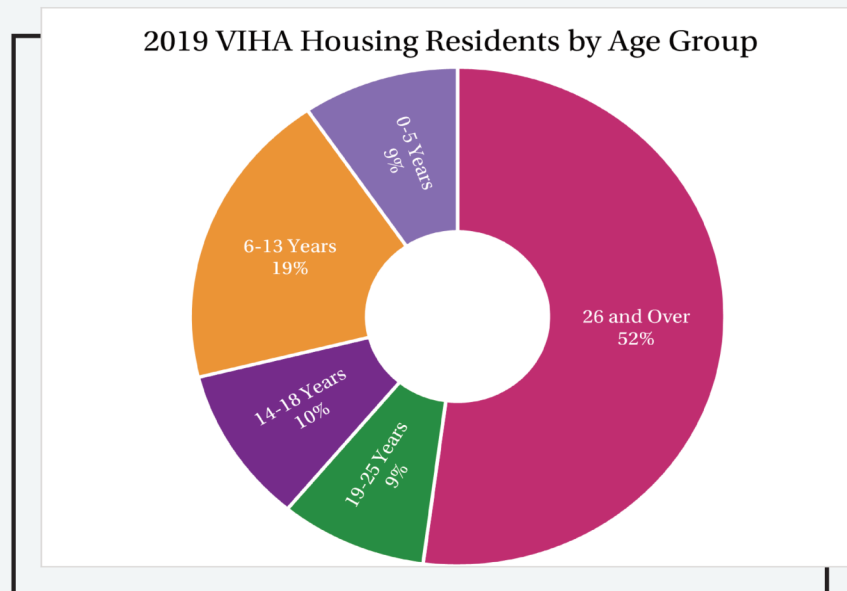


Figure 5. Total VIHA Public Housing Residents by Age Group (2019)

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. *Poverty Thresholds: 2019*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2019/demo/supplemental-poverty-measure/poverty-thresholds.html>

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2019, August). COMPREHENSIVE HOUSING MARKET ANALYSIS United States Virgin Islands. Retrieved from <https://www.huduser.gov/Portal/publications/pdf/USVirginIslands-CHMA-19.pdf>



## Children in Public Housing in the USVI

According to 2019 data from VIHA:

- There were 799 total public housing households with children in the USVI, which was down from a 5-year high of 924 households with children in 2015.
- Roughly 40% of households in public housing included residents that were age 18 or younger.
  - The largest reported age group of residents was children ages 6-13, at nearly 20% of all public housing residents.

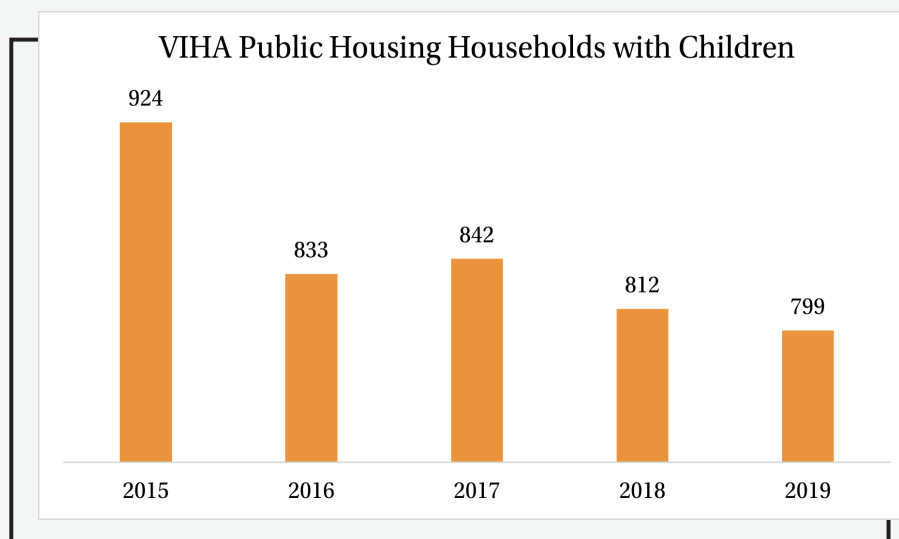


Figure 6. Number of VIHA Public Housing Households with Children (2015-2019)

## Female Heads of Households in Public Housing

- In 2019, more than 75% of VIHA public housing units were classified as having a female head of household. 23% of units had a male head of household.
- The number of households in public housing with a spouse present was 4%.

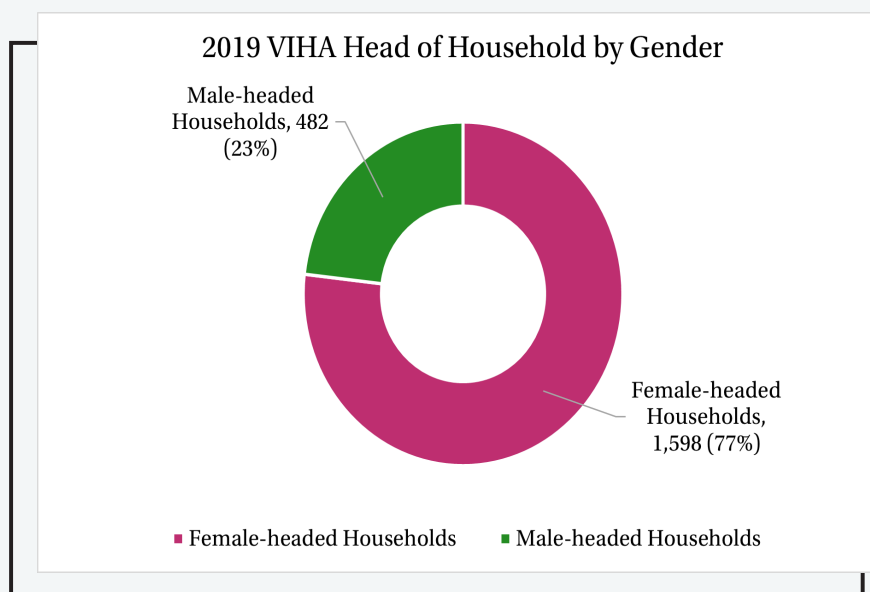


Figure 7. VIHA Head of Households, by Gender (2019)



# EDUCATION

Education is one of the most important indicators of the growth and development of children. While standards and measures of progress may differ, there is widespread belief that educating children – by both formal and informal means – is vital to the wellbeing of a community<sup>7</sup>.

## Early Head Start

The Early Head Start (EHS) program provides care and education services for infants and toddlers (ages birth to three years old), as well as for pregnant women. Administered by Lutheran Social Services of the Virgin Islands, EHS offers a center-based program, a home-based program, and a pregnant women's program.

There are two EHS centers operating in the USVI, both on St. Croix.

During the 2019-2020 school year:

- 98 children ages birth to 3 were enrolled in Early Head Start programs, with the ages almost evenly distributed:
  - 37% were ages 0-1
  - 30% were ages 1-2
  - 33% were ages 2-3
- 17% of the infants and toddlers were identified as having a disability; 12% were identified as English Language Learners; and 89% of the children served were covered by public health insurance.

# Head Start

The Virgin Islands Department of Human Services (DHS) offers preschool services through the Head Start program on all three major islands, although the data provided did not disaggregate between St. Thomas and St. John. The Head Start program is the largest early childhood education program in the territory and serves over 78% of the total number of three- and four-year-olds in low-income households<sup>8</sup>. In addition to the educational aspect of the program, Head Start offers medical and dental screenings, nutritional support, and social services.

- In the 2019-2020 school year (SY), there were 629 students enrolled in the program across St. Thomas/St. John and St. Croix, a decrease of 57 children from the previous year's total of 686. While the total funded enrollment for the USVI is 794 slots, VIDHS indicated that post-hurricane center closures and COVID-19 capacity restrictions have resulted in enrollment decreases.
  - There were 71 children on the waiting list: 50 on St. Croix and 21 on St. Thomas/St. John.
- Among Head Start children, 65% enrolled on St. Thomas/St. John had at least one parent employed, and 57% of children enrolled on St. Croix had at least one parent employed.

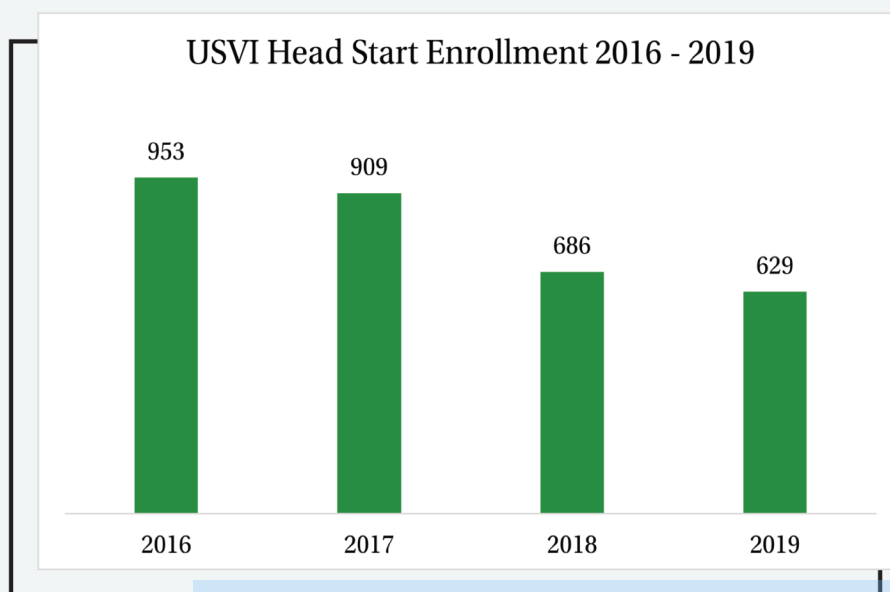
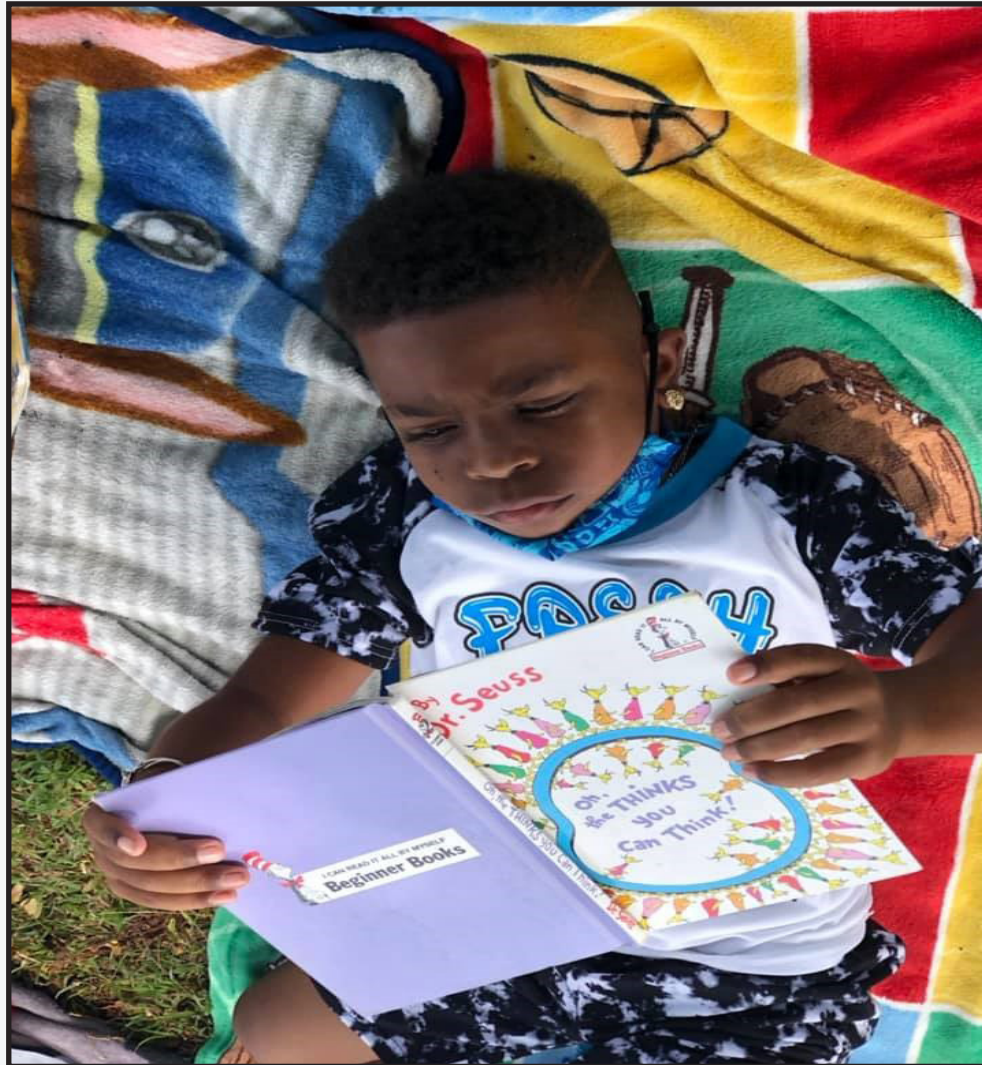


Figure 8. USVI Head Start Enrollment (2016-2019)

<sup>7</sup> Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine (2021, January). *Education as a Social Determinant of Health*. Retrieved from <https://publichealth.tulane.edu/blog/social-determinant-of-health-education-is-crucial/>

<sup>8</sup> USVI Department of Human Services. (n.d.) *Preschool Services*. Retrieved July 15, 2021, from <http://dhs.gov.vi/preschool/index.html>



The Head Start program is the largest early childhood education program in the territory and serves over 78% of the total number of three- and four-year-olds in low-income households.



## Head Start, cont.

The following data show an increase in every aspect of nutritional support and income assistance provided for Head Start students and their parents.

In 2019:

- 83% of Head Start students with insurance on record were covered through the Medical Assistance Program (MAP), an increase from 81.7% in SY2017-18.
- 68% (536) of Head Start parents received Special Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, an increase from 59% in SY2017-18.
- 5% (40) of Head Start parents received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits, an increase from 2.6% in SY2017-18.
- 50% (397) of Head Start parents received Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits, an increase from 48% in SY2018-19.

