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Multiple St. Croix Schools Close Early Amid Student Protests and AFT Job Action

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Ernice Gilbert **September 22, 2023**

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Students at the John H. Woodson Junior High School on Friday, Sept. 22, 2023 chanted "AC!" as unbearable heat impacts learning in classrooms without air conditioning units. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

ST. CROIX — The V.I. Department of Education on Friday announced early closures for several schools on St. Croix, citing student protests and a persistent job action by the American Federation of Teachers Local (AFT) 1826.

Specifically, the St. Croix Central High School, St. Croix Educational Complex High School, and John H. Woodson Jr. High School closed at 10:00 a.m. due to student protests tied to nonfunctional air conditioning units — long a problem at the public schools but [extremely hot](#)

[weather](#) has made sitting in classrooms unbearable. In a statement, D.O.E. emphasized, "The safety and well-being of students are a priority." Bus transportation is being arranged for affected students, and parents are being urged to retrieve their children as soon as they can.

In addition, the Claude O. Markoe PreK-6 School on St. Croix will also be shutting down for the day. This closure is a direct result of the AFT's job action, which has led to insufficient personnel available for instruction.

St. Croix has been grappling with teacher protests over oppressive working conditions, particularly the elementary and junior high public schools. The ongoing unrest has led to multiple interruptions in the academic calendar, with educators advocating for improved working conditions.

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."

D.O.E. has pledged to keep the community updated regarding any further school closures related to student protests and the ongoing AFT job action.