

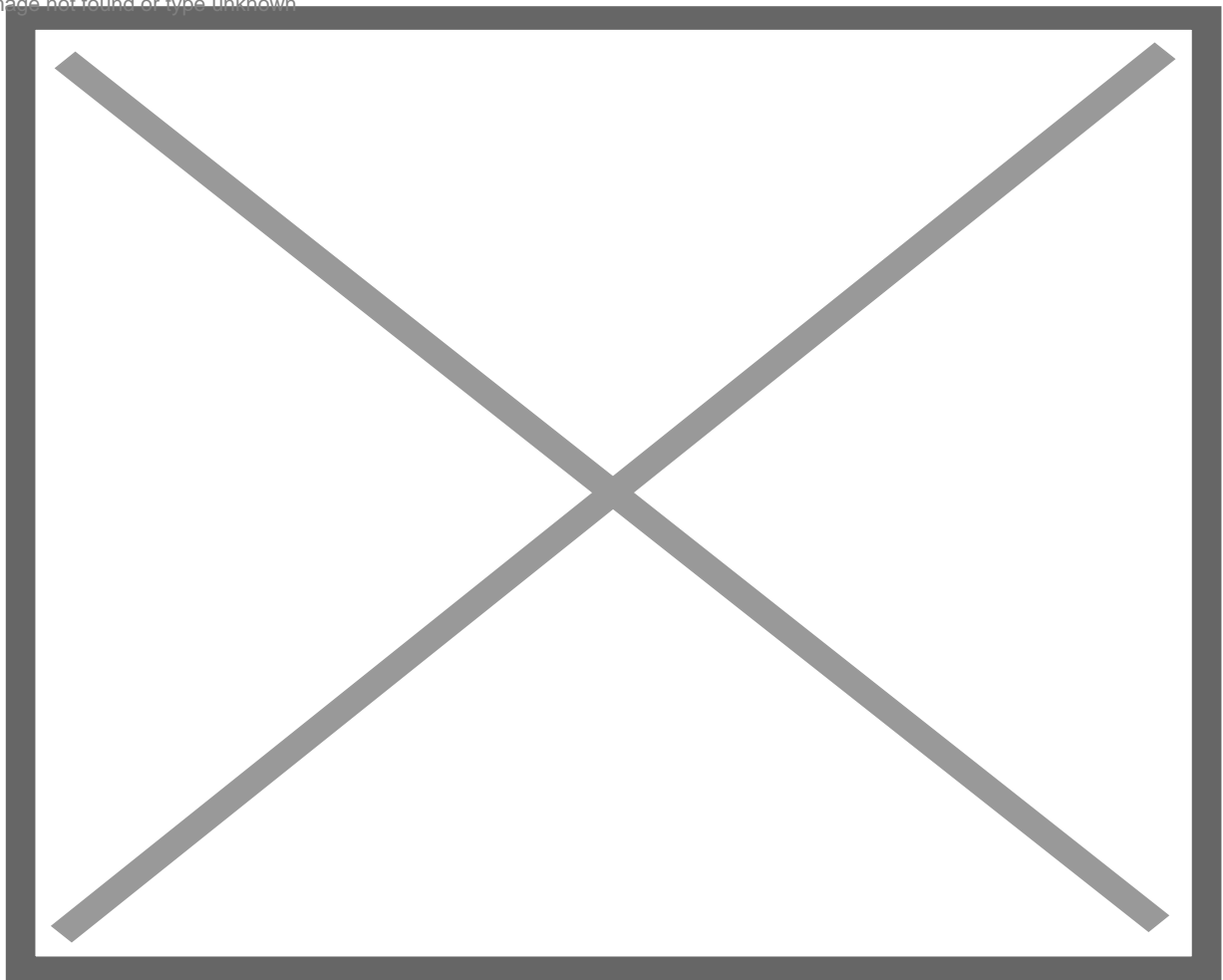
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Students Chant 'AC' as Unbearable Heat Impacts Learning; Bryan Blames Climate Change, Says Teacher Walkout Hurting Students

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Governor Albert Bryan, Jr. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

As the teacher walkouts in St. Croix enter their second day leading to further school closures, Governor Albert Bryan on Thursday afternoon addressed the situation, emphasizing the role of climate change in the unbearable heat.

Mr. Bryan acknowledged the struggles faced by educators and the ongoing efforts of the Department of Education to improve conditions while also moving towards the construction of new state-of-the-art facilities.

"I am aware of the issues in some of our schools and the Department of Education's efforts to address them as we move closer to constructing new state-of-the-art facilities. While many of us, including some of our teachers and the parents of our students, have attended these same facilities without air conditioning, what has changed now is the climate," Governor Bryan stated.

He continued, "Just as other jurisdictions across the nation, we are grappling with climate change and its impacts. It is frustrating to work in less-than-ideal conditions. As we work together to address these issues, we need to do so with consideration to the most important matter at hand, and that is the instruction of our students who are losing critical instruction days as a result of these job actions."

Meanwhile, students at the St. Croix Educational Complex organized on Thursday, chanting "AC" throughout the school as they took a stand for themselves. According to the Dept. of Education, over 50 percent of schools on St. Croix have nonfunctional AC units.

Previously, educators on St. Croix had staged a protest outside various schools instead of attending their classrooms. This job action was sparked by ongoing grievances related to working conditions at their institutions. The teachers highlighted issues ranging from the lack of adequate support personnel to the absence of essential tools and infrastructure, particularly air conditioning units.

Rosa Soto Thomas, President of the St. Croix chapter of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), supported the educators, emphasizing the daily challenges they face, including debilitating heat in schools. She mentioned that while air conditioning units had been installed in St. Thomas schools using federal grant money, St. Croix schools have been left waiting. The delay in accessing funds and implementing necessary infrastructure upgrades has left many schools without functional A/C units, further aggravating the situation.

Moreover, the educators have voiced concerns over unresolved wage negotiations, operating under an expired contract with no negotiation dates in sight. The AFT members have expressed their discontent over the long-standing underfunding of school facilities and other educational necessities.