## Kindergarten Readiness

The Learning Accomplishment Profile Third Edition (LAP-3) is administered to incoming kindergarten students in public schools to assess readiness for kindergarten in seven domains: gross motor, fine motor, pre-writing, cognitive, language, self-help, and personal/social.

In 2019, results of the LAP-3 assessment of incoming public school kindergarteners indicated that:

- 33% lacked age-appropriate Cognitive skills.
- 48% lacked age-appropriate Language skills.
- 17% lacked age-appropriate Pre-Writing skills.

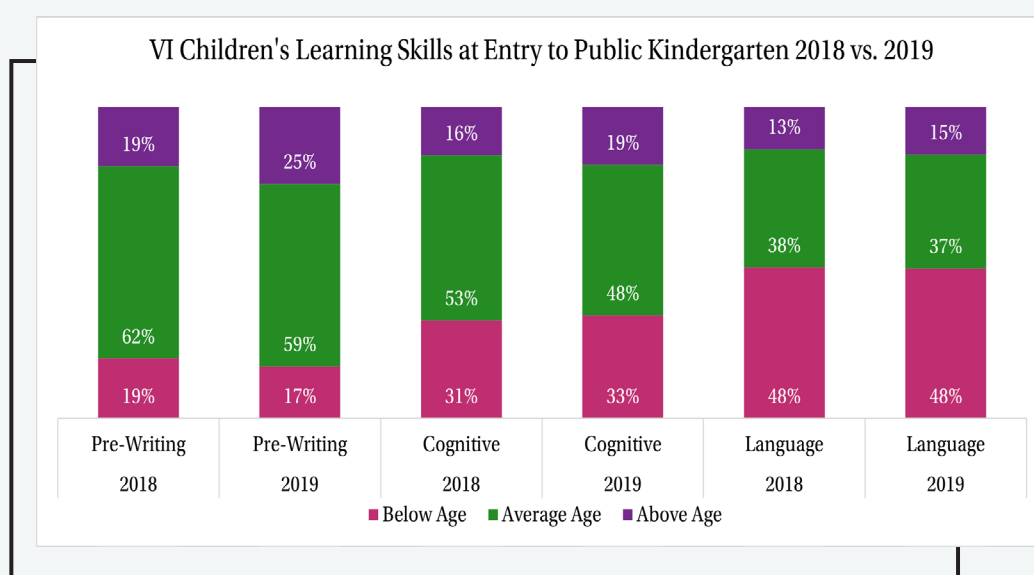


Figure 9. VI Children's Learning Skills at Entry to Public Kindergarten, (Fall 2018 vs. Fall 2019)

# K-12 Student Enrollment

The VI Department of Education (VIDE) comprises 22 schools, and there are an additional 27 independent private or parochial schools. The St. Croix District and St. Thomas/St. John District account for 11 public schools each. Of the 27 private and parochial schools, 13 schools are in the St. Croix District and 14 are in the St. Thomas/St. John District.

## Student Enrollment by School Type

Over the past eight years, both public and private school enrollment has been steadily declining. Between SY 2013-14 and SY2019-20, school enrollment across the territory decreased by 24.8% (from 19,634 students enrolled to 14,772). Enrollment in private schools decreased by 17.4% (4,681 to 3,865) for the same period, while enrollment in public schools decreased by 27.1% (14,953 to 10,907).

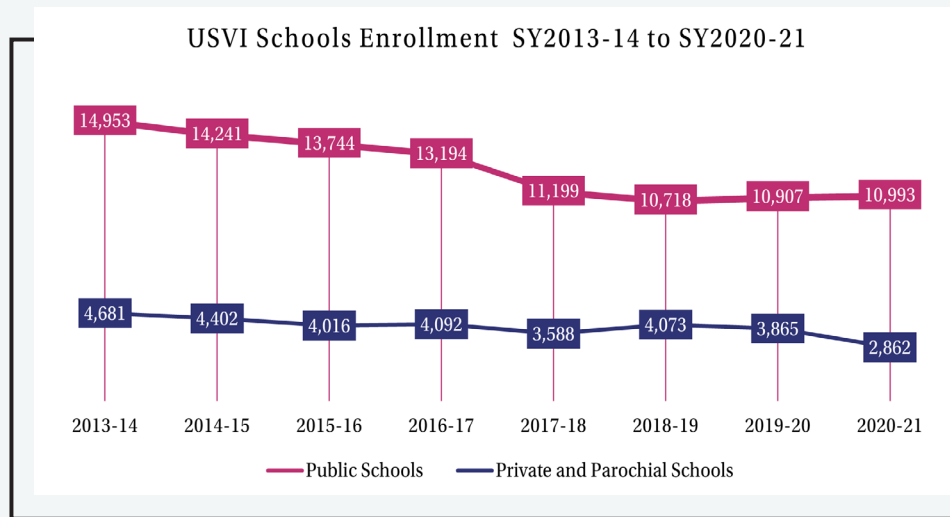


Figure 10. USVI Schools Enrollment by School Affiliation

The data show that the decline in enrollment in both public and private/parochial schools also coincides with several natural disasters in the past four years. As a result of the two back-to-back hurricanes in SY2017-18, public schools in both districts were closed for two months, which negatively impacted school enrollment. Twelve public schools in the territory had to temporarily operate on split schedules due to severe structural damage.

Both public and private schools saw their enrollment decline in SY2017-18 (a 12.3% decrease for the private schools and a 15% decrease for the public schools). While private schools recovered from the enrollment drop with a 14% increase in SY2018-19, public schools did not and continued to decline (down 4% in SY2018-19). Public school enrollment dropped from 11,199 students in SY2017-18 to 10,718 students in SY2018-19, but then increased slightly to 10,907 students in SY2019-20.

## Student Enrollment by School Type, cont.

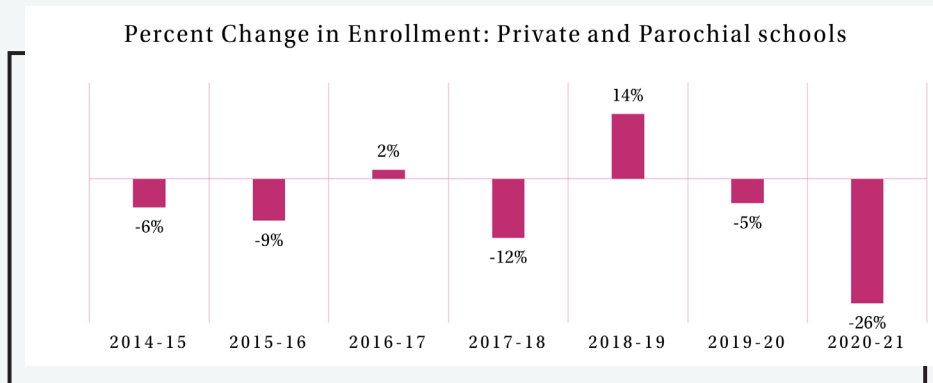


Figure 11. Percent Annual Enrollment Change, Private and Parochial Schools

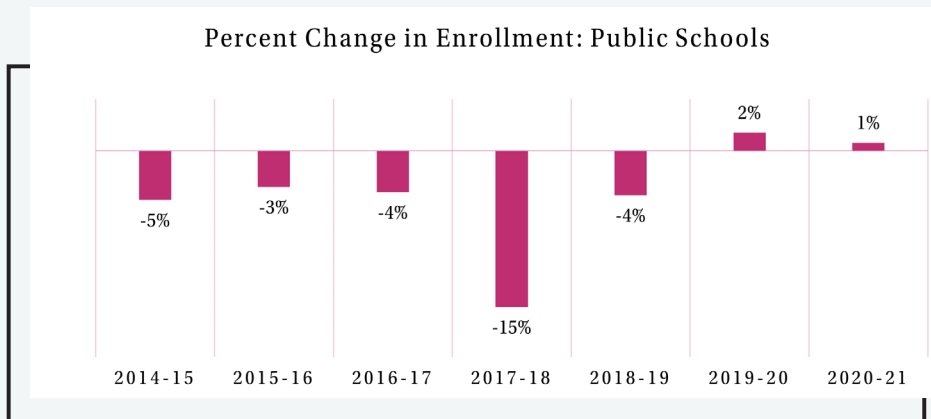


Figure 12. Percent Annual Enrollment Change, Public Schools

## Student Enrollment by District

As noted, the series of catastrophic natural disasters that the territory has faced has significantly impacted the inventory of brick-and-mortar schools that VIDE has available for use in both districts. Compounding matters, in early 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic created additional challenges.

- During the six school years from SY2013-14 to SY2018-19, both school districts saw annual decreases in student enrollment.
- In SY2019-20, both districts saw small increases in enrollment, although neither district has returned to pre-hurricane enrollment levels.

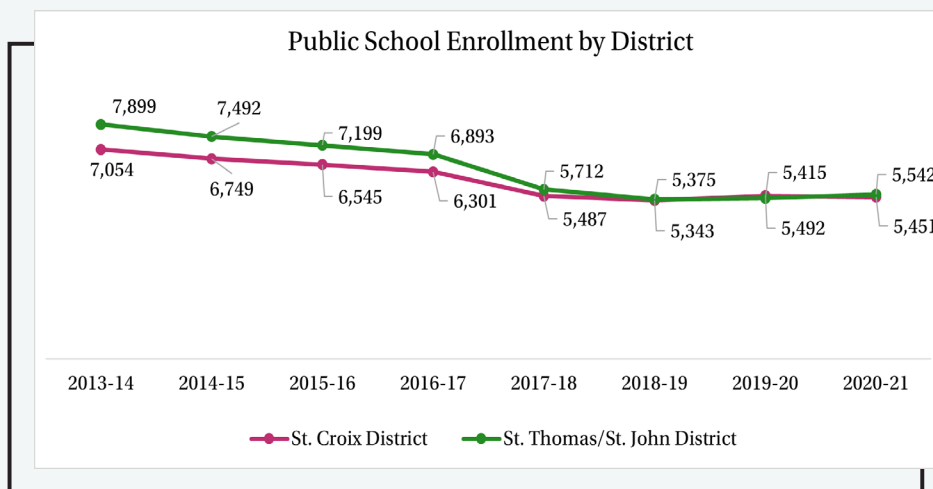


Figure 13. Public School Enrollment, by District



## Education

### Student Enrollment by District, cont.

The variance in private school enrollment has been less pronounced, with both districts seeing enrollment decreases in the past three school years.

- In the St. Croix District, private school enrollment increased by 8%, from 1,438 in SY2017-18 to 1,559 in SY2019-20, before dropping by nearly 30% (to 1,108) in SY2020-21.
- In the St. Thomas/St. John District, private school enrollment increased by 7%, from 2,150 students in 2017-18 to 2,306 in 2019-20, before dropping by 24% (to 1,754) in SY2020-21.

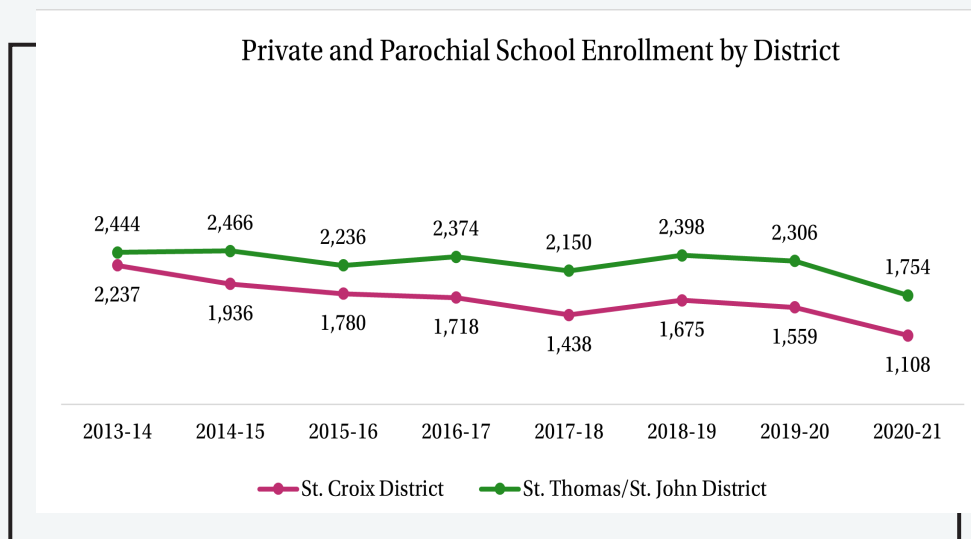


Figure 14. Private and Parochial School Enrollment, by District

### Student Enrollment by Special Population Category

**English Language Learners (ELL):** An ELL student is a national-origin-minority student whose English proficiency is limited. ELL students receive additional services to assist with English-language development.

The number of ELL students has declined in both districts since the 2017-18 school year. The highest number of students that are categorized as English Language Learners are enrolled in the St. Thomas/St. John District.

- The most significant decline in ELL enrollment occurred in the St. Thomas/St. John District, where ELL enrollment dropped from 840 students in SY2017-18, to 704 students in SY2018-19 and 623 students in SY2019-20.
- By comparison, the St. Croix District had an enrollment of 296 students who were English Language Learners in SY2017-18, 246 ELL students in SY2018-19, and 225 ELL students in SY2019-20.

