

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Beyond the Heat: St. Croix Students Highlight Dire School Conditions, Fear for Health in Years to Come

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Students from the St. Croix Educational Complex and St. Croix Central High School on Friday, Sept. 22 protested facility conditions.

Amid the recent teacher job actions on St. Croix, students from three major schools - the St. Croix Educational Complex, the St. Croix Central High School, and the John H. Woodson Junior High School - on Friday united in a public protest. Highlighting this union, Central High students marched over to Complex to demonstrate their shared grievances.

An 11th-grade student from St. Croix Central High School voiced the collective frustration of many students across the schools. In a heartfelt letter provided to the Consortium, the student wrote, "We, the youth, stand here not as individuals, but as voices for justice and change. It's time for our voices to be heard!"

The student's letter detailed several concerning issues within the schools, from the lack of playgrounds and the unbearable heat to unhygienic bathrooms and the presence of mold and termites in classrooms. They questioned why students had to endure broken sinks, toilets that don't flush, stalls without doors, and the smell of sewage water during their lessons. Raising health concerns, the student wondered about the long-term impacts of learning in such conditions, asking, "What will our health look like in the next ten to fifteen years?"

This protest by students adds another layer to the ongoing unrest on St. Croix. Educators had previously staged walkouts, highlighting issues like the absence of essential tools, inadequate support personnel, and particularly, the lack of air conditioning units, given the island's escalating temperatures. Rosa Soto Thomas, President of the St. Croix chapter of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), has emphasized the daily challenges teachers face, including debilitating heat in schools. However, the students' march and subsequent letter emphasize that they too are feeling the brunt of these unresolved issues.

The student's poignant closing words underscored their demand for change, stating, "We demand that you guys treat us better! Aren't we supposed to be thanking y'all instead of having to beg to be heard and appreciated?"

With both educators and students now raising their voices, it remains to be seen how the local administration will address these pressing concerns.