

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Letter To The Editor | Address The Mold So That Students' Minds Can Be Molded

Opinion / **Published On December 06, 2017 11:08 PM /**

Staff **December 06, 2017**



The 32nd Legislature of the Virgin Islands may have unwittingly set in motion a precedent for the Virgin Islands Department of Education, when on Friday, December 1, 2017, a majority of its members voted to re-appropriate four million dollars that was previously allocated for repairs at the Juan Luis Hospital, to be funneled toward securing and financing the renovation of a rental property in Golden Rock St. Croix. The purported justification for this action was to accommodate the deliberative body in a safe, mold-free environment following the passage of two hurricanes that damaged the Frederiksted town building, and further exacerbated prior deteriorating conditions at that site. Reportedly, the building will also be home to the judicial branch. Meanwhile, public schools in the St. Croix School District, which similarly sustained hurricane damages, to

include mold infestation, are on a daily rotating schedule using shared campuses.

Presently, all students in the school district are on double-sessions, receiving a maximum of four instructional hours each day, Monday through Friday. With the curtailed instructional time comes increased foot traffic at the host schools. The St. Croix Educational Complex High School, for example, is currently hosting students from five distinct sites, to include the Career and Technical Education Program, the Juanita Gardine and Eulalie Rivera elementary schools, the Arthur Richards Junior High School, and itinerant students from the St. Croix Central High School. In one or more instances, different cohorts of students and their teachers from the visiting schools are concurrently sharing one classroom, where, for example, Teacher A is providing instruction in reading, while Teacher B is leading activities involving mathematical practices. While this is an intuitive and creative means of mitigating the dire circumstances in the short term, it presents less than an ideal protracted solution for displaced students and educators.

If lawmakers, policymakers, and the wider community are vested in the maximization of student achievement, the precedent set by the Legislature should swiftly be replicated within the school environments. The Legislature must identify funding sources for repairs to schools; the Office of Management and Budget should be lobbied, posthaste, to allocate and appropriate the funds needed to conduct repairs and mold remediation in the shuttered schools; and parents, guardians, and other community stakeholders need to voice their concerns on the status quo, and be willing to contribute to the ongoing educational recovery process.

Addressing the mold and infrastructure plight in the closed schools, sooner rather than later, has a measureable multiplier effect that will achieve the following objectives:

- Recapture the present and future loss of instructional time;
- Decrease financial costs for future cleaning and repairs;
- Permit the salvaging and if necessary, the redeployment of scarce instructional materials and technology equipment for student and educator use at their current host sites, and;
- Deter vandalism, among other benefits.

The dilemma we face requires timely human intervention, if we are to thwart the chronic calcification of student learning. When a Code Blue – a medical term typically associated with resuscitating patients – exists in education, we must act with exigency, and not as though we are within an educational hospice, simply awaiting the eventual passage of the occupants.

Admittedly, it is an easier task to relocate the offices of the Legislature to an alternate location than it is to find suitable and sustainable structures for thousands of students enrolled in the public schools, considering, as well, the spread of the damages both to public and private facilities. Decision makers, must, however, both recognize and interceptively wrestle with the gravity of the situation and implement responsive actions, supported by prudent financial backing, toward a meaningful solution. The task may be arduous, but, to borrow a phrase from the Founder and CEO of the U.S. Dream Academy: If the mountain was smooth, you couldn't climb it.

Within seven months, the Virgin Islands once again will be within the bowels of what is predicted to be a more active and volatile hurricane season. The territory and its residents must also be vigilant of the forecasted increase in the number of unannounced earthquakes in 2018, with greater impact anticipated within tropical regions. Because of Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the Virgin Islands is now more resilient and experienced in disaster preparedness and recovery. How this experience is transferred into practice determines whether we have the indomitable will to achieve.

Submitted on Tuesday By: Everett A. Ryan, Ph.D., educator

© Viconsortium 2026