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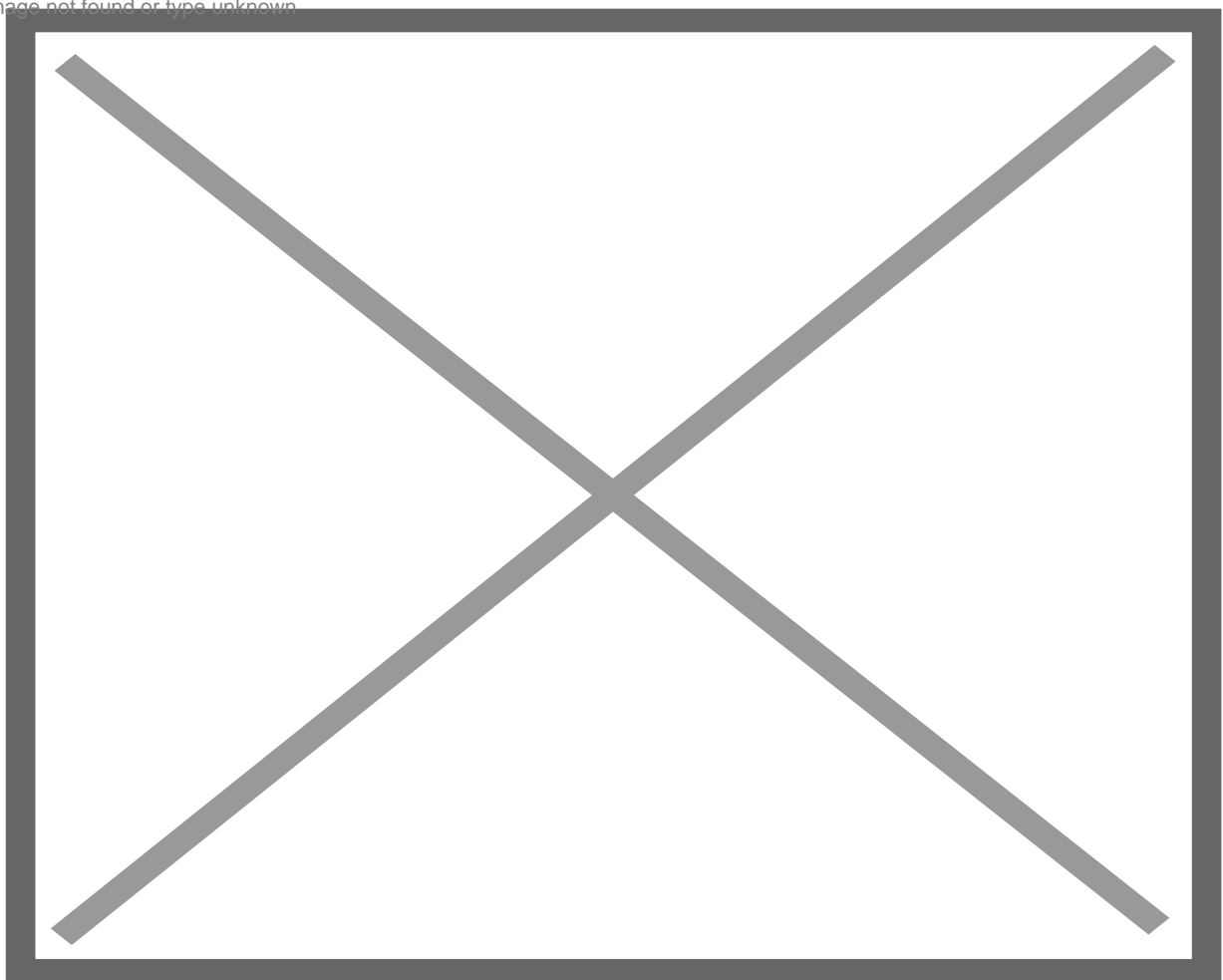
Teacher Struck by Student, Another Followed Home — Condition at Lockhart K-8 Exposed as Dept. of Education Responds

Unsettling reports of aggression towards educators trigger official inquiry and action plans

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Officers at the Lockhart K8-School facilitating an orderly dismissal on Wednesday. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

Following a teacher job action at the Lockhart K-8 School on Wednesday, which resulted in the early release of students from grades 4 to 8, the V.I. Department of Education has issued a statement addressing the recent disturbances. The job action is attributed to teachers expressing concerns over working conditions and disciplinary issues with students.

The statement comes in the wake of reports of violence and threats against educators by both students and parents.

St. Thomas-St. John District AFT President Leontyne Jones told the Consortium that the job action was precipitated by several events, including lack of communication between teachers and the administrative leadership, infrastructure deficiencies, and teacher safety. "Some students had either threatened or assaulted some teachers," Ms. Jones said.

One individual, Shenica Grant, voiced her support for the teachers and highlighted the need for decisive action against the students responsible for the threats. She said some of the students are extremely ill-mannered, and shared the blame for this behavior on parents who fail to discipline their children and in some instances empower their behavior.

Commenting rhetorically, she said, "It's okay for them to disrespect an adult, it's okay for them to threaten harm and physical violence... it's okay for them to pitch rocks at and lock their teachers out of their classrooms... it's okay for them to show prejudice against teachers that don't look like them (thee unmitigated gall of these Black children being prejudicial).

"I stand with those teachers... Do not return to school until they expel the damn perpetrators... Not suspend... Expel! When you can threaten to kill a teacher and have the audacity to follow that teacher home... You need to be expelled. I would be pressing charges against the children and the frigging parents."

Community feedback on the V.I. Consortium's previous coverage of the incident calls for serious repercussions following the physical assault on a teacher, underlining community support for teacher advocacy in response to disciplinary matters. Parents contacted our publication to voice concerns and spoke of an incident where a teacher was followed after leaving school premises. St. Thomas Police Chief Steven Phillip told the Consortium that officers were deployed at the school to oversee an orderly dismissal on Wednesday. Chief Phillip acknowledged hearing talk of these incidents, though no official reports had been filed with the V.I. Police Department.

Education officials have confirmed that normal school operations for all grade levels will resume on Thursday, even as the department acknowledged recent incidents of student and parental threats against teachers.

Commissioner Wells-Hedrington and American Federation of Teachers President Leontyne Jones met with Lockhart School teachers on Wednesday to address their grievances. Additionally, Education officials and the school's administration are collaborating on a plan to manage the concerns raised, focusing on improved disciplinary procedures and student behavior management, according to the statement.

"Specific concerns have been raised regarding disruptive behavior and repeat offenses by students. In hearing the concerns of the teachers, we understand the severity of the issues presented. Disruptive behavior not only interrupts the learning process but also undermines the safety and well-being of students and educators," Wells-Hedrington said.

She added, "The safety and security of our educational spaces remain a priority, where teaching and learning can thrive without fear or intimidation. We take these matters extremely seriously. Our educators are the backbone of our educational system, and their safety is of utmost importance. Any threat or act of violence against them is unacceptable and will not be tolerated."

In its statement, the Department of Education emphasized the role of parents and guardians in the education process and the importance of addressing issues through proper channels rather than resorting to violence or threats.

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