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“What If It Was His Neck?”: St. Croix Students Rally Against Hazardous School Conditions

After a ceiling fan seriously injured a student, protesters decry unsafe classrooms and accuse officials of downplaying the severity of the issues

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St. Croix Complex High School students protest unsafe conditions after ceiling fan injures classmate. By. ERNICE GILBERT, V.I. CONSORTIUM

On Friday morning, several students of the St. Croix Educational Complex lined the roadside outside the school to express their frustration and disgust with conditions that persist in the classrooms.

The precarious health and safety environment in which students must gain their education was exemplified on Thursday, when [a ceiling fan fell and cut a student](#), leaving a deep gash in the boy's side. "The fan started to spin fast and it just drop out the ceiling," said a student who said she was in the classroom when it happened. "The cut was big, and very nasty-looking," said another.

The students also derided what they say were attempts to minimize the situation by officials. "They telling us in the office that it's not that much, it's fine," a third student said. "Ceiling [fans] are dropping, what do you mean? What if it was his neck?"

In between honks of support from passing cars, the assembled students expressed frustration at the conditions they say they are forced to endure. "There are fans taped to the ceiling in French class," exclaimed one girl, who specified that electric tape had been used for the task. Met with incredulity by the Consortium, other protesters insisted that this was true.

One of the vehicles passing by was being driven by Board of Education member Terrence Joseph, who was overheard assuring the protesters that their concerns would be addressed. A walkthrough of the school on August 2 attended by board members found that only about a quarter of the 2000 window operators that were supposed to have been replaced beginning in the summer of 2023 are in place. Half of the needed 150 ceiling fans had been replaced. The report produced subsequent to the walkthrough also mentions downspouts as a critical problem throughout the school.

"This problem has existed since the hurricanes and needs to be addressed," it reads. Fire alarms need to be checked as well; the report identifies this as a longstanding capital project.

Although authorities have used pending Federal Emergency Management Authority prudent replacement projects for several schools to justify delaying major expenditures on those facilities, Complex is not among those awaiting a fresh new facility. The Consortium has attempted to reach out to Director of School Construction and Maintenance Craig Benjamin for insight on what plans might be in place to remediate the infrastructural challenges.