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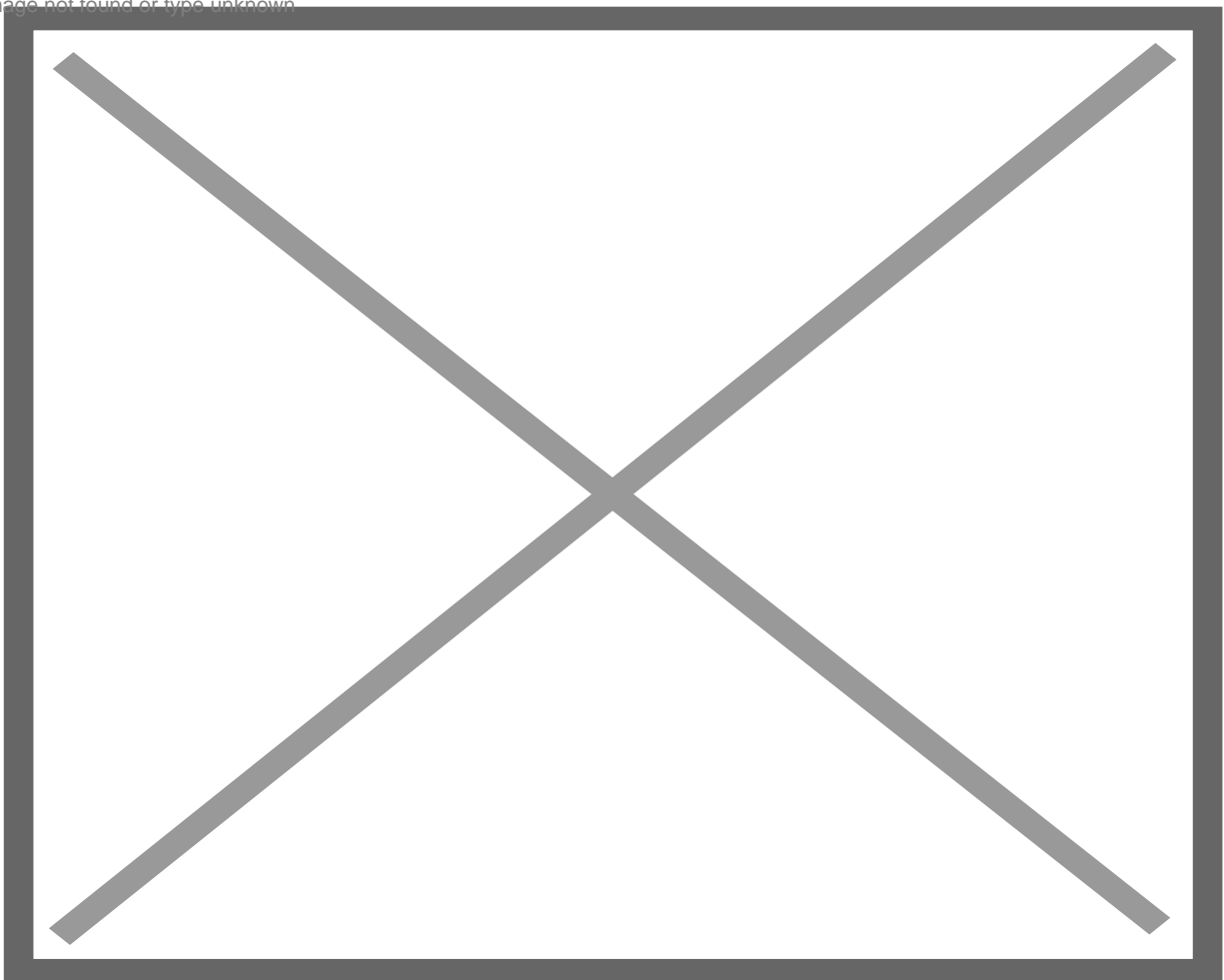
Government Must Start Valuing Teachers As Much as Doctors or Face Heightened Retention Challenges, CTE Executive Director Says

The debate heats up as CTE instructors face the reality of wages lagging behind other high-skilled professions

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During last month's meeting, the Board of Career and Technical Education noted that the attrition rate among CTE instructors is [unsustainably high](#). During a meeting on Wednesday, comments from Executive Director Anton Döös noted that the phenomenon was not just limited to the territory.

"That is throughout the United States," he remarked, commenting on a stateside conference he recently attended. "That particular plight is not ours alone." Other states, he said, were running

incentive programs to boost retention numbers. In either North or South Carolina, Mr. Döös said, “if anybody gets nationally board certified they get a \$10,000 raise the first year ...and then they get a \$7000 bonus for the next years that they’re staying within the school system.”

All retention initiatives ultimately boil down to a question of money, said Mr. Döös. “Government itself must make that decision that the teacher is as valuable [as], or more than any doctor or lawyer,” he argued. “If government is not willing to bring the salaries up into a range that is competitive with the private markets, we’re going to lose these folks and there’s nothing we can [do to] stop it.”

Board chair Joane Murphy pointed out that the union representing teachers, “especially on St. Croix, is fighting the idea of paying CTE teachers more than regular teachers. They’re just fighting us on that.” Nevertheless, a solution has to be found with some urgency because the rate of attrition is such that “another 50% of the program is going to be gone in the next two or three years, unless we do something,” Ms. Murphy predicted.

Mr. Döös suggested that the board engage directly with the Department of Education on the matter, since negotiations for new teaching contracts are reportedly underway. “The board certainly could...maybe formulate a document and send it to Mr. Somme and voice our concern,” Mr. Döös suggested, referencing the Assistant Commissioner of Education Victor Somme III. “But we would have to be fairly quick because they’re in negotiations right now.”

Dale Louis Gaubatz, the University of the Virgin Islands’ recently hired vice provost for enrollment management, noted that Denver, Colorado – a city with an “almost identical” cost of living to St. Thomas – has a living wage calculated at \$76,000 for a single adult with no children. That sum, he noted, was “far above anything I can pay any entry level workers on my staff.” Driving home the stark reality of the territory’s relatively low-wage environment, Mr. Gaubatz noted that “I would venture to say that \$76,000 might be tight. That’s why most of our employees have two jobs and a side hustle.”

Ms. Murphy and Mr. Döös wondered if there might be federal grant funding available to incentivize CTE instructors to remain in the system.