

The Virgin Islands Consortium

What's In A Handshake On The First Day Of School? A Lot, Says Senator Kurt Violet

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ST. CROIX -- A local initiative [that started in 2015 by Senator Kurt Violet](#) -- male students being greeted by successful male figures in the community on the first day of school -- has been received extremely well. But not all see the effort as effective, with some contending that much more than a handshake is needed to correct the course of so many of the territory's youth, while others accuse the senator and others who sign up to participate as only playing politics.

Both legitimate concerns, so we asked Mr. Violet -- who, along with other professionals, was stationed at the St. Croix Educational Complex on Tuesday morning greeting both male and female students, while others were at the St. Croix Central High School doing

the same -- why his office had acted on the idea.

"I think this is very important. So many of our male students, all they continuously see is that negative role model, and education is the pathway with opportunities for everybody to be able to equalize what is going on in the community," Mr. Vialet said. "No matter where you come from, no matter how poor your family, no matter what circumstances you're dealing with, if you have a solid education, you could get out of all the issues that your family faced. And this was an opportunity for them to see positive black men, some of whom might have been in similar circumstances like them, who did not come from rich families but made sure they focused on education and have gone on to do well in the community.

"We want to show them that you don't have to wear your pants way down on your behind, and you don't need to have a scowl on your face all day, or this look like you're upset with the world. We had a couple of those this morning, but by the time they got through, we had them smiling."

Mr. Vialet said it was past time that change come to the way things have been done in the territory, relative to what is acceptable behavior and what is not. He said he spoke to some parents on Tuesday, imploring them to comply with the rules that have been set by school authorities.

"This is part of being able to comply with the rules and regulations of society. So you can't come and challenge school rules and then expect that your child isn't going to challenge the rules of society when they're out there," he said, revealing that he's had conversations with school principals on the importance of enforcing school rules, "so that when they're finished, they understand their responsibility," Mr. Vialet said, referring to students.

Mr. Vialet said most of the students at Complex -- about 1,000 strong this school year -- came well dressed and ready for learning. He deemed the event as successful, and announced a related mentorship program that will see at-risk 9th grade students from Central High School and the Educational Complex, being paired with successful male figures in the community, whose job will be to encourage these young men, teaching them about the benefits of leading a positive life, and making available opportunities that so many take for granted.

"We want to try to give some exposure to them that they're not usually exposed to," Mr. Vialet said. "And you'd be very surprised. A lot of times we take things for granted, especially when you come from a family that exposes you to a lot of stuff. But a lot of these children have not been exposed to the finer things of life, and I believe that if you expose them, it's going to encourage them to want the finer things of life so they're going to do what they're supposed to do."

Mr. Vialet spoke of trips to the bowling alley in Castle Coakley, a Buck Island tour, among other activities. "We want to make an impact; not just stay here complaining. We want to be out here working with these at-risk 9th graders to see if we could increase the probability of them moving to the 10th grade."

Senator Novelle Francis, who was at Central High School greeting students but also attended the Complex event, said the professional walk was a good example for students

on their first day. He said role models are critical in fostering the ongoing notion that positive decisions breeds positive, successful lives.

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