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## St. Croix District Schools to Resume Classes Today Amid Teacher Job Action

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### Educators at the John H. Woodson Junior High School protest school conditions (9.20.23)

Following Wednesday's disruptions due to a [teacher job action](#), the V.I. Department of Education has announced plans to conduct school in the St. Croix District today, September 21, 2023. This decision emerges from what the department described as proactive engagement with the American Federation of Teachers Local 1826 (AFT) aimed at reducing educational disruptions and enhancing dialogue with the union.

The D.O.E. said it was informed on Wednesday about several schools in the district facing a shortage of teachers due to absences and delays. An immediate assessment revealed an acute staff

shortage, leading to the closure of all PreK-6 and PreK-8 Schools, along with the John H. Woodson Junior High School.

In a bid to address the concerns raised by the teaching community, D.O.E. said its senior officials, including the District of St. Croix, engaged in a productive dialogue with AFT President, Rosa Soto-Thomas. The discussions spanned several issues:

1. **Air Conditioning Units and Electrical Upgrades:** D.O.E. Dionne Commissioner Wells-Hedrington stressed the necessity of school electrical system upgrades, referencing the Juanita Gardine School as a case study. The school's electrical improvements, which began in August, are set to wrap up by September's end. Funding from ARPA has been pinpointed for potential reprogramming to meet infrastructure needs, pending approval from the U.S. Department of Education.
2. **Replacement AC Units and Parts:** Through CARES II funding, the department said it has secured replacement units and components, which will be fitted by the Operations Division upon arrival.
3. **Impact of Heatwave on School Schedules:** The [recent heatwave's](#) toll on school operations was acknowledged, particularly noting the significant damage to devices, totaling over \$3 million in assets. This damage has hindered schools from reverting to virtual learning. D.O.E. has urged parents and students to [return laptops and MiFi devices](#) promptly. Furthermore, the most affected schools are slated to adopt adjusted schedules starting Monday, September 25, 2023.
4. **Teacher Training and Certification:** A notable 80% of the teaching staff is either uncertified or nearing recertification. D.O.E. said it is invested in offering professional development hours and seeks AFT's cooperation to assist teachers in the recertification journey, especially focusing on specialized groups like Special Education.

The department said it remains unwavering in its mission to provide students with a safe, favorable, and stimulating learning atmosphere. Its leadership has expressed gratitude for the union's partnership in tackling these pressing concerns. One of D.O.E.'s pivotal aims is to ensure minimal disruption to learning, thereby reducing the necessity for extensive compensatory school days. The community's continued support is valued, and the department has pledged to uphold transparency and consistent communication regarding the evolving situation.