

**GOVERNMENT OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS
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**VIRGIN ISLANDS BOARD OF EDUCATION RECOGNIZES
CONTRACT DAY AND HONORS THE TRAILBLAZERS OF THE
LABOR RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

Contract Day, often referred to as "Fire Burn" locally, occurred on October 1, 1878, and is a major day in Virgin Islands history. It is arguably the second-most important event, after the July 3, 1848, abolition of slavery. After slavery was abolished, labor rules were passed to control the working conditions of free laborers. These laws restricted employment changes to once a year, on October 1. Workers congregated on the island of St. Croix on that particular day in 1878 to protest the poor pay and unfavorable terms of their employment contracts, which they believed to be on par with or even worse than the circumstances of slavery. Following the protest's transformation into a revolution, there were several days of looting and burning. Mary Thomas, Axeline Elizabeth Salomon (also known as "Agnes"), Mathilda McBean, and Susanna Abramsen (also known as "Bottom Belly") are the women who spearheaded the uprising. Since then, they have earned the title "Queens of Fire Burn" and are revered as representations of the Virgin Islands' tenacity and fortitude.

Our community today is supported by labor rights advocates like the "Queens of the Fire Burn," David Hamilton Jackson, Theobald Brow, and Ralph de Chabert. These pioneers blazed the pathway and made it possible for fair compensation, reasonable raises, secure employment, secure healthcare, affordable insurance, livable retirement, and the freedom to express concerns without fear of punishment. "Although there is still much work to be done, there has been much advancement in our current living and working conditions. Dr. Kyza A. Callwood, Chairman of the Virgin Islands Board of Education (VIBE), said: "The Virgin Islands Board of Education (VIBE) is contributing to the movement by carrying the torch to provide leadership, oversight, and advocacy for continuous improvement of the Public Education System of the Virgin Islands."

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Virgin Islands Board of Education is to provide leadership and oversight, set policy and advocate for continuous improvement of the Public Education System of the Virgin Islands of the United States.

VISION STATEMENT

Each child is provided with the best quality education which guarantees academic excellence, promotes our history and culture, and builds strong local and global communities.

The VIBE, through its standing committees, regularly conducts site visits to provide repair and maintenance as well as curriculum and instruction recommendations for a safe, healthy, productive learning and working environment. This is done to guarantee that every student is given the best possible education. Standards of excellence are ensured by the implementation of policies, rules, and laws. To encourage high-quality training, the credentials of the professional personnel are examined. To ensure that every child has access to higher education and financial support, scholarship possibilities are offered. Last but not least, VIBE gives parents and children a place to file complaints and appeals related to Virgin Islands Public School issues.

“In remembrance and honor of the sacrifices made, the Board will continue to advocate for the next generation of fire sparkers, conch shell blowers, flame keepers, torchbearers, and movers and shakers to guarantee academic excellence, promote our rich history and culture, and build strong local and global communities,” said Dr. Callwood.

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