

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Thomas-St. John District AFT To Join St. Croix In Protest On Monday

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Teachers left their classrooms and headed to the streets of St. Thomas in protest against a myriad of issues, chief among them being salary increases and retroactive pay. (Sandra Goomansingh, Director/Anchor News 2).

ST. THOMAS -- The St. Thomas-St. John District American Federation of Teachers union members [will join their St. Croix counterparts](#) on Monday for simultaneous protests, with the St. Croix event taking place at Government House in Christiansted from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., while the St. Thomas protest happens at the same time outside the Legislature.

The protests fall on the day of Governor Kenneth Mapp's State of the Territory Address, set to take place in the Earl B. Ottley Legislative Hall.

A subtitle of the release reads, "VI Education in Crisis". The release then lists a myriad of issues (updated in a newer press release) that AFT has identified as affecting education in the territory. They include the following:

- The Department of Education's budget is grossly underfunded. Educator resources are severely limited. Schools do not have sufficient textbooks, teachers' manuals, other supplies and equipment. (e.g., copy paper, printers, copiers, computers, smart boards & replacement parts, etc.)
- Students' learning and AFT members' working environments present disturbingly serious health and safety issues in crumbling facilities, (e.g., broken PA systems, mold and rodent infestations, etc.)
- The DOE procurement process to acquire necessary supplies, materials and services is cumbersome.
- The temperature in our classrooms is unbearable, dangerous and not conducive to teaching and learning. Schools should be properly retrofitted to accommodate the badly needed air conditioning units that are in all government offices.
- The Teacher Evaluation System takes valuable time away from planning and instruction and our infrastructure and lack of resources do not support it.
- Too many initiatives are impossible to adequately implement due to the lack of resources and support systems. There are too many demands and AFT members are incredibly overworked.
- Educators have no autonomy in the classroom. The educational system operates on a top-down paradigm; teachers have no voice. The DOE has lost its way.
- Caring, certified and competent educators and support staff are leaving the profession due to noncompetitive wages, insufficient resources, and hazardous facilities. Instructional time and the safety of our students are being compromised due to insufficient staff.
- There is an abundance of unresolved grievances with the Office of Collective Bargaining as it systematically fails to act on member complaints and contract violations.
- 32nd Legislature of the V.I., Committee on Education members along with the Education Commissioner are considering hiring virtual teachers. This physically removes teachers from classrooms while virtual teaching does not work for all students.
- Education is not a priority in the Virgin Islands.

Many of the grievances will sure to be challenged by the Mapp administration along with the Department of Education, but the list includes a number of issues that teachers and residents alike have long complained about.