## Student Enrollment by Special Population Category, cont.

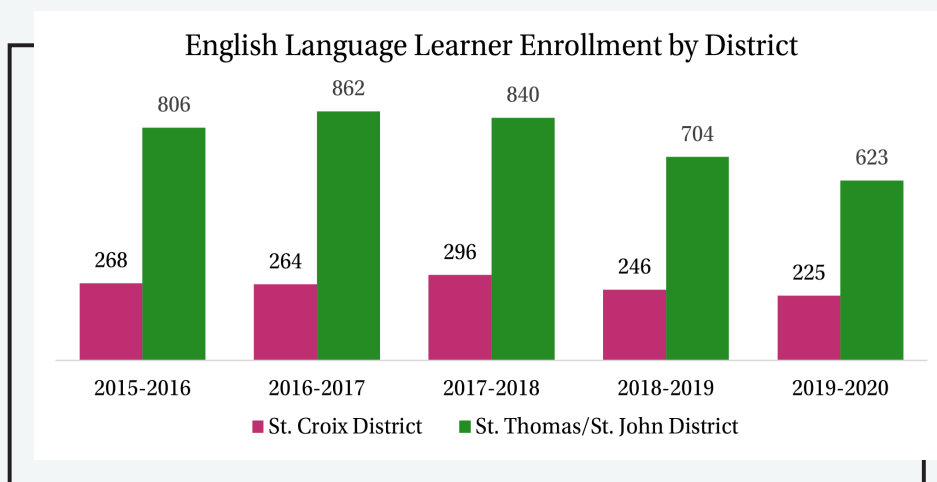


Figure 15. English Language Learner Enrollment, by District

**Special Education Students (SPED):** *Students with a special education designation receive specialized instruction to meet the unique needs of their disability.*

A total of 681 Special Education students were enrolled across the territory in SY2019-20. **The largest population of Special Education (SPED) students in VIDE are enrolled in the St. Croix District.**

The overall number of SPED students in both districts has steadily declined every year from SY2015-16 to SY2019-20. During this three-year period:

- SPED enrollment in the St. Croix District decreased by 26% to 367 students enrolled.
- SPED enrollment in the St. Thomas/St. John District decreased by 27% to 314 students enrolled.

**The overall number of public school students categorized as SPED is declining across the territory at a higher rate than the overall student population,** and more specific demographic data about this student population would be extremely useful in determining the underlying factors. Understanding the specific patterns of enrollment can tell us where these students are going and why.

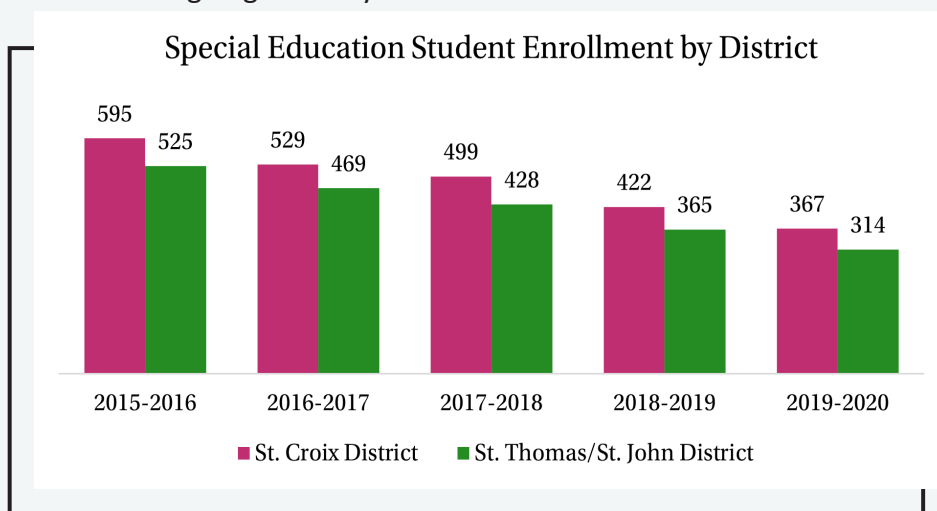


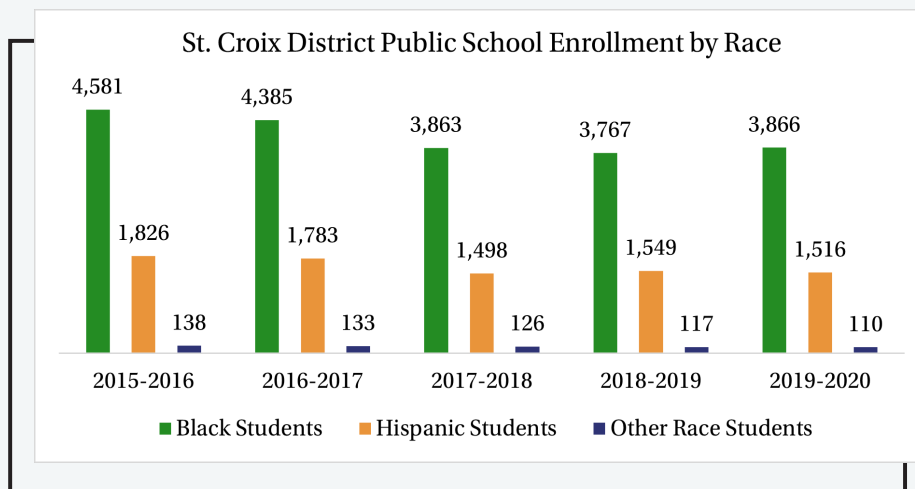
Figure 16. Special Education Enrollment, by District

## Student Enrollment by Race

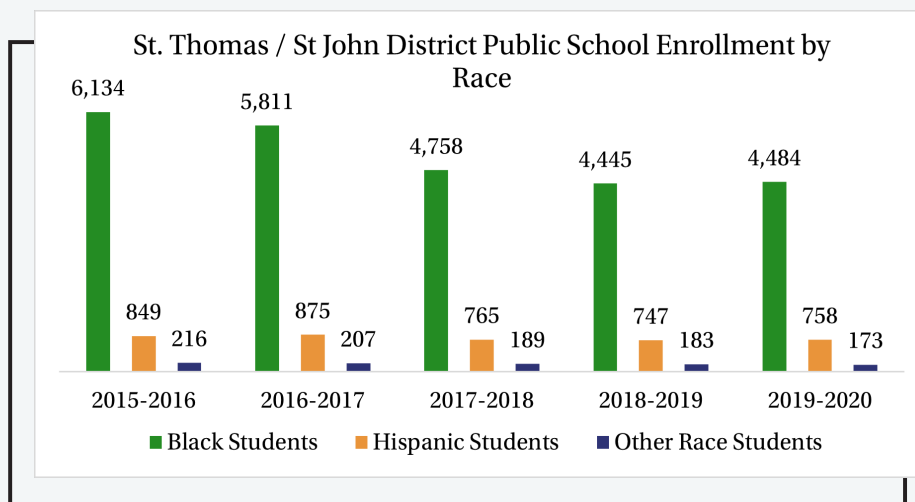
Data on student enrollment in VIDE schools are disaggregated by race as Black, Hispanic, and other races (e.g., White, Asian American Pacific Islander, and others).

For the 2019-20 school year:

- 71% of public school students self-identified as Black.
- 28% of students self-identified as Hispanic.
- 1% of students self-identified as other races.



**Figure 17. St. Croix District Public School Enrollment, by Race**



**Figure 18. St. Thomas/St. John District Public School Enrollment, by Race**



# Attendance

VIDE reported a 94% attendance rate in SY2018-19, the latest publicly available school year, compared to 95% in the 2017-18 school year. Nationally, the reporting of attendance issues is increasingly focused on a subset of students who are chronically absent (missing at least 15 days of school in a year) and represent the majority of all truancy cases<sup>9</sup>.

## Promotion/Retention

*Promotion refers to student advancement to the next grade. Retention refers to students who must repeat a grade.*

For the last school year with publicly available data (SY2018-2019), the highest retention rate among students in public schools occurred in the 9th grade, with almost one-third of students (30%) being retained. In contrast, only 6% of 8th graders and 14% of 10th graders were retained. The 9th grade retention rate was 33% for SY2017-18 and 31% in SY2016-17, demonstrating a pattern of consistently high retention at that grade level.

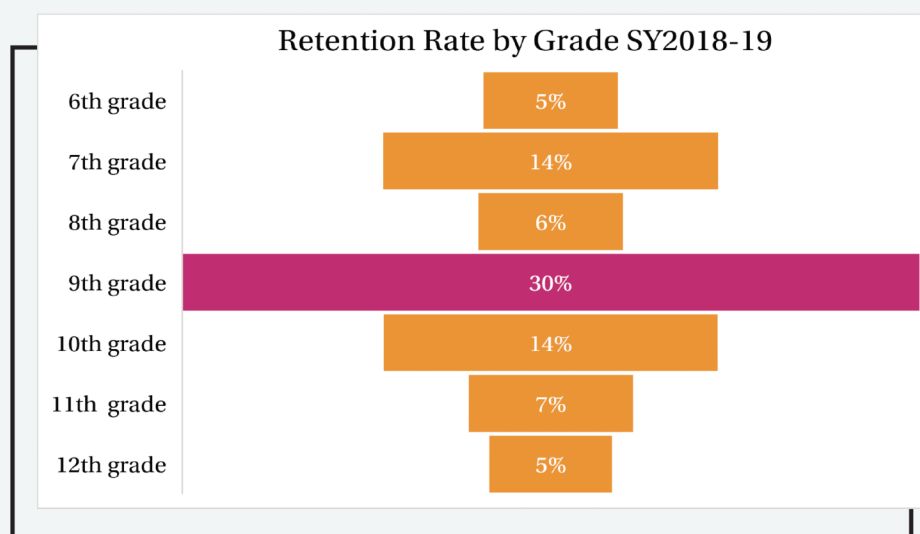


Figure 19. Retention Rate, by Grade (SY2018-19)

## Public School Dropouts

191 public school students in grades 7th through 12th left the school system in the 2019-20 school year. For both SY2018-19 and SY2019-20 the highest number of recorded as “dropouts” from public schools were in 9th grade.

- 9th grade: 51 students dropped out in SY2019-20; 55 in SY2018-19
- 10th grade: 42 students dropped out in SY2019-20; 45 in SY2018-19
- 11th grade: 50 students dropped out in SY2019-20; 33 in SY2018-19
- 12th grade: 38 students dropped out in SY2019-20; 31 in SY2018-19

<sup>9</sup>U.S. Department of Education. (2019, January). *Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation's Schools: A hidden educational crisis*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/datastory/chronicabsenteeism.html#intro>

# Public School Dropouts, cont.

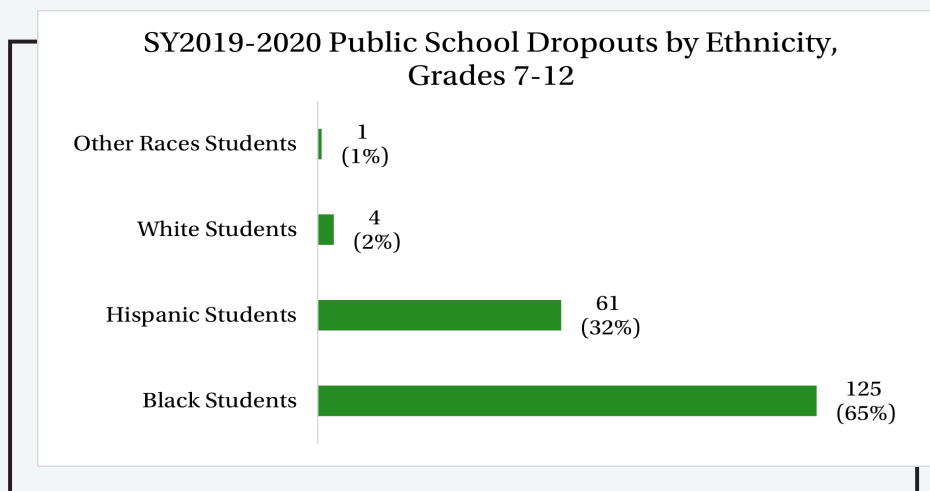


Figure 20. Grades 7-12 Public School Dropouts, by Race/Ethnicity (SY2019-20)

## Graduation Rate

The graduation rate is the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort (accounting for transfers) for the graduating class.

- The graduation rate of students in USVI public schools for the 2019-20 school year was **71%**, compared to 62% the previous two school years (SY2017-18 and SY2018-19).
- The national average graduation rate for SY2018-19 was approximately 85%, with the District of Columbia reporting the lowest rate at 69%.

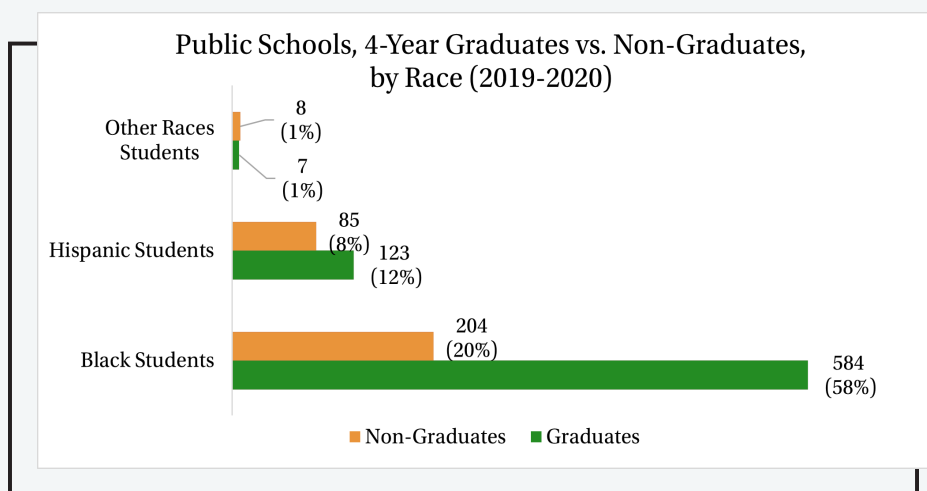


Figure 21. Public School High School Seniors, by Graduation Status (SY2019-20)

