

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Report: D.O.E. Has No Idea When The Original Elena Christian Facility Will Reopen; Wants To Use Evelyn M. Williams As Headquarters

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ST. CROIX -- The Department of Education (D.O.E.) does not know when Elena Christian Jr. High and Evelyn M. Williams Elementary schools will reopen, or if they ever will. The department, when announcing the closures of the aforementioned facilities, [repeatedly told](#) concerned parents and the media that the closures would last only one year -- the 2015-16 school year -- while the schools undergo repairs of what it called "longstanding structural and environmental issues."

But as the 2015-16 school year comes to an end in June, construction at the original Elena Christian and Evelyn Williams schools had not started; and D.O.E. officials say they are not sure when and if repair work will commence because the schools are considered capital projects, and the department does not have such funding in its budget.

"Both Elena Christian Jr. High and Evelyn M. Williams Elementary schools are considered capital projects. The Department of Education currently does not have the requisite funding to address many of its longstanding capital projects needs. When the decision was made to close Elena Christian and Evelyn Williams at the end of the 2014-15 school year following an extensive analysis of the structures, it was with the intent to repair and reopen, as our original press release stated. Commissioner McCollum and



of action for both structures going

Entrance of Elena Christian Junior

High School. (Feb. 25, 2016)

The Consortium toured the original Elena Christian grounds on Thursday, and witnessed bushes growing on its fencing, and an aura of abandonment enveloping the facility. While there, a trucking company's employees could be seen removing desks, chairs and other school equipment from the building. D.O.E. said the items belong to the District School Food Authority (S.F.A.) that had been stored there, and they were being moved to the new S.F.A. location in Estate Cottage.

Before D.O.E. officials announced that some schools would be consolidated to allow for repairs on the dilapidated facilities, Governor Kenneth Mapp made no secret of his desire to permanently shutter some schools, contending that some needed to be merged. In May, 2015, The Consortium was told by a senator, who requested anonymity to speak freely on the matter, that the Mapp administration would shutter two elementary schools and merge two others.

Residents [had contacted](#) The Consortium, inquiring of the matter when talk of consolidation was rampant, stating that they'd heard rumblings from teachers that some schools would shutdown for repairs, while others would be altogether closed because there were not enough students to justify faculty and staff.

This morning, Senator Kurt Violet told The Consortium that Education Commissioner Sharon McCollum said in a recent meeting with senators that D.O.E. saw the Evelyn

Williams building as a suitable location for the department's headquarters. However, while Mr. Violet agreed that there were some merits to the idea, he said more information was needed before a final decision could be made. Mr. Violet also advocated strongly for the reopening of the original Elena Christian school, noting the extra strain on parents with students from the east side of the island, who carry their children all the way to the Charles H. Emanuel School (Charles H. Emanuel students have merged with Alfredo Andrews Elementary School).

Asked how would the Charles H. Emanuel building be utilized if Elena Christian students were to move back to their original location after repairs, Mr. Violet said the facility could be used for government offices. He also said that a study that analyzes how government could better utilize its many vacant buildings must be conducted.

"The population of the schools have decreased," Mr. Violet said, adding that the merger of Charles H. Emanuel and Alfredo Andrews resulted in a population of just over 400. He said that is the justification, as long as we can



Evelyn M. Williams Elementary

School. (Feb. 26, 2016)

Even so, D.O.E.'s statement on the matter gives a sense of a department that has moved on; revealing that Elena Christian and Evelyn M. Williams students had become thriving members of the school communities that they have joined.

"The Department of Education remains committed to ensuring that all of its students and school employees are housed in a safe environment conducive to learning. Evelyn M. Williams students that have joined the student population at Claude O. Markoe Elementary and Eulalie R. Rivera Elementary are thriving," reads the statement.

It added: "They are now a part of those school communities. Elena Christian Jr. High School students and employees have adapted well to their new school environment and are also thriving."