

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## At Abandoned Schools, Sensitive Documents Were Left Exposed, Senator Hansen Says

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ST. CROIX -- Senator Alicia Hansen, who on Monday toured St. Croix schools with other senators during a tour organized by the Senate Committee on Education, Youth and Recreation, said she was "appalled" when they saw files left in open cabinets and office floors with clear names reflected on them, appearing to be personal files of students, teachers, and support staff. "Even social security numbers were exposed. This is really ridiculous," Mrs. Hansen said.

The veteran senator said she was fully aware that there were principals, teachers and other support staff that were willing to go into schools to retrieve equipment, files, and supplies to included literature necessary for the continuation of a viable education. But,

she added, staffers were directed by the Mapp administration not to enter the facilities.

According to Mrs. Hansen, if staffers were allowed to enter the schools, "much of the computers and supplies would have been salvaged." She urged the Department of Education to immediately secure all schools, personal files, property, and equipment -- or what's left of them. During the tour, both abandoned and functioning schools were visited.

The senator's findings lay bare continuing troubles at the Department of Education as it works to prepare modular school units to ease the burden on teachers and students currently in double session classes. This model sees students receiving only four hours of education a day, and has served as an inconvenience to working parents, as some schools start classes during the late morning or early afternoon hours.

In a [Facebook post](#) on Monday, Senator Kurt Violet chided the D.O.E. and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, stating, "Sadly there is still not a clear plan as to how we are going to reopen these facilities. The indecision of FEMA and D.O.E. is troubling! Why are we still [assessing] six months later?" Mr. Violet said many of the closed schools were fixable and should see remediation to rid them of mold. "We don't need modulares for schools that are intact but were just abandoned," he said.

During a January Senate hearing, D.O.E. Commissioner Sharon McCollum told lawmakers that double sessions may continue into the 2018-19 school year, adding that it would take six months to procure and install modular units. She said because the order of the units is being managed through FEMA's Public Assistance Program, which is 100 percent reimbursable, it would have to be processed through the local Department of Property and Procurement, which could add additional months to the process.

Lawmakers were not pleased to learn that double sessions may continue through the upcoming school year, and they asked Ms. McCollum to expedite the process.

There are currently 10 abandoned schools in the territory; seven in the St. Croix District (STX): (1) Lew Muckel, (2) Pearl B. Larsen, (3) Eulalie Rivera, (4) Arthur A. Richards, (5) Elena Christian, (6) John Woodson and (7) Alexander Henderson; and 3 schools in the St. Thomas/St. John District: (1) Addelita Cancryn Junior High School, (2) E. Benjamin Oliver Elementary School, and (3) Guy Benjamin Community Center.

The Mapp administration has requested \$750 million to repair and rebuild 6 school facilities, funds that have not yet been made available. And it remains to be seen how much the territory will receive from the federal government once the assessments are completed.

As for the schools that were damaged but remain functional and are being utilized, D.O.E. as of January had difficulty procuring materials and supplies, as well as contractors to do the work. "The most significant challenge the department is facing across the territory is scarcity of materials and A&E contractors; roof damage continues to allow moisture into the schools, facilitating the exacerbated growth of mold," Ms. McCollum said.