## Graduation Rate by Special Population Category

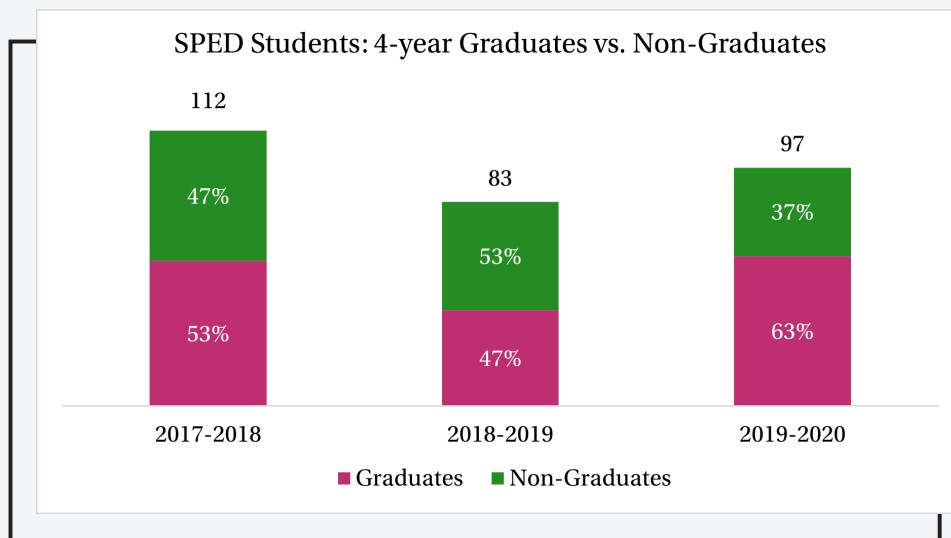


Figure 22. SPED Students 4-year Graduation Status

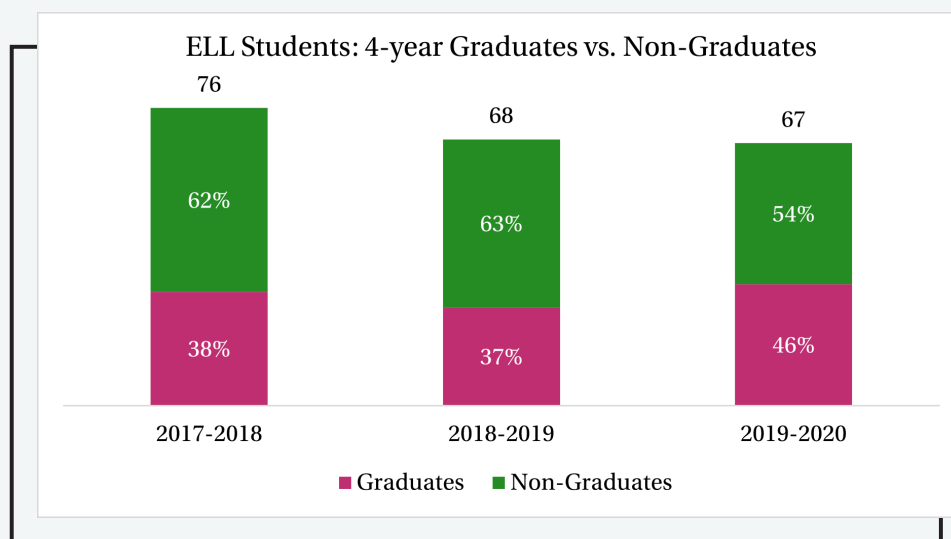


Figure 23. English Language Learners Graduation Status

**NATIONAL KIDS COUNT DATA TRENDS:** Nationally, 15% of high school students did not graduate on time for the 2017-18 school year, an improvement over SY2010-11, when 21% of high school students did not graduate on time.

# Academic Performance Assessment

The VI Department of Education (VIDE) utilizes the *Smarter Balanced* assessment system for its year-end English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics (Math) summative assessment in grades 3rd-8th and 11th<sup>10</sup>. This assessment is used for tracking student progress across grades and federal education reporting purposes and is based on more rigorous, national, college, and career-ready standards than the previous basic skills assessment<sup>11</sup>. **Smarter Balanced was the territory’s first online standardized assessment.** This same assessment is used by other states, and allows for some degree of student performance comparisons nationwide.

Aligned with national trends, public school students perform significantly better (at proficiency and near proficiency) in ELA than in Math<sup>12</sup>. The overall picture of USVI public school student performance on *Smarter Balanced* across the years is mixed.

Student Proficiency Rates on ELA and Math Assessments (SY2018-2019)			
Grade 3 English Language Arts Proficiency		Grade 3 Math Proficiency	
Below Standard	56%	Below Standard	66%
Near Standard	27%	Near Standard	22%
Met Standard	11%	Met Standard	9%
Exceeded Standard	6%	Exceeded Standard	3%
Grade 5 English Language Arts Proficiency		Grade 5 Math Proficiency	
Below Standard	47%	Below Standard	68%
Near Standard	26%	Near Standard	24%
Met Standard	20%	Met Standard	5%
Exceeded Standard	7%	Exceeded Standard	3%
Grade 7 English Language Arts Proficiency		Grade 7 Math Proficiency	
Below Standard	53%	Below Standard	63%
Near Standard	29%	Near Standard	30%
Met Standard	16%	Met Standard	7%
Exceeded Standard	2%	Exceeded Standard	1%
Grade 11 English Language Arts Proficiency		Grade 11 Math Proficiency	
Below Standard	28%	Below Standard	75%
Near Standard	32%	Near Standard	17%
Met Standard	30%	Met Standard	6%
Exceeded Standard	11%	Exceeded Standard	2%

Figure 24. Student Proficiency Rates on ELA and Math, Selected Grades (SY2018-19)

<sup>10</sup> The Regents of the University of California. (n.d.). SMARTER RESOURCES: U.S. Virgin Islands. Retrieved February 25, 2021, from <https://smarterbalanced.org/member-state/usvi/>

<sup>11</sup> The Regents of the University of California. (2021). *Smarter Balanced Assessments: Our History*. Retrieved February 25, 2021, from <https://smarterbalanced.org/our-vision/our-history/>

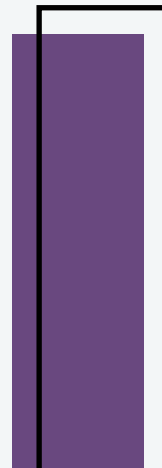
<sup>12</sup> Virgin Islands Department of Education. (n.d.). *Virgin Islands Virtual Information System*. Retrieved March 1, 2021, from [www.vivisdata.vi.gov](http://www.vivisdata.vi.gov)



For the 2018-2019 school year, (the latest available data), 93% of 7th graders were not proficient in Math and 83% of 3th graders were not proficient in ELA. On the positive side, scores are improving each school year, including increases for all key subgroups. In addition, the percentage of all tested students scoring at the very lowest level of the assessment (“below standard proficiency”) in ELA has decreased by 10 percentage points, with an additional 8 percentage point reduction in the percent of students scoring “below standard proficiency” in Math since the first administration of the exam in SY2014-15. Due to the low baseline performance scores, although there have been improvements in proficiency, an acceleration in the rate of improvement is still needed to ensure that more students are graduating with college and career readiness skills in ELA and Math.



**NATIONAL KIDS COUNT DATA TRENDS: 67% of 8th graders were not proficient in Math in 2019, the same percentage as a decade earlier, in 2009. 66% of 4th graders were not proficient in ELA in 2019, a slight decrease from the 68% that were proficient in 2019.**



# HEALTH

A child's health is fundamental to their overall development. Poor health in childhood can affect other critical aspects of life (such as school readiness) and attendance), and can have lasting consequences on future health and well-being<sup>13</sup>.

## Low Birthweight Babies

In 2020, 934 babies were delivered in USVI health care facilities - 411 in St. Croix and 523 in the St. Thomas/St. John District<sup>14</sup>.

- 40 (4.3%) were born at low birthweight (5.5 pounds or less).
  - This compares to 3.8% of babies born at low birthweight in 2019, 5% in 2018, and 2.6% in 2017.
- 13 babies (1.1%) were born at a very low birthweight (less than 3.3 pounds).
  - This compares to .3% of babies born at very low birthweight in 2019, 1.6% in 2018, and 1.2% in 2017.

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<sup>13</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2021, June).

<sup>14</sup> United States Virgin Islands Department of Health. (2020, April). *2020 United States Virgin Islands Community Health Assessment*. Christiansted, USVI. Retrieved from <https://doh.vi.gov/community-health-assessment-report>

## Low Birthweight Babies, cont.

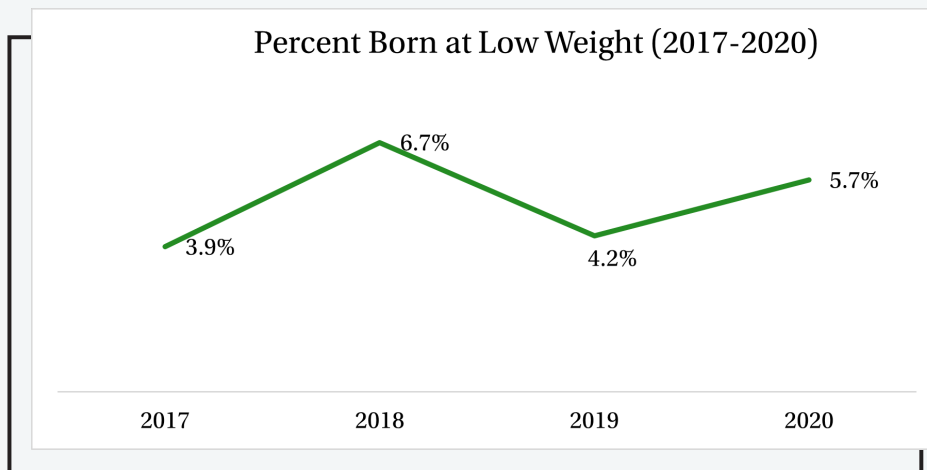


Figure 25. Percent of Babies Born at Low Weight, USVI

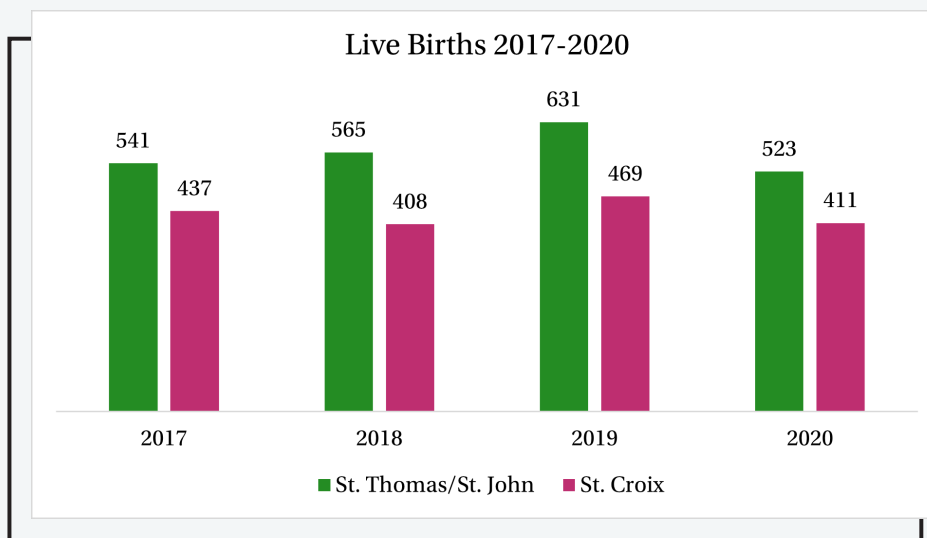


Figure 26. Number of Live Births, by District

**NATIONAL KIDS COUNT DATA TRENDS:** In 2020, 8.3% of babies were born in the United States with low birthweight. This is a slight decrease from the 8.1% of low birthweight babies born in 2010.

# Infant Mortality

The USVI has a very low rate of infant mortality as compared to other states/territories.

- According to the VI Department of Health, there was one (1) case of infant mortality in 2019.
  - Between 2010 and 2017, 56 infants died in the USVI.
  - The top three causes of infant mortality between 2010 and 2017 were: extremely low birthweight or extreme immaturity (17.9%), sudden unexpected infant death syndrome (10.7%), and respiratory distress of newborn (8.9%)<sup>15</sup>.

**NATIONAL KIDS COUNT DATA TRENDS:** The national rate of 25 child and teen deaths per 100,000 was similar to the USVI rate in 2010, which was 26 child and teen deaths per 100,000.

# Births to Teens

Although the USVI has data available for the number of babies born to teen mothers for the years 2017 through 2020, USVI population data (by age) are needed to determine the birth rate (and were not available as of publication).

- In 2019, babies born to teen mothers (ages 13-19) accounted for 6.4% of the total live births, which is a slight decrease from the percentage of babies born to teens in 2015 (7.9%).
- In 2020, 20 cases of teen pregnancy were reported to the VI Department of Human Services for counseling and support services.

**NATIONAL KIDS COUNT DATA TRENDS:** The national rate of teen births in 2019 was 16.7 per 1,000 females.



# Child Maltreatment

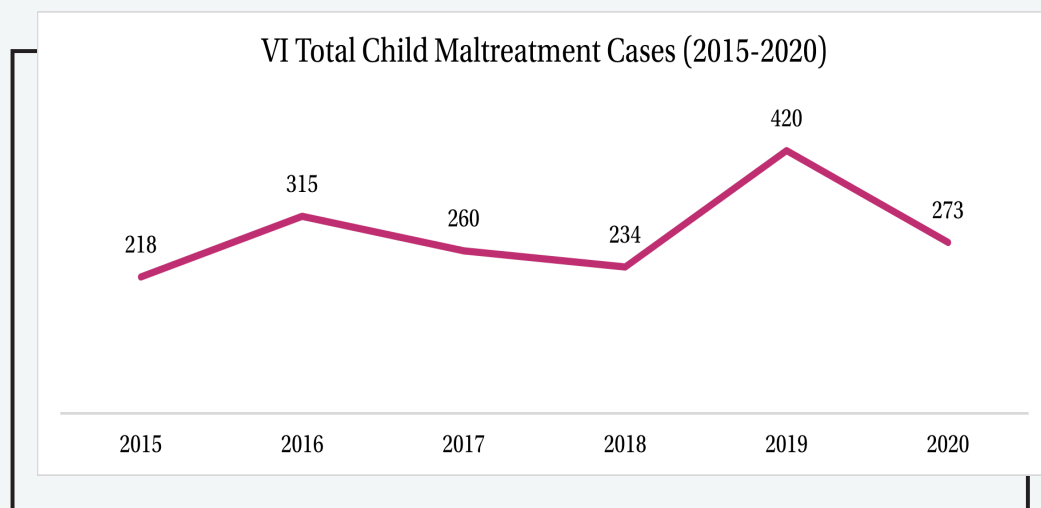
In 2020, there were 273 cases of child maltreatment reported in the USVI, down from 420 reported in 2019, which had been a sharp increase from the previous four years of available data.

