

The Virgin Islands Consortium

179 Students Graduate From St. Croix Educational Complex

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ST. CROIX -- It was all joy at the St. Croix Educational High School gym, not because summer had arrived, but because the next journey in the lives of 179 graduates dawned a new page -- each chapter leading closer to the goal of a life of success.

This year's class, dubbed "The Supreme Class of 2017", came with a solid mix of young men and women (82 young men), and a long list of academic achievements that saw them netting \$2.5 million in combined scholarships. They were a talented bunch as well, with performances during the ceremony demonstrating the graduates' artistry.

It was on display when a graduate took a mic and headed the stage to rap a song dubbed, "I'm Not Throwing Away My Shot", backed up by the school's band, whose members include class of 2017 graduates. Students bobbed their heads as the graduate sang, not just because the rhythm commanded movement; their faces also gave away a sense of freedom as a result of accomplishing an important feat.

Indeed, 179 students graduated out of a class of 187, according to school Principal Genitta Richards, representing 96 percent of students. The principal boasted of the class's accomplishments, but soberly reminded them of the challenges ahead.

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"Class of 2017, be prepared to be accountable for everything you do in this life," she said. Ms. Richards quoted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who stated that the measure of a man is not in where he stands in times of comfort, but where he stands in times of challenge and controversy. "When you do encounter these times, speak your truths humbly and respectfully," she urged. "I charge you to always believe in yourself and find your purpose in life."

The class received multiple admonitions from a variety of speakers, among them Sen. Kurt Violet, a former principal of S.C.E.C.H.S., who warned students of the consequences of choices. "As you partake in this journey towards adulthood, be careful with the decisions that you make," he said.

Dept. of Education Commissioner Sharon McCollum told the students that their leadership is needed in every facet of the community, including houses of worship, government and media. "Now more than ever before our beautiful Virgin Islands and the world are in need of you," she said.

Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett called on the graduates to be change agents, "Because no change occurs without young people's involvement," she said.

Keynote speaker Akeel St. Jean said the biggest threat to the territory remains the constant migration of its educated, a phenomenon known as brain drain.

Governor Kenneth Mapp, looking at the graduating class which boasted a strong number of males, called on the audience to offer a round of applause. "We do not belittle the work of our women, but in our community, a community of color, our young men remain under assault, and are many times stigmatized and actually looked down upon even by some in our own community," the governor said.

Class speaker Ameera Mustafa, whose determination to be the valedictorian of her class was bolstered by her parents joking threat of not attending her graduation if she failed to achieve the goal, recognized her mother and father for their dedication to her success.

The salutatorian, Rainella Labadie, motivated members of her class to face life's challenges head on. "Once you walk away today, you will believe in your strength, and never let anyone challenge it. You will never sit down without a fight; without your values beliefs and goals in mind," Ms. Labadie said.

St. Croix Educational Complex was the third public high school to hold graduation ceremonies this. The St. Croix Central High School will host its event this morning.

