

Complex High Class of 2026 Celebrates Territory-Leading Test Scores, Honor Students and Pre-Cadet Graduates

Principal Rodney Moorehead highlighted more than 60% honor students, top Smarter Balanced scores and 14 pre-cadet graduates, while Commissioner Wells-Hedrington told the 217 class members greatness comes from embracing who they are.

Education / **Published On May 19, 2026 03:54 PM /**

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Images from the St. Croix Educational Complex High School Class of 2026 graduation ceremony. By. DEAR PRODUCTIONS.

The St. Croix Educational Complex High School Class of 2026 marked its graduation Tuesday with a ceremony that celebrated academic achievement, personal resilience, schoolwide progress

and a message repeated by several speakers: graduates should define their own futures without being limited by hardship, doubt or the size of the place they come from.

The 217 members of the graduating class completed their transition from high school seniors to high school graduates during Tuesday's ceremony. Principal Rodney Moorehead opened by highlighting several accomplishments recorded during their time at Complex.

More than 60 percent of the graduating class were honor students, he said. "This shows the hard work, determination, commitment, and [that] you're willing to push through adversity at this time," Mr. Moorehead declared.

The school's academic performance was also reflected in its standing at the top of the territory in Smarter Balanced standardized testing scores. Mr. Moorehead also highlighted the school's 21st Century after-school program, which produced 14 pre-cadet graduates. Those students, he explained, are "eligible to join the Virgin Islands Police Department with a starting salary of \$42,000 as soon as they leave high school today."

In his message to the "Unmatched" Class of 2026, Mr. Moorehead told graduates that their gifts are needed beyond the walls of the school.

"The world needs your intelligence, your creativity, your leadership, your compassion, and your voice," he said.

Education Commissioner Dionne Wells-Hedrington told the graduates that giving their best to the world requires remaining true to themselves.

"Do not spend your years trying to fit into places that require you to diminish who you are. The world will often pressure you to conform, for but greatness comes when you fully embrace the person you are created to be," she advised. "You are unique, you are unmatched, and you need to walk with that understanding as you walk into the next chapter of your life."

Lieutenant Governor Tregenza Roach also focused on individuality, reminding students that every dream and goal has value, even when it appears small at first.

"I used to think that big dreams were the things that mattered," he said. "Somebody would cure a disease, or somebody would discover that maybe there's another planet, or some discovery that would be of earth-shaking significance."

Mr. Roach said his view has changed over time. "As I've grown older, I've learned to believe in the importance of things that may at first appear small, and the reach that small things may have."

He used the example of planting a fruit tree, saying such an act could feed future generations of Virgin Islanders. A word of encouragement, he added, can also have lasting power. "When you speak a word of inspiration to someone who you do not know...it may be a lifeline," he said.

Mr. Roach encouraged graduates to preserve and nurture the friendships formed during their school years.

"Nurture your friendships, protect them, and invest in them, because these are the kinds of things that will take you through life," he said. He also urged the graduates to "preserve your life by the decisions that you make," pointing to impulsive and rash decision-making as dangers that can accompany youth.

Salutatorian E'leeya Richard spoke about the role grief played in her high school journey. She disclosed that her mother died earlier this year, a loss that she said has reshaped her understanding of hardship. "Rough waters do not only challenge us, but they reshape us."

Richard said the loss strengthened her determination "to work hard, make her proud and continue living in a way that honors her." She reminded her classmates that graduation does not mark the end of their development. The close of this chapter, she said, "does not mark the final version of who we are, it simply marks the moment we begin discovering who we can become."

Valedictorian Daryl Griffith Jr. carried forward that theme of transformation, reflecting on how much the class had changed since entering high school.

"We have transformed from shy, unsure ninth graders, fresh from Covid, into leaders, entrepreneurs, Olympic athletes, and the next generation of change makers that this world sorely needs. And we are just getting started," he declared.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology-bound graduate said the class has both promise and drive. "We have unlimited potential, and more importantly, we have the vigor, the vitality, the passion, and the drive to realize it," he said.

Griffith urged his classmates to seek value and meaning in their work, and to return always to service.

He reminded them to "always come back to the service of your fellow human beings, no matter who you are or where you come from."

Keynote speaker Clint Williams, a noted women's basketball coach and St. Croix Educational Complex alumnus, told graduates that uncertainty after high school should not be seen as failure.

He recalled his own lack of direction after graduating from Complex 20 years earlier. "I didn't think about going to college, and didn't think college was for me. I thought I was just going to join the workforce and go work at Hess," he said.

Mr. Williams said a mentor redirected him by forcing him to enroll at the University of the Virgin Islands. From there, he was recruited to play basketball at a college in Arkansas on a full scholarship and was later recruited by Tuskegee University. His entry into coaching, he said, began with a suggestion from his college basketball coach.

"He put me on his staff, and here I am 15 years later," Mr. Williams said.

He cautioned that the journey was not simple. "I want you guys to understand there were setbacks, there were disappointments, there were moments where doors closed, where I even questioned myself."

Persistence, he told the graduates, mattered most. "One thing I did was kept showing up and working, even when nobody was clapping for me. That's what separates people in life," he remarked.

Mr. Williams closed by encouraging graduates not to shrink their ambitions because of their surroundings. "Don't be afraid to dream bigger than what you've seen," he said. "Never allow anybody to convince you that your dreams are too big simply because you come from a small place."

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