In 2020:

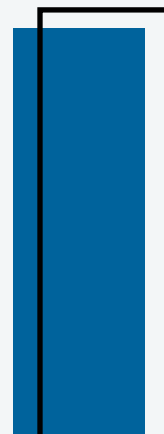
- Neglect accounted for 46.9% of reported cases.
- Physical abuse accounted for 30.4% of reported cases.
- Sexual abuse accounted for 22.7% of the cases.

In 2019:

- Neglect accounted for 55.7% of reported cases.
- Physical abuse accounted for 35.7% of reported cases.
- Sexual abuse accounted for 8.7% of the cases.



**Figure 27. USVI Cases of Reported Child Maltreatment (2015-2020)**



# Child Health Insurance

Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) provide free or low-cost health coverage to millions of Americans, including some low-income people, families and children, pregnant women, the elderly, and people with disabilities<sup>16</sup>.

## Children Enrolled in Medicaid

In 2020:

- 12,646 children were enrolled in Medicaid, an increase from the 8,412 reported in 2015.
  - The increase was primarily due to additional persons becoming eligible via an expansion to the Federal poverty levels from \$6,500 to \$11,770, a change which occurred in 2017<sup>17</sup>.
- The gender of children with Medicaid coverage was almost evenly distributed, with 50.3% of enrolled children being males and 49.7% being females.

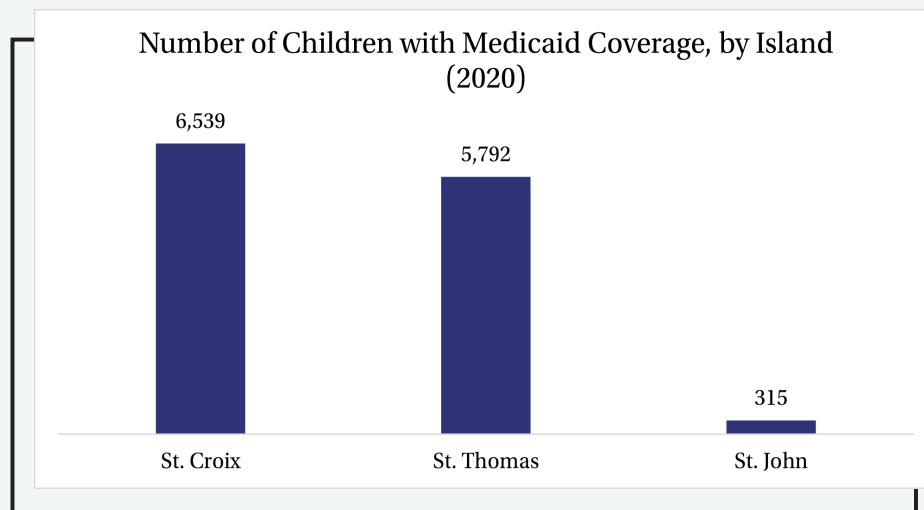


Figure 28. Number of Children with Medicaid Coverage, by Island (2020)

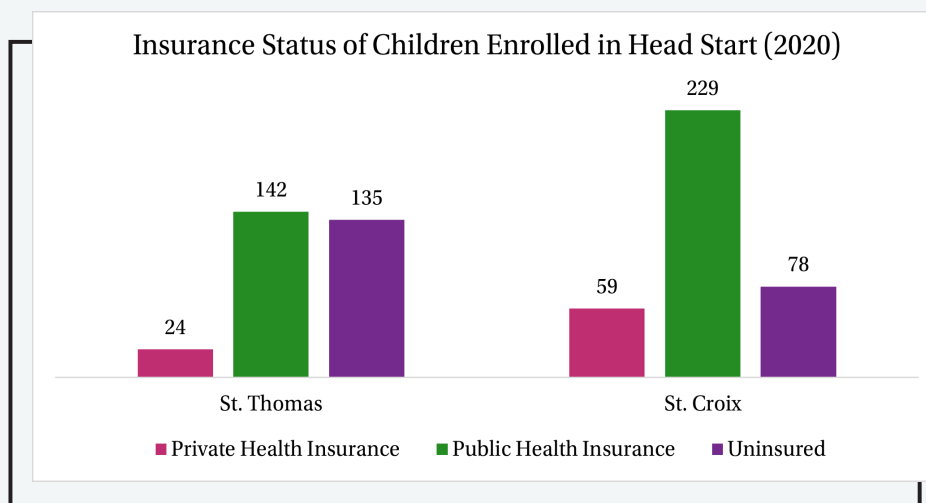
- The number of children enrolled in Medicaid in 2020 differed between St. Thomas and St. Croix, with St. Croix having slightly more children (6,539) as compared to St. Thomas (5,792).
- St. John had a comparatively small number of children with Medicaid coverage, 315 in total.
- As of June 2019, the total number of enrollees, including adults and children, in the USVI Medicaid program and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) was 29,033.

<sup>16</sup> Healthcare.gov. (n.d.). *Medicaid and CHIP Coverage*. Retrieved December 6, 2021, from <https://www.healthcare.gov/medicaid-chip/getting-medicaid-chip/>

<sup>17</sup> Source Staff. (2017, May 22). *Feds Approve V.I. Medicaid Expansion*. The St. Thomas Source. Retrieved from <https://stthomassource.com/content/2017/05/22/feds-approve-v-i-medicaid-expansion/vvvv>

## Insurance Status of Children Enrolled in Head Start

In 2020, most students in Head Start had either public or private insurance coverage. Even so, there was a gap in insurance coverage between St. Croix and St. Thomas, with St. Thomas serving a higher number of enrolled children without either public or private insurance coverage.



**Figure 29. Insurance Status of Children Enrolled in Head Start, by Island (2020)**

The trend observed in insurance coverage for Head Start students has been steady over the past five years, with a larger share of the enrolled children on St. Croix having insurance coverage as compared with the share of children on St. Thomas with insurance coverage. Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, St. Croix Head Start reported its highest percentage of insured children, with 80% of the students reporting either public or private insurance coverage.

**Prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, St. Croix Head Start reported its highest percentage of insured children, with 80% of the students reporting either public or private insurance coverage.**

# Nutrition and Income Assistance

## Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

*SNAP provides supplemental assistance towards the food budget of low-income families.*

- There were 24,368 SNAP participants (across 12,065 households) in the USVI as of June 2020.
- This is a decrease compared to the 28,933 participants and 14,260 households reported after Hurricanes Irma and Maria in September 2018.

## Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

*TANF awards grant funding to states and territories to operate programs designed to help low-income families with children achieve economic self-sufficiency.*

- In the USVI, there were 265 total participants, including 184 children in FY2020.
- This represents a 64% decrease from the 523 children in families receiving TANF in 2018.

## Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

*WIC provides federal grants to states for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk.*

- In 2020, a total of 2,240 children lived in families receiving WIC benefits. Of these children, just over half (52.7% or 773 children) were infants under the age of 1.
- The number of children in families receiving WIC had been declining for the past decade, although there was a slight uptick in 2020.

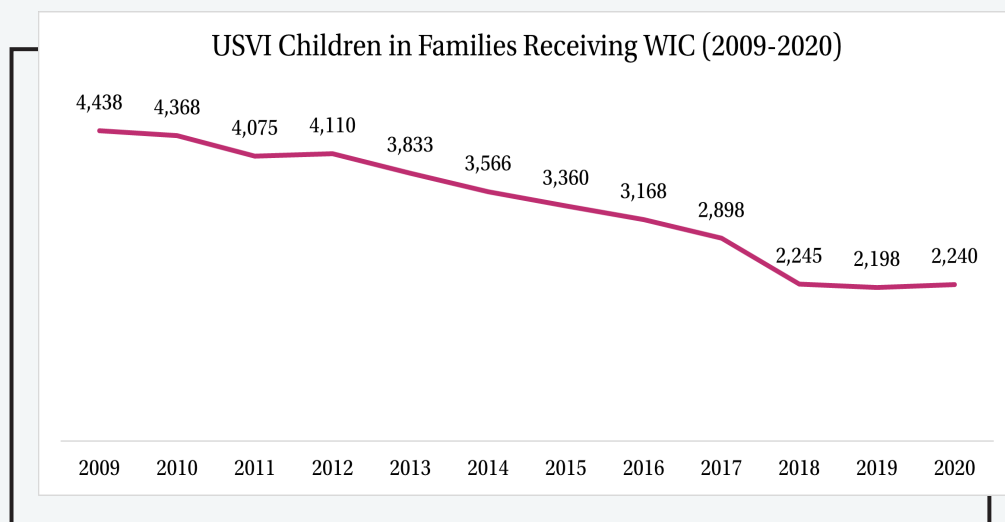


Figure 30. USVI Children and Families Receiving WIC (2009-2020)





## Vaccinations

According to the National Immunization Survey data provided by the VI Department of Health, children in the USVI have among the lowest vaccination rates in the United States.

- In 2016, 45.7% of USVI children aged 19 to 35 months were vaccinated, representing a decline of 10.4% since 2009, when 51.0% of USVI children aged 19 to 35 months received all recommended vaccines<sup>18</sup>.
  - In comparison, 64.4% of children aged 19 to 35 months received their recommended vaccines in Puerto Rico and 70.4% nationally in 2016<sup>19</sup>.
- Data collection in the USVI was suspended during 2017 because of the severity of the hurricane season and did not occur at all in 2018<sup>20</sup>.
- **Children in the USVI have the lowest documented rate of MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccination in the United States, with only 70.5% of children receiving the vaccination compared to 91.1% nationally and 85.7% in Puerto Rico<sup>21</sup>.**

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<sup>18</sup>United States Virgin Islands Department of Health. (2020, April).

<sup>19</sup>Centers for Disease Control. (2017, August). *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/mm6633a2.htm>

<sup>20</sup>Centers for Disease Control. (2020, October). *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/pdfs/mm6942a1-H.pdf>

<sup>21</sup>United States Virgin Islands Department of Health. (2020, April).

# Youth Risk Behavior

While various health behaviors associated with chronic conditions and leading causes of death often emerge in adolescence and track into adulthood, little is known about the health behaviors of adolescents in the USVI. The *USVI Youth Risk Behavior Survey* was conducted in 2018 by the Caribbean Exploratory Research Center at the University of the Virgin Islands (UVI-CERC) to gather data on mental health and substance use among school-age children in the USVI<sup>22</sup>. Data collection took place in all public schools, with an overall response rate of 65% of students enrolled in grades 7-12.

### Key Findings Among High School Respondents:

- 15.7% reported being bullied on campus and 9.5% were electronically bullied.
- 35.5% “felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities.”
  - female students were almost twice as likely as male students to report as such (46% of females and 23.7% of males).
- **17% of respondents had seriously considered attempting suicide.**
  - 13.6% made a plan, and 10.3% had actually attempted suicide.
- Approximately 1 in 5 were currently sexually active (in the past 30 days).
  - 42.9% of sexually active youth did not use a condom at last sexual encounter.
- 37.2% meet the classification of overweight (16%) or obese (21.2% or 268 youth).

### Key Findings Among Middle School Respondents:

- 36% reported having been bullied on school property and 12.5% had been bullied electronically.
- **22.5% seriously thought about killing themselves.**
  - 14.3% reported they made a plan and 8.5% actually attempted suicide.
- 14% had ever had sexual intercourse.
  - 44% of sexually active youth did not use a condom at last sexual intercourse.
- 33.1% thought there was gang activity at their school.
  - 31.3% did not feel safe at school.

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<sup>22</sup> Valmond, J.M., Michael, N., Paul, C.M., & Williams, A. (2019). *USVI 2017 Youth Risk Behavior Survey*. St. Croix, USVI: Caribbean Exploratory Research Center, School of Nursing, University of the Virgin Islands.



In 2018, 22.5% of surveyed public middle schoolers seriously thought about killing themselves, while 14.3% reported that they had made a plan and 8.5% actually attempted suicide.

*USVI Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2018*









# ECONOMIC WELL-BEING

A family's social, demographic, and economic circumstances can have direct and indirect effects on a child's development. A significant body of research indicates that socioeconomic status is a key factor influencing quality of life for children and families<sup>23</sup>. Moreover, structural inequities around accessing resources such as education, income, or food can exacerbate disparities in children's health and school readiness<sup>24</sup>.

## Children in Poverty

Growing up in poverty is one of the greatest threats to healthy child development. It increases the likelihood that a child will be exposed to factors that can impair brain development and lead to poor academic, cognitive and health outcomes. It can also result in higher rates of risky health-related behaviors among adolescents<sup>25</sup>. The official federal poverty level in 2019 was \$25,926 for a family of two adults and two children<sup>26</sup>.

- The last available data for the U.S. Virgin Islands, from VICS 2015, indicate that 29.6% of children in the USVI were living in poverty<sup>27</sup>.
  - Child poverty rates in 2013 and 2014 were 35% and 37%, respectively.
- Child poverty rates in the USVI consistently differ by race.
  - In 2015, 31% of Black children and 25% of children of "other races" lived in families in poverty, compared to 11% of White children<sup>28</sup>.

One of the striking indicators presented in the 2020 National KIDS COUNT Data Book focuses on American children living in poverty. In a decades-long trend, Black and Native American children in the US represented the highest proportions of children living in poverty, hovering at 32% and 31%, respectively, in 2020. In comparison, the percentage of children of all races living in poverty is 18%<sup>29</sup>.



**NATIONAL KIDS COUNT DATA TRENDS: 18% of children across the U.S. lived in poverty in 2018. This is a decrease from the 22% of children nationally that lived in poverty in 2010.**

<sup>23</sup> American Psychological Association. (2010). *Children, Youth, families, and Socioeconomic Status*. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/pi/ses/resources/publications/children-families>

<sup>24</sup> Piña, G., Moore, K.A., Paschall, K., and Anderson, S. (2020, May). *Being Healthy and Ready to Learn is Linked with Socioeconomic Conditions for Preschoolers*. Retrieved from <https://www.childtrends.org/publications/being-healthy-and-ready-to-learn-is-linked-with-socioeconomic-conditions-for-preschoolers>

<sup>25</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2021, June).

