

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Going Back To His Roots, Sen. Kurt Vialet Lectures Students On Importance Of Education

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ST. CROIX -- He looked comfortable and projected his message with the kind of ease that belonged to a professional who had honed their craft for decades. And as he spoke, they listened, some more intently than others, but all with a certain gaze that gave away their focus on what was being said.

A senator now, Kurt Vialet spent most of his life as an educator. He was at the helm of at least two schools here, and knows intimately the innards of the local school culture better than most. On Friday morning, Mr. Vialet lectured Central High School (C.H.S.) twelfth graders in the school's gymnasium, inspiring them to choose career paths that are in demand, and not carelessly select degrees that lead to dead ends. The move, according

to the senator, had nothing to do with politics; but rather a sincere desire to see the territory's youth succeed.

"I'm tired of seeing great minds wasted and I think it's important for us to come back and share our experience and knowledge as to how students need to proceed in order to be successful," Mr. Viallet told this publication after his talk. "Because a lot of times people don't really talk to the children at that level, and I try to be as real as possible, and provide scenarios that will hopefully motivate them to do better."

The senator gave his college story in an effort to motivate the students to take school seriously. He was also direct and at times stringent, stating that students who had no plan waste their time attending classes.



Angel Guzman, 18, is contemplating a plan B

career path following Sen. Kurt Viallet's talk at Central High School on Friday, Feb. 5. (VIC).

"If your plan to hang and do nothing, then don't come to school tomorrow," the freshman Democrat admonished. "Stop from now because it doesn't make a difference; you don't have any plans for the diploma. But if you're going to get that diploma -- and you're doing it for you, not your parents -- you have to know what you want to do. And do not leave here going some place to major in something easy, or take the easy path because you don't want to study or be the best at what you have to do."

The senator spoke for roughly an hour, and also touched on the difficult lives led by those who neglect education. At one point, he mentioned someone who had asked to be employed by his office.

"I said, 'no problem, what can you do?' And she looked up in the air.. Could that solve a problem for me?" Mr. Viallet asked rhetorically. "What can you do?" he continued asking the former student, a woman. He then requested a resume was left unsatisfied with what was provided.

"What I'm I going to do? You want a job because you want to make money, but what are you going to bring to me? You have to bring something to the table that would prompt me to hire you in the first place," Mr. Viallet went on.

Later, the senator said he felt confident that what he set out to achieve was accomplished.

"Anytime I speak, I look at the crowd, I look at people's faces and look at their eyes to see whether or not they're taking it in, and I saw that," he said, adding that the C.H.S. students were among the better crowds he had spoken to.

"He made me change my mindset a little bit," said Shomanee Francis, 17, who said he's now thinking of the U.S. Army and a bachelor's degree in mechanic and technology repairs. "The only thing that was on my mind was basketball, but I know a lot of people don't make it, so I'm now thinking about keeping my options open."

Another student, 18-year-old Angel Guzman, said before the senator's talk, he was focused solely on going to the military, "but I have to make a plan B because I can see already that my plan A isn't working. I'm not really good in math or English, and I scored low on the A.S.V.A.B. (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) test and I've got to retake it."

As it currently stands, Mr. Violet said he is not pleased with the model that is being used to educate the territory's youth, and has [long called for a new strategy](#).

"A lot of the new mandates, to me, have taken the focus off of teaching and learning. And I have told [Education] Commissioner [Sharon McCollum] on many occasions that I don't agree with the [Charlotte Danielson model](#) that is being used for evaluation. I think it's taking up too much of the teachers' time when they could be having one-on-one discussions with students. Some teachers have said to me that they don't tutor anymore because they're doing the Charlotte Danielson," he said.

In the end, though, Mr. Violet said he would continue talking to students about the importance of school because education is where his heart is.

"This is my real love, education, and seeing our students do well is the greatest joy that I could have. Every time a Virgin Islander does well, I'm very, very happy," he said.

According to Guidance Counselor Karen Chancellor, who has been working at C.H.S. for over three years, some 205 out of 210 C.H.S. students will graduate this year.