

The Virgin Islands Consortium

2015-16 School Year Opens With Optimism, Few Glitches

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ST. CROIX -- The Dept. of Education is most likely pleased with the way the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year began, especially in light of the various school mergers on this island, as little setbacks were reported territory-wide.

The Consortium visited the Central High School, the Educational Complex and the old Charles H. Emanuel (now Elena Christian Junior High School), and at the latter institution in particular, where parental concerns were expected because of the new location, the day progressed as if ECJH never moved.

"By 8:00 a.m. this morning all students had their schedules and they were in first period, so that tells me that we got off to a pretty good staff," Carlos McGregor, ECJH's principal, said.

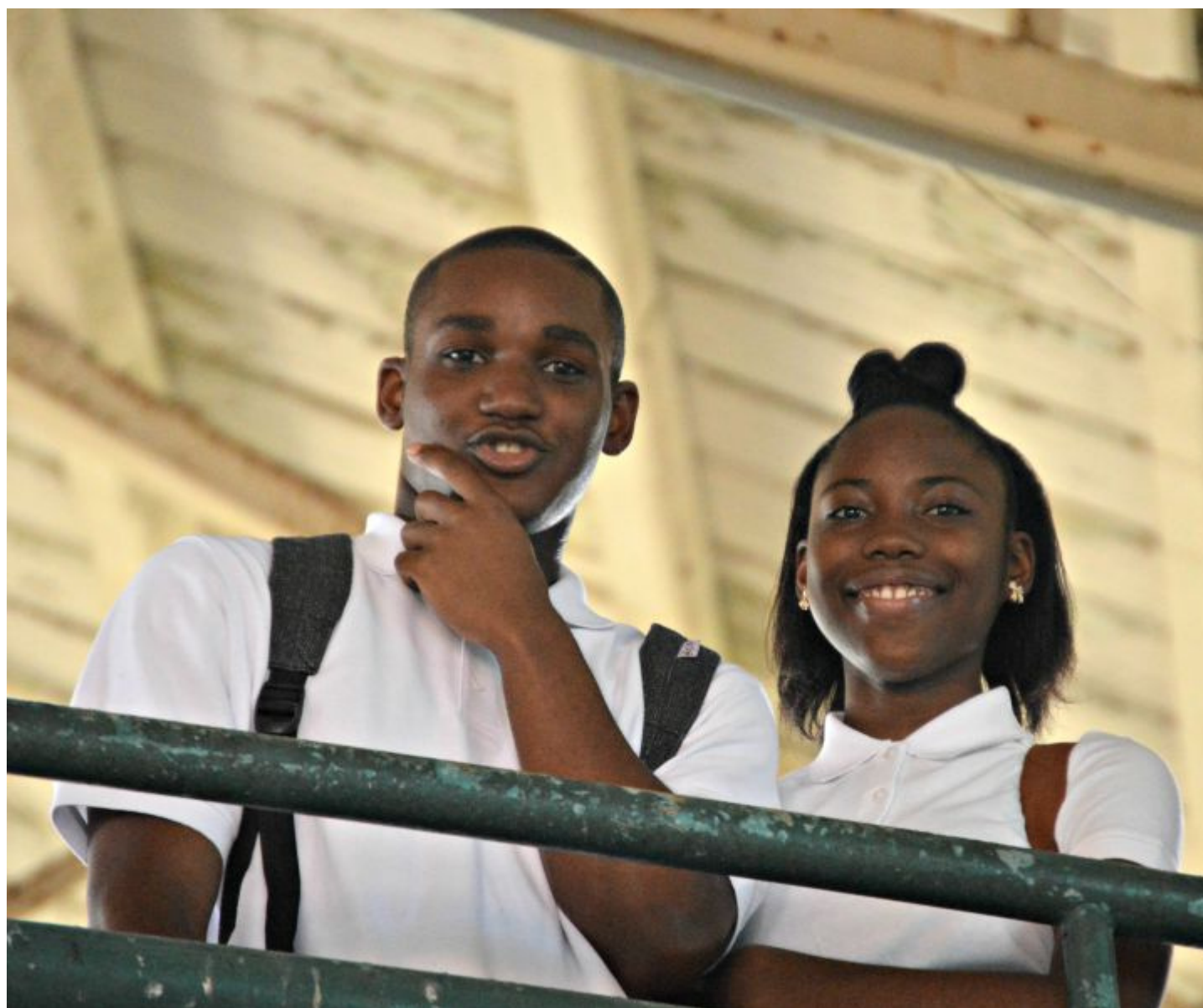
On hand at ECJHS were Assistant Education Commissioner Chermaine Hobson-Johnson, and Superintendent of Schools here, Colleen Mae Williams. The officials said while there were small discrepancies at some schools, for the most part, the opening day was a success.