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). *Poverty thresholds by Size of Family and Number of Children*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html>

<sup>27</sup> Eastern Caribbean Center (UVI). (2018, July). *2015 Virgin Islands Community Survey*. Retrieved from <https://www.uvi.edu/research/eastern-caribbean-center/documents.aspx>

<sup>28</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2021, June).

<sup>29</sup> Piña et al. (2020, May).



# Wages

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, workers in the USVI had an average (mean) hourly wage of \$23.06 in May 2020, compared to the US average of \$27.07<sup>30</sup>.

- 15 of the 22 major occupational groups had average wages in the USVI that were significantly lower than their respective mainland U.S. averages, including management, protective service, and transportation and material moving.
- Three groups had significantly higher wages than their respective national averages: production; farming, fishing, and forestry; and healthcare support.

# Unemployment

The annual average unemployment rate for the USVI from 2015-2020 was 10.3%.

- Between 2007 and 2019, the USVI had a net job loss of 19%, with approximately 8,700 jobs lost<sup>31</sup>.
  - The closure of the HOVENSA oil refinery in 2012, the 2017 hurricanes, and the COVID-19 pandemic all contributed to a decline.
- Despite the challenges, the annual average unemployment rate fell to a five-year low of 6.1% in 2019 (potentially associated with the “recovery economy” in the aftermath of the 2017 hurricanes), before the COVID pandemic caused it to rise again to levels in line with prior years.

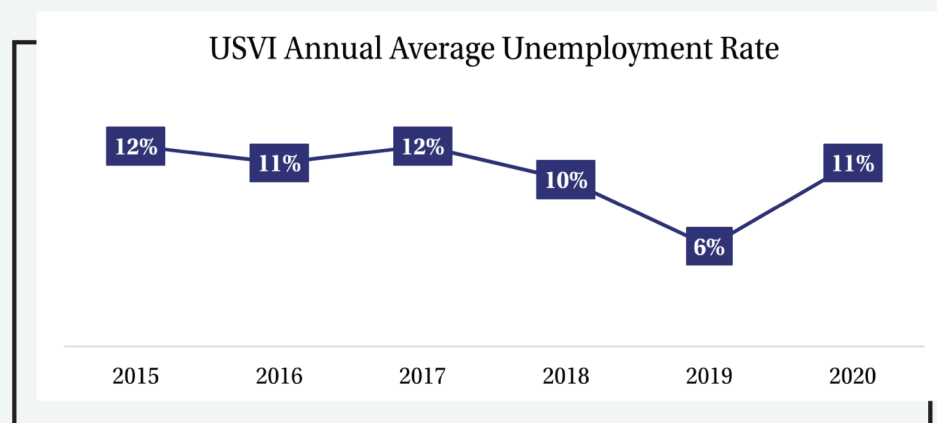


Figure 31. USVI Annual Average Unemployment Rate (2015-2020)

<sup>30</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020, May). Occupational Employment and Wages in the U.S. Virgin Islands – May 2020. New York–New Jersey Information Office: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved from [https://www.bls.gov/regions/new-york-new-jersey/news-release/occupationalemploymentandwages\\_virginislands.htm](https://www.bls.gov/regions/new-york-new-jersey/news-release/occupationalemploymentandwages_virginislands.htm)

<sup>31</sup> USVI Economic Development Authority. (2021, March). *US Virgin Islands Vision 2040 Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.usvi2040.com/theplan>



**BETWEEN 2007 AND 2019, THE USVI HAD A NET JOB LOSS OF 19%, WITH APPROXIMATELY 8,700 JOBS LOST.**



# SPOTLIGHT ON OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

*Opportunity Youth* are generally defined as those young people between the ages of 16 to 24 years old who are considered “disconnected” from school and work (i.e., not in school and not participating in the labor market)<sup>32</sup>. This developmental time period, also referred to as emerging adulthood, holds critical potential for individual growth through exploring independence and life opportunities.

Nationally, Opportunity Youth are nearly twice as likely to live in poverty, more than three times as likely to have a disability of some kind, nine times as likely to have dropped out of high school, and more than 20 times as likely to be living in institutionalized group quarters when compared to their connected counterparts<sup>33</sup>. Disconnected young women are over four times as likely to be mothers as their connected peers<sup>33</sup>.

Data on Opportunity Youth in the USVI are extremely limited and variable from year to year. Previous KIDS COUNT Data Books report that between 2005 and 2014 the percent of teens ages 16 to 19 who were not in school and not working fluctuated from a low of 11.3% (in 2006) to a high of 27% (in 2013)<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>32</sup>Youth.gov (n.d.). *Opportunity Youth*. Retrieved from <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/opportunity-youth>

<sup>33</sup>Lewis, K. (2020, June). *A Decade Undone: Youth Disconnection in the Age of Coronavirus*. Retrieved from <https://measureofamerica.org/youth-disconnection-2020/>

<sup>34</sup>Annie E. Casey Foundation. (n.d.). *KIDS COUNT Data Center*. Retrieved from <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#VI/4/0/char/0>



## Opportunity Youth and Education

According to the VIDE, 191 public school students in grades 7th through 12th left the school system in the 2019-20 school year. As discussed in the *Education* section of this Data Book, 9th grade is the grade during which the highest number of students dropped out during both SY2018-19 and SY2019-20. The 9th grade also tends to be the grade for which the highest proportion of students are retained. These data points suggest that 9th grade is a pivotal year for students' connection to the education system and point to a critical prevention/intervention point for Opportunity Youth.

Of the students who were reported as dropouts in SY2019-20, 62% were from the St. Thomas/St. John School District. Among students limited in their English proficiency, there were more public-school non-graduates than graduates.

In addition to the USVI having a graduation rate below the national average, a worrying data point is the graduation rate of Hispanic students in USVI public schools (59%), which is well below the national Hispanic graduation rate of 81% and the graduation rate of Black students in the USVI (74%). These data point to a "Hot Spot" and opportunity to further disaggregate the student population to design specific interventions and methods of tracking: (1) when students unenroll from the district and (2) how many then go on to complete their GED or high school diploma through VIDE's alternative programs, including adult education.

191 public school students dropped out of the school system between the 7th and 12th grades in the 2019-20 school year.

# Youth Contacts with the Juvenile Justice System

Minors under 18 years of age who commit an offense or are otherwise arrested fall under the purview of the Virgin Islands Police Department’s Juvenile Bureau. The Juvenile Bureau works with other agencies, such as the Department of Human Services, Department of Education, Superior Court, Attorney General’s office, and private institutions, with the goal of decreasing the number of repeat offenders and improving outcomes for at-risk youth. The Bureau’s initiatives include enforcing curfews and making home visits, providing juvenile counseling, and conducting preventive patrols.

## Youth Arrests

Data from the USVI Juvenile Bureau indicate a decrease in arrests during 2020 compared to 2019.

- During the past two years, the highest incidence of reported crimes for juveniles were assault and burglary.
- Males were the most likely to be incarcerated based on demographic data provided for the St. Thomas/St. John District.

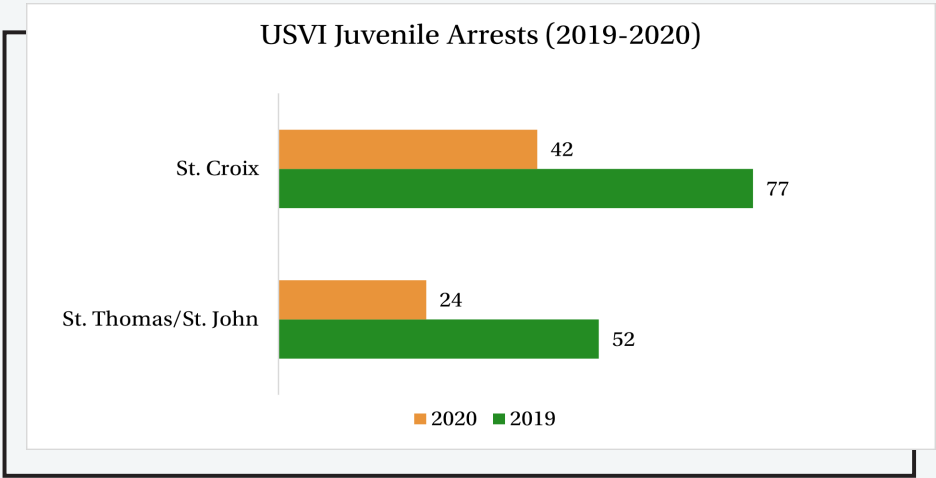


Figure 32. Total Arrests by the VIPD Juvenile Bureau (2019 and 2020)

## Youth Arrests, cont.

The charts below encompass the most common reasons for juvenile arrests for 2019 and 2020 in each district. Due to the nature of how the crimes are categorized in each district, it is not always possible to make direct comparisons between St. Croix and St. Thomas/St. John arrests.

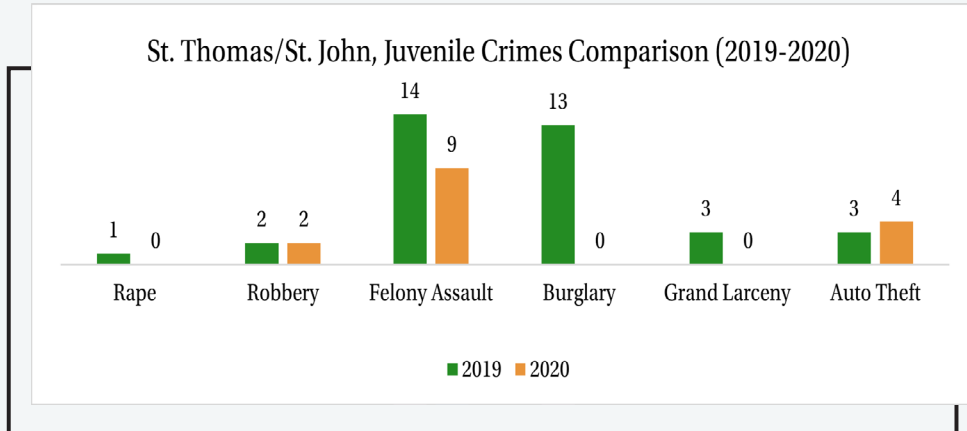


Figure 33. Selected Juvenile Arrest Crimes, St. Thomas St. John (2019 and 2020)

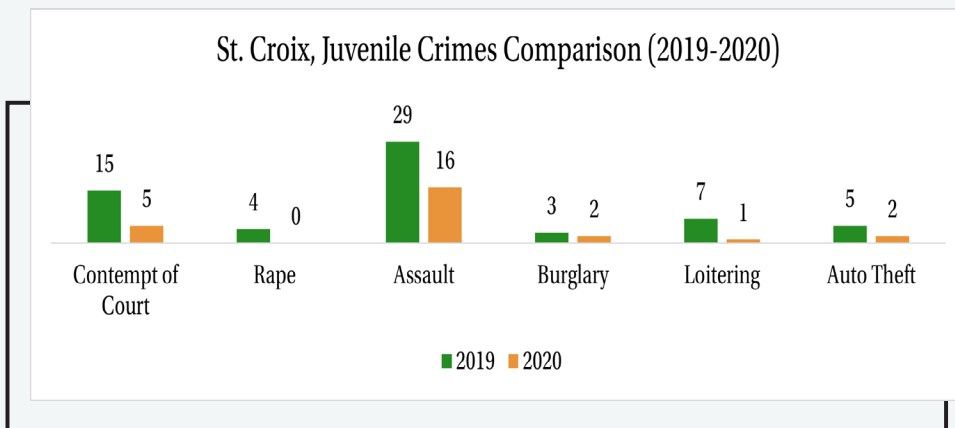


Figure 34. Selected Juvenile Arrest Crimes, St. Croix (2019 and 2020)

# COVID-19 IMPACTS

Highlighted by Annie E. Casey Foundation President and CEO, Lisa M. Hamilton, in the *2021 National KIDS COUNT Data Book*, the COVID-19 pandemic has been the most striking public health crisis in a century, with devastating impacts on global, national, and local economies, school systems, households, and nearly everything in between<sup>35</sup>. As we continue to consider the role of these complex systems in the lives of our children, we cannot understate the ways in which COVID-19 has impacted (and will continue to impact) their lives at nearly every level. In the following section, we highlight several contextual factors that are of particular timeliness and relevance for our children at this moment in time. Providing an overview of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across Education, Health, Economic Well-being, and Opportunity Youth.

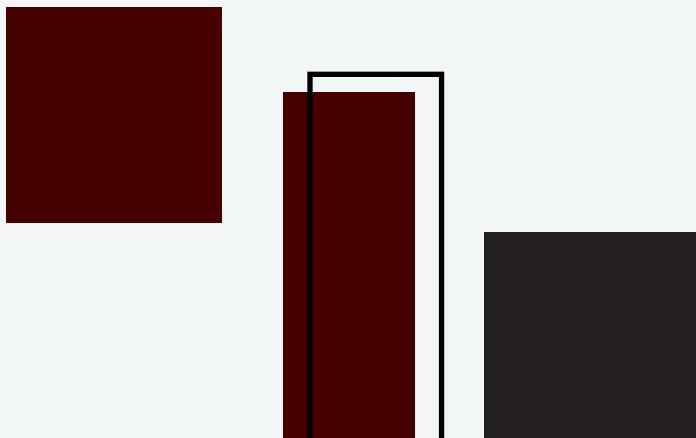
## Education

In March 2020, the multi-faceted systems that comprise K-12 public education were abruptly upended, as communities worldwide shifted into high gear to find alternative ways to deliver instruction. In responding to the challenge of making schools safe via virtual instruction, the US was forced to grapple with barriers to learning that have been impacting students for decades but were largely overlooked. The full story began to unfold as a national spotlight honed in on the pre-existing conditions surrounding the ways in which children's socioeconomic status, geography, and other factors impacted their learning experience.

One such example is the *digital divide* and the resulting *homework gap*, phenomena associated with children being unable to complete assignments due to the lack of internet access<sup>36</sup>. While these issues have persisted for years, the COVID-19 pandemic laid bare glaring disparities. One "Bright Spot" for the USVI was the initiative by the VIDE to purchase enough laptops for every public-school student in the territory to ensure they had the basic resources necessary to participate in a virtual learning environment.

