



THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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From Rubble to Resilience: USVI Educators Stun National Model School Conference with Immersive SEL Presentation

St. Thomas-St. John District Director of Professional Development, Michealrose Ravalier shares a recap of her 2025 Model School Conference presentation experience.

The lights dimmed. Thunder roared through the ballroom. Winds howled across the screen. In an unforgettable moment of raw emotion and truth, educators from the St. Thomas–St. John School District turned a national stage into a visceral journey of trauma, survival, and hope inviting participants to walk not just through a storm, but into the lives of the children they serve.

This was no ordinary conference session. It was an experience. Led by Director Ravalier, alongside Superintendent Dr. Stefan Jürgen and Deputy Superintendent Dr. Symra-Dee Brown-Gumbs, the trio presented “SEL: A Holistic Approach – Supporting Students and Teams” to a packed audience at the 2025 Model Schools Conference.

At the heart of the session was “Overcoming: An Anthology,” a powerful collection of narratives authored by 12 graduating seniors from both Charlotte Amalie High School and Ivanna Eudora Kean High School. These stories spoke of displacement, survival, strength, and healing in the aftermath of Category 5 hurricanes and the COVID-19 pandemic. When we give our students voice, they have a chance to heal themselves and others.

A District tested by disaster. Dr. Jürgen opened with an overview of demographics and the trauma of natural disasters: over 5,500 students, 10 schools, two category 5 hurricanes, one global pandemic, and above all resilience.

Suddenly, the room went dark. The audience was plunged into a full sensory simulation of a hurricane: lightning visuals, the sound of torrential rain, wind, thunder. Then came real footage of roofs being torn away and the aftermath that followed. A question echoed through the room: “What if that was your student walking into your classroom today homeless, displaced, depressed, or disruptive?”


Next came the “Air of Care” balloon activity a fun, symbolic exercise illustrating how it takes the entire educational community to lift and support both students and staff amid chaos. A scenario-based role-play followed, empowering educators to problem-solve through real-life post-disaster situations: teacher fatigue, student trauma, lack of technology, and more. Collaboration turned insights into strategy.

The session closed with a joyful quiz competition and book giveaways. Anchored in the voices of 12 graduating seniors who authored *Overcoming: An Anthology*, the session left some in tears and, more importantly, inspired to act. Feedback highlighted the presentation as both powerful and transformative. “Writing the book gave our students an opportunity to open a window that had been closed for years. The experience was not just remembering but feeling all over again.”

From St. Thomas–St. John, with love, courage, and unwavering commitment our students’ voices were heard, and our message was shared. “It wasn’t just a session. It was healing in motion.”

Missed It? Don't Miss Out.

We invite you to experience the session through:

 **Photos from the session** [Click here](#)

 **Student-authored video clips** [Click here](#)

 **Order the book “Overcoming: An Anthology” (on Amazon) –** [Book Link](#)

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