



KIDS COUNT USVI

2022 Political Candidates Questionnaire

As a political candidate in the upcoming 2022 U.S. Virgin Islands Election, St. Croix Foundation's [KIDS COUNT USVI](#) Team invites you to participate in a 2022 Candidate Questionnaire relative to the well-being of children and families in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Please reflect on and answer each question by **September 26, 2022**. All responses will be housed on EngageVI.org and distributed to media and key stakeholders in our communities, including the KIDS COUNT USVI 'network' of nonprofits, public sector agencies, and national partners. This will give candidates the opportunity to share their platform and perspective with voters, and will give voters the opportunity to evaluate candidates on their engagement with these critical issues.

Please note that responses will be published as received and will not be edited in any way (e.g., for typos, misspellings, grammatical errors). Please direct any questions you may have to lcox@stxfoundation.org and a response will be forwarded promptly.

Submission Directions

1. Please complete the following questionnaire and submit your answers to Lilli Cox at lcox@stxfoundation.org by September 26, 2022, close of business.
2. If there are any technical difficulties with completing, saving, or submitting this form, please contact Lilli Cox at lcox@stxfoundation.org.

Candidate's Full Name

Kurt Vialet

Office sought in the 2022 USVI Election

Governor

Senator - STJ-STT

Senator - STX

Senator - VI

**1. For the last school year with publicly available data (SY2018-2019), the highest retention rate among students in public school occurred in the 9th grade, with almost one-third of students (30%) being retained. (See page 25 of the [2021 KIDS COUNT USVI Data Book](#).)*

While more recent data from the VIDE indicate that there has been some improvement in retention rates, given the data, what specific policies and/or interventions would you utilize to address this critical issue?

What funding opportunities/resources are you aware of that could be used for cross-departmental initiatives?

With powerful data insights, we can be strategic in shaping the experience for students which will assist in their progress on their journey to success in school and beyond. The retention rate provided by VIDE is not a clear indication of a student's grade level competency. However, if entrance exams are established based on skills mastered per grade level, teachers can differentiate and teach based on attaining mastery. Recent studies have shown that there is a growing "learning loss" as a result of the pandemic. The VIDE should partner with non-profits that can provide one on one tutorials, after school and summer programs to narrow the gap. The VIDE received over \$200 million dollars in Federal Funds to address this area among other areas of varying concerns within the educational system.

**2. The KIDS COUNT team recognizes the inextricable link between our nonprofits/social impact organizations and children and families and is conducting interviews with local social service organizations, providing 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.*

What policies and/or amendments would you advocate for to support nonprofits that serve children and families in the areas of health, education, housing, public safety, and economic well-being?

When you work to change the lives of children and families in need, you help to create a better future for everyone living in this Territory. If we can seek to strengthen organizations by connecting them to useful information, resources, training and relationships that will nurture children and families through effective programs to help them build positive, healthy futures the territory would be a definite winner. Non-Profits that provide services that complement the GVI or provide services that the GVI currently doesn't offer, should be funded by utilizing all applicable local and federal funds. Non-Profits should be evaluated by the GVI to determine if they meet certain minimum criterias, but are not limited to; number of persons served, effectiveness of the program, and correlation with serving a critical need. The Non-Profits that satisfy these dire needs must work in conjunction with DHS, VIDE, DOH, VIHA and Public Safety to access local and federal funds.

**3. On a national level, KIDS COUNT data are derived from many sources, including the American Community Survey (ACS), which contains housing, economics, demographics, and social data. Unfortunately, the ACS is not conducted in the USVI. In the absence of the ACS, the territory administers (via the Eastern Caribbean Center) the Virgin Islands Community Survey (VICS), collecting data similar to that included in the population and housing components of the decennial Census. The last published VICS was released in 2018 (reflecting 2015 data), with the release of 2018 data expected in 2022. (See page 6 of the [2021 KIDS COUNT USVI Data Book](#)).*

Given the territory's challenges around data collection and the rapidly changing ecosystem our children and families live in, what do you propose to improve data collection and usage for policy decisions in the USVI?

Creating a system to share data between Human Services agencies and Non-Profits, and making it possible to function and utilize data for policy decisions should be done on an annual basis. The Bureau of Economic Research an entity responsible for collecting and publishing all data annually, should hold all departments accountable, allowing us to apply for additional federal grants. Data collection is an important part of developing policies, shaping programs and identifying weaknesses hence, if we can collect the data on an annual basis it can further be utilized to enhance policy decisions. Virgin Islands Virtual Information System is currently not fully implemented and can be a very resourceful tool to collect data and again, utilize it to drive policy decisions.

**4. According to the most recent available data (2019-2020 school year), 54% of English Language Learner (ELL) public high school students did not graduate in 4 years compared to 71% of all public high school students (page 27, [2021 KIDS COUNT USVI Data Book](#)).*

How do you propose we support ELL students and address their academic, social, and emotional needs to improve their educational outcomes?

First, in assisting ELL students it is imperative to assist the teachers who would need to address these students on a daily basis. Develop a cohort at the University of the Virgin Islands to train and prepare teachers to become ELL certified to expand the number of available teachers in the Public Schools. Ensure that DOE acquire resources in dual languages that supports counseling and wrap around services. Provide Social Workers at each school access to programs already established in DHS to better assist these students, socially.

**5. In 2018, 36% of surveyed public high school students “felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activities” (page 38, [2021 KIDS COUNT USVI Data Book](#)) - a response often associated with clinical depression.*

What do you consider to be some of the primary contributing factors to the mental health challenges facing our youth, and what are some of the systemic 'fixes' to the Territory's mental health infrastructure?

Mental health challenges are the leading cause of poor life outcomes in young people. Youths caught in conflict zones have seen a lifetime worth of trauma. Supporting families with mental and behavioral health needs with expert care should be created to provide counseling for all families that sadly experience a traumatic experience. We leave the loved ones of crime victims alone and believe that somehow, "all will be well," but more often than not, it isn't. It would be in the DOE's best interest to conduct mental health surveys and evaluations and the results must be utilized to develop programs that provide wrap around services for these youths.

**6. 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), according to the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Data on Opportunity Youth in the USVI are minimal and variable from year to year. Previous KIDS COUNT Data Books report that between 2005 and 2014 the percentage of teens ages 16 to 19 that were not in school and not working fluctuated from a low of 11.3% (in 2006) to a high of 27% (in 2013).*

What specific steps and strategies would you develop to reconnect this population?

As an educator, I saw the need to address this issue and as a Senator I drafted legislation, now law, that helps to "connect" these students. The "About Face" and the "Forward March" programs in conjunction with the Virgin Islands National Guard addresses these "disconnected" Youths. All students who are listed as a "no show" or who dropped out of school within the past five years must be identified. The DOE in conjunction with non-profits will be tasked to develop high school diploma acquisition programs, career and technical education options and counseling components. Workforce development programs and apprenticeship programs would need to be fully implemented. With these components in place, Opportunity Youths can advance and secure family wage jobs and make connections in civic engagement and improve our community.

Thank you for participating.