Another noteworthy impact of the pandemic on local schools was seen in enrollment figures. According to available data, private and parochial school enrollment was the most severely impacted by the pandemic, with enrollment dropping by 5% in SY2019-20 and again by 26% the following school year. In comparison, public school enrollment held steady and even registered a small gain of 2% in SY2019-20 and 1% in SY2020-21.

As we look to Education to answer the two questions, "where are our children?" and "how are they faring?" we must also look at ourselves, and ask the question, "how well are we providing children with 'level pathways' that support their educational progress, and what are we willing to do to effectively and equitably meet their needs?" How we answer these questions will ultimately determine the kind of future we can envision and realize for children in the USVI.





## Health

As of publication, the USVI was listed at “Level 3: High Level of COVID-19 in the U.S. Virgin Islands” by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and remains in the Safer At Home phase of its 5-part advisory plan to safely reengage all operations in the territory in response to the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>37</sup>.

Indeed, the health impacts of COVID-19 have been significant. In the USVI, as of October 29, 2021:

- Over 7,200 people had tested positive for the COVID-19 virus.
- 81 virus-related deaths were reported.
- Just over 1,000 children ages 0 to 17 had tested positive for the COVID-19 virus.
  - Children had a 5% positivity rate, which was the highest rate in the USVI (along with adults ages 18-29, who also had a 5% positivity rate).
- **2,356 children ages 12-17 had been fully vaccinated.**
  - This number is expected to rise in concurrence with FDA’s authorization of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine for emergency use in children ages 5 through 11 years on October 29, 2021.

In addition to direct health effects, the COVID-19 pandemic has compromised many of the reliable safety nets that serve to buttress children against the social and economic hardships in their lives. The adjustments to daily life based on public health guidelines have affected children’s access to social learning/extracurricular opportunities (i.e., through play with peers) and social supports (i.e., through interactions with caring adults).

Experts note that children may be uniquely impacted by the pandemic, having experienced this crisis during important periods of physical, social, and emotional development<sup>38</sup>. But, the heightened vulnerability of children to the social and mental health after-effects of a crisis is not unique to COVID-19. Indeed, a community needs assessment conducted in the USVI following the 2017 hurricanes highlighted concerns about lingering symptoms of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder in a significant number of the adults and children surveyed<sup>39</sup>.

Given the exacerbation of material hardship and psychological distress for low-income families, experts caution that we must be mindful of the possibilities of long-lasting impacts on children. This is particularly true for the territory’s children, who have endured compounded crises over the past several years.

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<sup>35</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2021, June).

<sup>36</sup> Williams, E. (2021, August). *Back to School amidst the New Normal: Ongoing Effects of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Children’s Health and Well-Being*. Retrieved from <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/back-to-school-amidst-the-new-normal-ongoing-effects-of-the-coronavirus-pandemic-on-childrens-health-and-well-being/> and

The Education Trust - West. (2020, April). *Education Equity in Crisis: The Digital Divide*. Retrieved from <https://west.edtrust.org/resource/education-equity-in-crisis-the-digital-divide/>

<sup>37</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). *COVID-19 in the U.S. Virgin Islands*. Retrieved November 22, 2021, from <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/covid-3/coronavirus-usvirgin-islands> and Office of Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. (n.d.). *COVID-19 - Path to a New Normal*. Retrieved November 22, 2021, from <https://www.vi.gov/covid/phases/>

<sup>38</sup> Williams, E. (2021, August).

<sup>39</sup> Michael, N., Valmond, J. M., Ragster, L. E., Brown, D. E., & Callwood, G. B. (2019). *Community needs assessment: Understanding the needs of vulnerable children and families in the U.S. Virgin Islands Post Hurricanes Irma and Maria*. St. Thomas, USVI: Caribbean Exploratory Research Center, School of Nursing, University of the Virgin Islands.

# COVID-19 Impact

## Economic Well-being

On a national level, the pandemic and its resulting public health measures struck millions of households with a range of economic impacts. Loss of employment and health insurance or reduced hours caused many American families to struggle to pay for or locate basic necessities like food, medical care, and childcare. Many families also faced homelessness due to eviction or foreclosure. Low-income families and Black and Hispanic families have been reported to face additional challenges associated with the impacts of the pandemic<sup>40</sup>. For example, the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey (which did not include the USVI) found that since the onset of the pandemic, about one in seven adults with children (14%) said their household "sometimes" or "always" did not have enough to eat in the most recent week. The percentages for Black households (25%), households of two or more races or another race (21%) and Latino households (20%) with children were about twice the rates for their white (10%) and Asian (9%) counterparts<sup>41</sup>.

As noted previously, the lack of comprehensive and current data sets and other timely detailed data limits our ability to report on the specific impacts of COVID-19 on families with children in the USVI. Although we cannot yet quantify the full impact of COVID-19 on our economy, what we do know is that the territory's unemployment rate saw a sharp increase in March of 2020, just as the pandemic unfolded, peaking at 13.5% in June. Even as COVID-19 related travel and business restrictions continued throughout 2020, the unemployment rate decreased to 8.8% by the end of the year<sup>42</sup>. But, even at that level, it was still higher than at any point in 2019.

Additionally, because of the territory's dependence on tourism-related jobs, impacts were felt throughout the hospitality sector, from hotels and restaurants in addition to individual and small business service providers and vendors. According to USVI Office of Management and Budget data, cruise ship passengers decreased by 38.7% and airline travel declined by 45.3% year over year<sup>43</sup>.

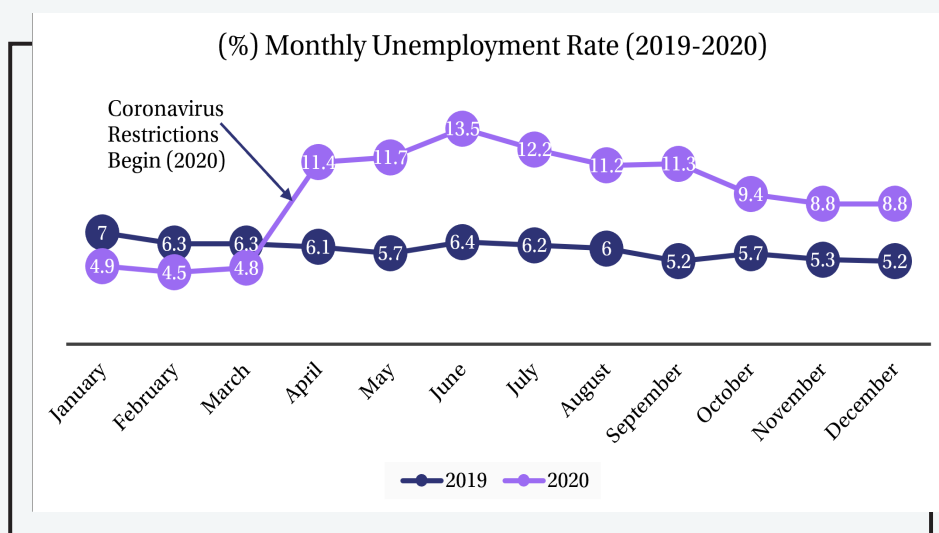


Figure 35. Monthly Unemployment Rate (2019 and 2020)

## Opportunity Youth and COVID-19

Many Opportunity Youth are at a crossroads in their lives and may have already been disconnected from school and other networks when the COVID-19 crisis hit. These youth often rely on personal contacts with community providers to re-engage in school or work; therefore, the pandemic may have disrupted the common methods by which they would reconnect to employment and education opportunities<sup>44</sup>.

Nationally, the share of young people not in school and not working (“the disconnection rate”) rose from 13.4% in February 2020 to a peak of 25.3% in April 2020 and has been declining since that time<sup>45</sup>. While local data are unavailable, we expect that the patterns parallel what has been reported at the national level.



<sup>40</sup> Karpman, M., Gonzalez, D., Kenney, G. (2020, May). *Parents Are Struggling to Provide for Their Families during the Pandemic: Material Hardships Greatest among Low-Income, Black, and Hispanic Parents*. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/parents-are-struggling-provide-their-families-during-pandemic>

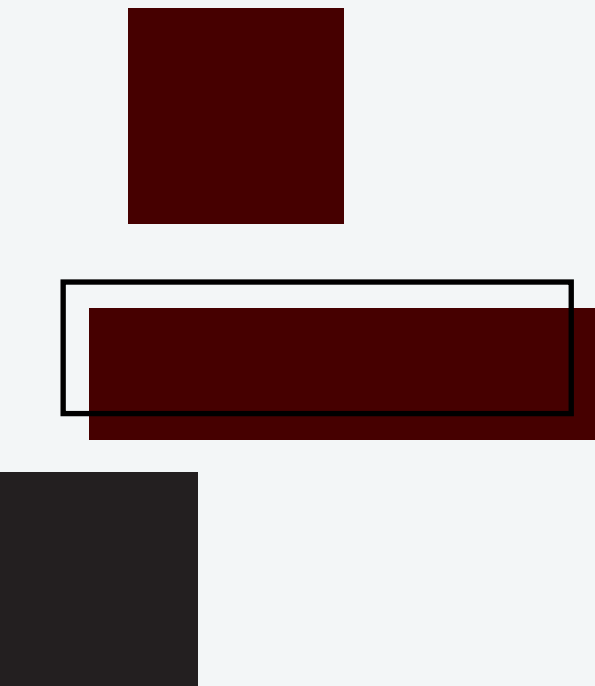
<sup>41</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d). *Household Pulse Survey Data Tables*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/data.html>

<sup>42</sup> Office of Management and Budget, Division of Economic Research. (2020, March). *Review of the USVI Territorial Economy 2019*. Retrieved from <http://usviber.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Review-of-the-Virgin-Islands-Economy-Final-March-25-2020.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> USVI Bureau of Economic Research. (2021, November). *UNEMPLOYMENT RATES - U.S. Virgin Islands Monthly Totals, Year To Date, Quarterly and Annual Averages*. Retrieved from <http://usviber.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/UNE21-SEPT-1.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Shenbanjo, T. and Mack, M. (2021, February). *Supporting disconnected youth during the COVID-19 pandemic: Experiences from the field*. Retrieved from <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/P3%20COVID19%20Special%20Topic%20Paper.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> Borgschulte, M. and Chen, Y. (2021, April). *Youth Disconnection During the COVID-19 Pandemic*. Retrieved from [https://research.upjohn.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1035&context=up\\_policybriefs](https://research.upjohn.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1035&context=up_policybriefs)



Nationally, the share of young people not in school and not working (“the disconnection rate”) rose from 13.4% in February 2020 to a peak of 25.3% in April 2020 and has been declining since that time.







# COMMUNITY BRIGHT SPOTS

The *KIDS COUNT USVI Team* recognizes that the data on child well-being have trended towards ‘crisis’ over the past two decades. While the multitude of Hot Spots surrounding our children are critical to identify in order to ensure we are directing resources at the most urgent needs, the *Bright Spots* are also important guideposts pointing us to what is working and where strategic investments can be deepened.

As a place-based operating foundation, SCF also recognizes the inextricable linkages between our nonprofits and public sector partners. Seeking to go beyond the standard data indicators, throughout 2020-2021, our *KIDS COUNT Team* conducted a series of interviews with local social service organizations that are also supporting the territory’s growing population of Opportunity Youth. These robust conversations provided great insight into the importance of and dire need for community resources in the USVI that provide sustainable safety nets, relief, and enrichment in our children’s lives. Whether they are providing academic interventions, mental health services, or workforce development initiatives, these assets ultimately represent real Bright Spots in the story of how we, as a territory, are meeting the needs of our most at-risk youth.

We have selected just three of the many community-based organizations and one government agency that are providing critical services to vulnerable families and their children to tell a more complete story.



## My Brother's Workshop

My Brother's Workshop (MBW) is a nonprofit organization established to provide hope, faith, and purpose to at-risk and high-risk young people in the USVI by offering mentoring, counseling, paid job training, education, and job placement. MBW offers trainees an opportunity to work at one of two workshop training facilities, one on St. Croix and one on St. Thomas, or at its culinary training site/cafe on St. Thomas. One of MBW's high impact programs offers *Opportunity Youth* vocational and academic tracks. In 2019, 13 students in the St. Thomas/St. John district earned their high school diploma through their alternative education program. Between 2015 and 2020, as MBW's organizational capacity has grown, so too has student enrollment, providing additional opportunities for a vulnerable, underserved youth population.

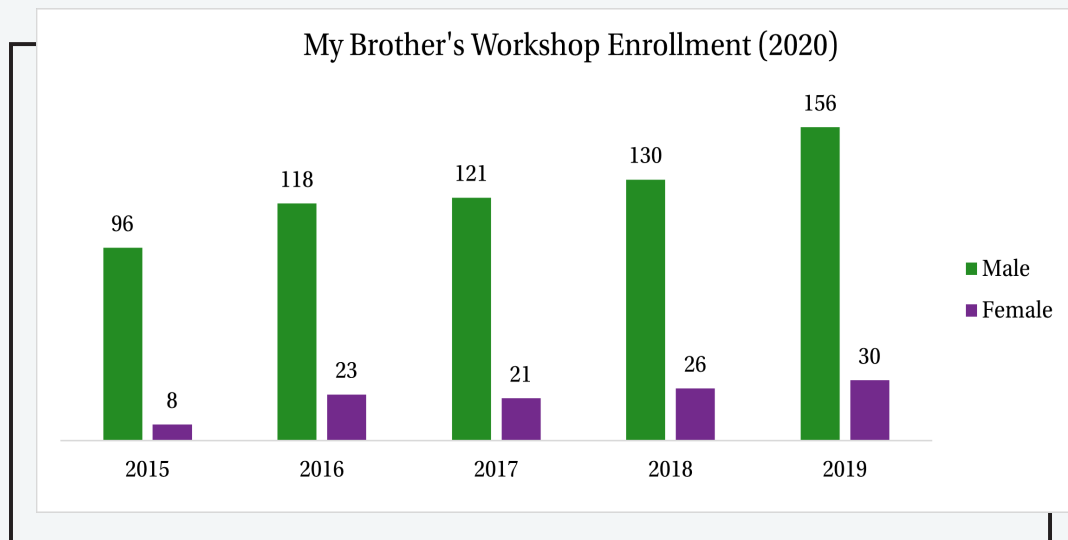


Figure 36. My Brother's Workshop Enrollment, by Gender (2015-2020)

### Caribbean Centers for Boys and Girls of the Virgin Islands

Caribbean Centers for Boys and Girls of the Virgin Islands (CCBGVI) offers school-aged children after-school programming and a summer camp. These programs include academic enrichment, art, athletics, and teen leadership training in St. Croix and St. Thomas. As of October 2021, CCBGVI enrolled 309 youth on both islands.