Hobson-Johnson said education officials first toured the schools located on the island's west side and made their way east.

St. Croix Education Complex students Pose For Pictures





























"What we've been experiencing is a lot of excitement. Faculty were out there, everybody was working well with each other and the parents were adjusting to the new environment," the assistant commissioner said.

Hobson-Jonshon also acknowledged the great number of students at the Claude O. Markoe Elementary school, and said good planning resulted in a mostly seamless opening, although she mentioned "tension" among some students who were not yet assigned to classrooms.

"They had it down to a science," she said. "They knew exactly what to do with the students. Those students who were not on class lists for whatever reason, were placed in the cafeteria with the administrator to try and ease some of the tension, and to move the students to the classrooms that they needed to go to."



Assistant Commissioner

Chermaine Hobson-Johnson

And in relation to the [criminal activity that enveloped this island over the weekend](#), Hobson-Johnson said they had concerns, and prepared appropriately to assure the safety of students.

"We were concerned, and when we heard about what was happening, we called the police department -- because a lot of what happens in the society trickles into the schools -- so police were on alert in the event that something happened," Hobson-Johnson said. "School security is also out there providing support, and the exceptional monitors that we have."

She added: "What's really good is that the monitors know a lot of what's happening in the community. They know a lot of the students so it's been somewhat easy because of their knowledge of what's going on."

Aside from a freezer at Ricardo Richards Elementary that was inoperable, the opening day of school went "exceptionally well," Hobson-Johnson exclaimed.

Indeed, at Complex and Central, the day seemed normal. The Consortium also spoke to students who were attending high school for the first time.

"I'm nervous but excited," Shaniah Clifford, a freshman at Complex, coming from the Church of God Holiness school, said. Clifford said she was expecting a lot of work, and hoped to join the Virgin Islands Police Department upon completing school.

And Neal Henry, a native Crucian who moved to St. Kitts for much of his childhood, said he felt good to be back on St. Croix.

Outstanding Men In the Community Greet Educational Complex Students

According to a press release DOE issued late Tuesday, Commissioner Sharon McCollum toured the St. Thomas/St. John District schools, where she welcomed students, parents and staff of the new school year.

During her first stop at Addelita Cancryn Junior High School, Commissioner McCollum spoke to a group of students and parents gathered in the school's library. She encouraged students to do their best, to eat healthy meals and come to school ready to learn.

"This is going to be an exciting school year," she said.

Cancryn Principal Lisa Forde proudly showcased a wooden picnic table constructed by local non-profit My Brother's Workshop. Commissioner McCollum was instrumental in having the table installed at the school.

At Gladys A. Abraham Elementary, Commissioner McCollum greeted parents and students gathered in the school's main lobby. Principal Michelle A. Rogers-Bully reported that opening day was overwhelmingly positive, and praised her teachers and custodial staff for ensuring classrooms were ready for students' return. Students there greeted Commissioner McCollum with big smiles and warm hugs.

Commissioner McCollum walked the halls and visited with school officials at Lockhart Elementary and Ulla Muller Elementary, again greeting students, parents and staff.

While Charlotte Amalie High School experienced power outages in parts of its campus over the weekend that lasted into the morning of the first day of school, WAPA crews could be seen working to fully restore power to the facility.

Feature Image: Educational Complex Students on school grounds.

Image Credit: VIC.