

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Displaced Alexander Henderson Students To Be Placed At Various Schools On St. Croix

Health / **Published On February 26, 2015 11:05 AM /**

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At a meeting organized by St. Croix Superintendent of Schools Colleen Williams Wednesday and held at the St. Croix Educational Complex auditorium, leaders of the Department of Education (DOE) said the students of the Alexander Henderson Elementary School on St. Croix, who are displaced because of mold and fiberglass issues at the school, will be sent to various schools around St. Croix while a contractor works to fix the problems at Henderson.

Williams acknowledged how unfortunate it is that the students have been displaced, but pointed out that the department had moved swiftly to find a solution so the children's education could continue uninterrupted.



St. Croix Superintendent

of Schools Colleen Williams addresses parents

Williams told *VI Consortium* that local contractor AdCon has been retained to fix the problems at Henderson, which, she said, would take 15 days.

"We've already told the contractor, there's no ifs, ands or buts. Get it done and get it done right, within the time frame," Williams said.

Williams explained to a packed auditorium of parents how and where their students would receive their education for the next three weeks, including how transportation will be worked out.

She said Henderson students in Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd Grades will be placed at Eulalie R. Rivera, known as Grove Place school; students in 3rd and 5th Grades will be placed at Charles H. Emmanuel; students in 4th Grade will be placed at Claude O. Markoe Elementary School; and those in 6th Grade, or enrolled in a gifted or talented class, will be placed at Authur A. Richards Junior High School.

"In the morning, the process that your child normally goes through to get to Alexander Henderson, is the same process -- that's not changing. So if you drop them off, or they come on the school bus to Henderson in the morning, that process has not changed. So, if your child goes to the bus stop in the morning to be picked up and brought to Henderson, that remains the same. Once they get to Henderson, the buses will take them to the individual school locations," Williams explained.

She continued: "In the afternoon, their school day will end at 2:25 p.m. because we need that 15-minute turnaround time to get them back to Henderson, so that they can get on their usual bus to go home in the afternoon. So, coming to school in the morning is still the same. Once we get them back to Henderson, going home in the afternoon is still the same."

Williams said parents need to have their students at Henderson school no later than 8 a.m. in order to board the appropriate buses to take them to their temporary schools. She also made known that the DOE examined all other options before deciding on the current course of action.

"We investigated all possible options," she said. "We went to every single private school that we could find open and we asked to talk to them about housing our children. We

looked at Good Hope, we looked at Manor School, we looked at Randolph Lockhart, we even investigated to see if the University of the Virgin Islands, but none of them could house the number of children and professional staff that we have at Henderson school. Our only other option was to look at what we have in the District, the schools that are on."



Parents listen while Assistant

Commissioner Charmaine Hobson-Johnson speaks

Assistant Education Commissioner Charmaine Hobson-Johnson sought to calm the concerns of parents by assuring them that the department was doing all in its power to provide for a seamless experience for the children while the health hazards at Henderson were being addressed.

"Dr. McCollum has been in the position for one month, and we're trying to get the situation dealt with and mitigated immediately," Johnson began. "It's not fair that your child should be in an unsafe situation. You asked a question about putting [all of them] in the same school, [but] it was so difficult. The other schools that we examined that were empty, they were empty too long, so that would have been another health hazard."

Johnson said the professionals at the other schools have been extremely accommodating, and even excited about hosting the Henderson students while the problems at the aging school were being sorted out.

"What we are grateful for is the principals and teachers at the other schools who have been extremely accepting, they are excited about this three-weeks change [and] it's going to be an experience for your child," Johnson said. "Do not add pressure to them. This is a situation that we have to take care of, [the children] still must get their education. We don't want to extend the school year for any reason, so we're asking your indulgence."

"My thing to you is, let's just try it. Any concerns you have, please call us immediately. You can call the schools or you can call us to provide you with any assistance. Let's work on getting this fixed, you guys have been [enduring] it for too long," Johnson said.

Parents, however, had concerns. They wanted to know how children with special needs would be addressed, what would happen if a child falls ill, and whether there would be enough school monitors to handle an influx new students.

Williams said the nurses, monitors and other staff from Henderson would be on call to assist any Henderson child located at either one of the schools, along with those who are

already on that campus.

Officials present at the Wednesday evening meeting included Williams, Education Commissioner-designee Sharon McCollum, PhD, Assistant Commissioner Hobson-Johnson, Deputy Superintendent Faith George, officials from the police department and Dean Andrews from the Department of Labor's Division of Occupational Safety and Health.

Sen. Kurt Violet was also present and could be seen interacting with concerned parents.

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