- Enrollment by gender was nearly evenly split, with 159 males and 150 females.
- The majority of children served (63%) were in elementary grades (K-6).
- 68% of enrolled youth were Black, 16% were Hispanic, and the remainder were multi-race (8%), race unknown (4%), other race (3%), and Caucasian (1%).

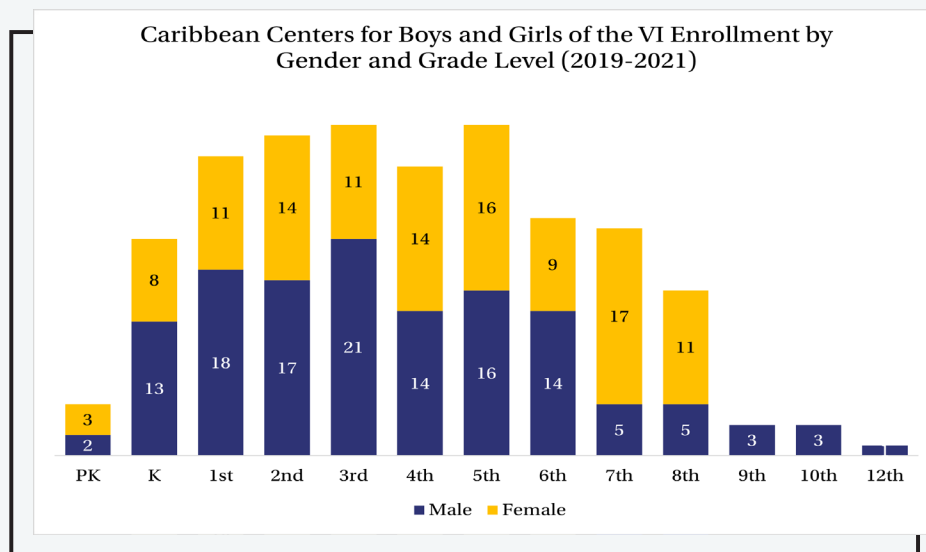


Figure 37. Caribbean Centers for Boys and Girls of the VI Enrollment, by Gender and Grade Level

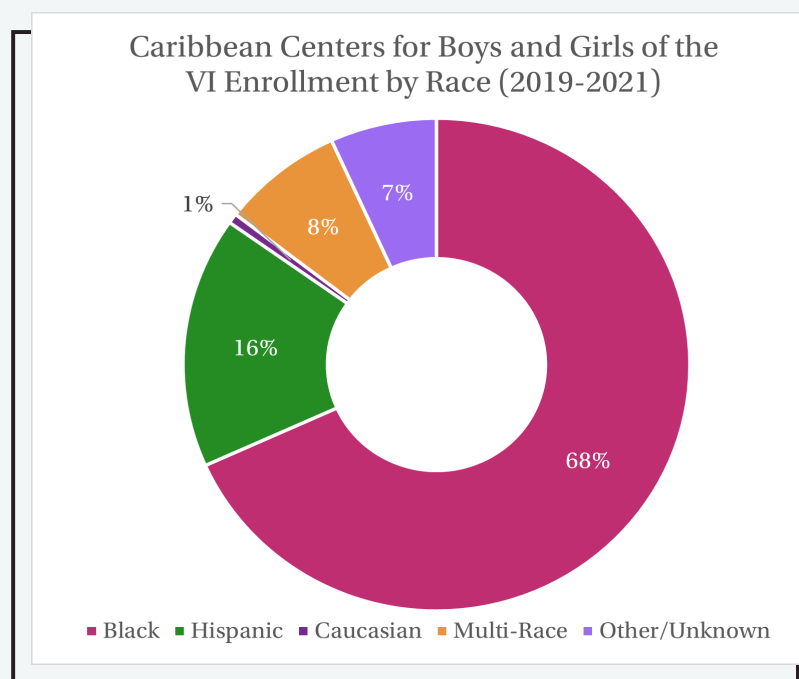


Figure 38. Caribbean Centers for Boys and Girls of the VI Enrollment, by Race/Ethnicity

## VI Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation

The VI Department of Sports, Parks, and Recreation (DSPR) provides diverse sports and recreation, maintains facilities, and promotes physical fitness. Many of its free and low-cost summer and after-school programs provide valuable recreation opportunities for children and help us to answer the question: where are our children?

Of the DSPR programs targeted at children, almost half were available to middle and high school students. In 2020, many of their programs were either suspended or offered virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, DSPR stands out as a critical government agency that is targeting and serving Opportunity Youth.

- 47% of the children served by DSPR are Opportunity Youth between the ages of 16 and 25.
- About 16% of their programs were targeted specifically for girls, while another 82% were co-ed.
- DSPR served approximately 4,726 children across its various programs in 2019 and 2020.

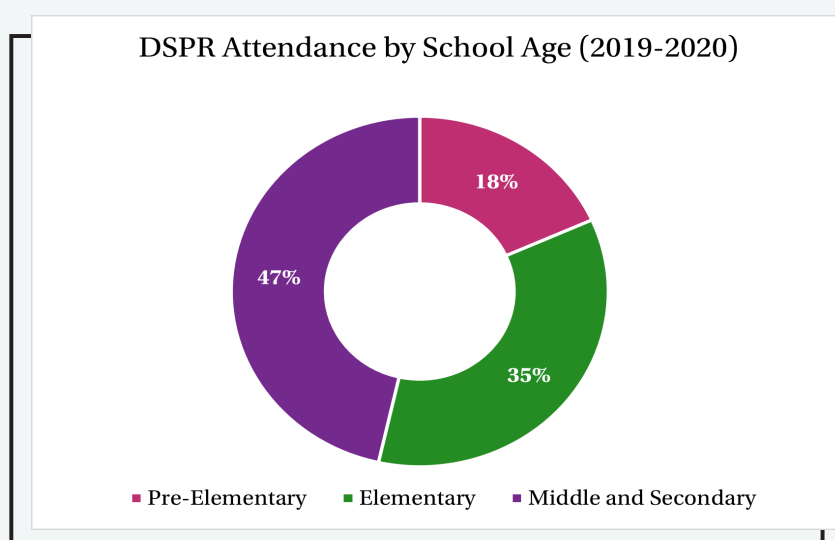


Figure 39. VI Department of Sports Park and Recreation Programs, by Age Group (2019)

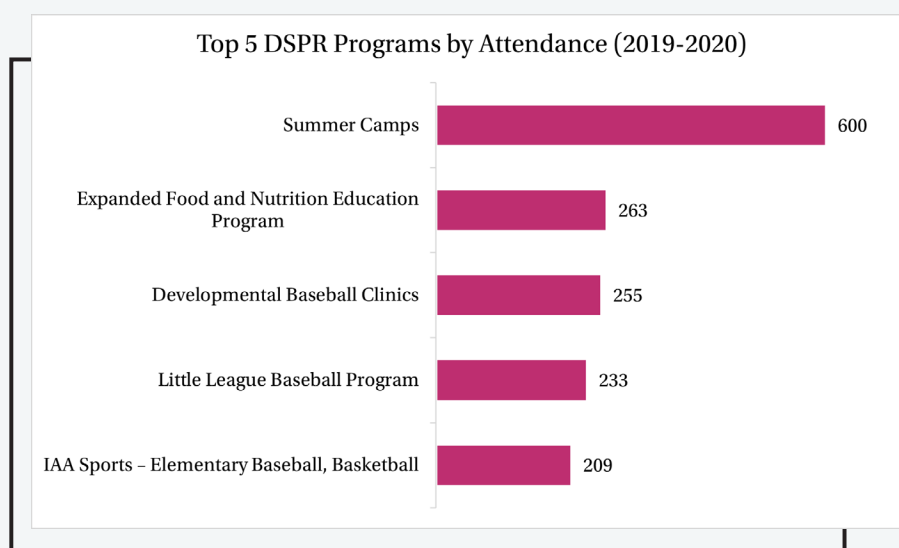


Figure 40. VI Department of Sports Park and Recreation Programs, by Attendance (2019)

# Community Bright Spots

## Family Resource Center

The Family Resource Center (FRC) is a nonprofit organization based on St. Thomas that provides no-cost services to meet the needs of all victims of crime. Each year, FRC provides essential services to children and families in crisis and, in turn, captures critical data around the well-being of youth and families.

FRC reported domestic violence as the most common problem presented by children receiving services. The second most common reason for needing services was child abuse and neglect. These findings from the field point to potential underlying family and community issues that have an impact on the well-being of children in the USVI.

Between 2017 and 2020:

- 73% of children served were female and 27% were male.
- 76% of children served were Black, 15% were White, 9% were Hispanic.
- 19% of children needed assistance with shelter.
- The top 3 referral sources were Department of Human Services, self-referrals, and parents.

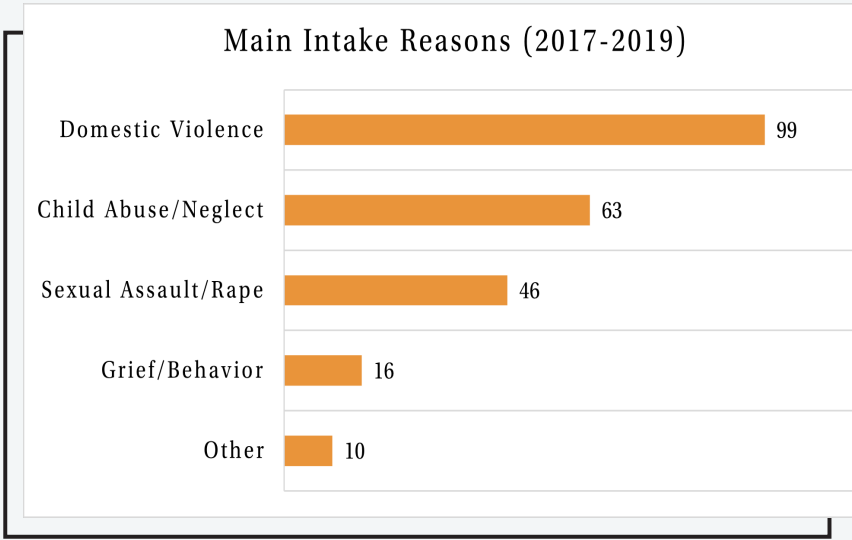


Figure 41. Family Resource Center Intake Reasons for Children Served (2019)





# ACTIVATING THE DATA

As we close out our first Data Book publication, St. Croix Foundation's KIDS COUNT Team is actually optimistic about the future. As the smallest entity in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's national KIDS COUNT network, we believe the USVI's size may be one of our greatest assets, affording us an unprecedented opportunity to make rapid and radical gains. We also believe that the territory has the chance to craft a compelling case for the creation of a philanthropic (and federal) funding support system for our children. But, to do so, data must serve as the foundation of our "case for support."

As we look to the future, seeking to make the data more meaningful, SCF is committed to connecting the story of the data to the lived experiences of people on the ground. As such, a significant priority for our future KIDS COUNT work will center around supporting, and expanding, a territorial network of partners and support systems across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Our ultimate goal is to harness our community's collective power around not just statistics and trends but around activating the data through policy and programming.

Recognizing that 'what gets measured gets managed,' we need to ensure that we are first measuring the right indicators for well-being and then utilizing all available tools to translate what we know into what we do. Now, as a territory, let us activate this data through innovative and relevant programs and policies that meet the current and emerging needs of our children in order to level the pathway toward a bright future for every young person in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

St. Croix Foundation for Community Development remains steadfastly dedicated to improving the quality of life of and opportunities for all Virgin Islanders, especially our children and young adults. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the organizations, agencies, and individuals who shared their time and invaluable information to make the *2021 KIDS COUNT USVI Data Book* possible. It is clear that we all want the best for our children and, collectively, we have the power to form a tightly woven circle around our youth through qualitative and quantitative data.

**We express our heartfelt appreciation to the following:**

Annie E. Casey Foundation  
Caribbean Center for Boys and Girls of the Virgin Islands  
Community Action Now  
Family Resource Center  
Frederiksted Health Care Inc.  
Giffit Hill School  
Harborview Apartments  
Love City Strong  
Lutheran Social Services/Queen Louise Home  
Men's Coalition of St. Croix  
My Brothers Workshop  
Project Promise  
Rising Stars Steel Orchestra  
Society 340  
St. Croix Long-term Recovery Group  
St. Croix Women's Coalition  
St. John Community Foundation  
St. Thomas East End Medical Center Corp.  
V.I.N.G.N. (Virgin Islands Next Generation Network)  
World Ocean School

Office of the Governor, U.S. Virgin Islands  
Bureau of Economic Research  
Law Enforcement Planning Commission  
University of the Virgin Islands  
Virgin Islands Department of Education  
Virgin Islands Department of Health  
Virgin Islands Housing Authority  
Virgin Islands Department of Human Services  
Virgin Islands Department of Justice  
Virgin Islands Department of Labor  
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## St. Croix Foundation

St. Croix Foundation for Community Development (SCF) was founded in 1990, in the wake of Hurricane Hugo. Since our inception, the Foundation has been unflinchingly dedicated to the issues of equity and holistic, rooted community development. Committed to advancing a brand of progressive place-based philanthropy for three decades, SCF has directed laser focus on catalyzing systemic change through a myriad of philanthropic strategies including strategic grantmaking, fiscal sponsorship, program administration, and nonprofit capacity building. To date, SCF has been a conduit of over \$42 million invested into the U.S. Virgin Islands.

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