

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Dept. Of Education Lists Woes It's Currently Facing With St. Croix District Schools Post Maria

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ST. CROIX -- The Department of Education has listed a number of problems that are plaguing progress in the St. Croix District -- from funding, to mold, storage and vandalism. The update follows a recent tour by 32nd Legislature senators, with some [criticizing D.O.E.](#) and the Mapp administration for the state of the territory's schools.

The department said it has been continuously monitoring the properties of shuttered schools in the St. Croix District in the aftermath Hurricane Maria. It said eight schools were shuttered on the island following the storm: Pearl B. Larsen Elementary, Lew Muckle Elementary, Alfredo Andrews Elementary, Alexander Henderson Elementary, Eulalie Rivera Elementary, Elena L. Christian Jr. High (Charles H. Emmanuel campus)

John H. Woodson Jr. High and the Arthur A. Richards Jr. High schools.

Although many hold to the notion that Hurricane Irma did more damage to St. Thomas than Maria did to St. Croix, at least with schools, it appears that the St. Croix District sustained more damage.

Mold

D.O.E. said Hurricane Maria brought inches of rain that consequently flooded schools. Water was pumped out of schools on several occasions. The downpour of rain continued to seep into schools with damaged roofs and through the ground from the rising water table on the island, it said.

Once water was pumped out of schools, district officials worked with local and federal partners to assess the damages of schools to determine prospective open dates for students to return, D.O.E. said. Those assessments revealed a large presence of mold and other environmental concerns. It was concluded that mold and moisture would remain an issue at several school sites during the rainy season.

Storage

Another issue the department is plagued with in both districts is lack of facilities to store salvaged equipment, according to D.O.E. It said school officials in both districts have reached out to community partners and storage remains scarce and the cost remains high. School administrators, teachers and district officials have limited options of storing materials and equipment deemed salvageable, D.O.E. said.

Vandalism

D.O.E. said it continues to make a plea to the public to refrain from vandalizing schools. Security at shuttered campuses is a two-fold hardship, it said. The department does not have the funds to employ personnel to provide security to all shuttered campuses across both districts. Separately, the territory has a security personnel shortage following both Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Officials in both districts reached out to the Virgin Islands Police Department to request police presence at school sites, but were met with a manpower shortage, D.O.E. said.

In addition, the maintenance crews in St. Croix were instructed to perform daily checks on schools as a safety precaution. If crews suspected vandalism, they were to inform the maintenance director and superintendent so a police report could be filed, according to the department.

Several schools have issues of horses on its properties. The Department of Agriculture was contacted to assist with the removal of the horses, but breached fences and uncooperative horse owners have hardened efforts to keep horses off of school property, D.O.E. said.

Electricity

D.O.E. thanked the Virgin Islands Water and Power Authority for what it said was WAPA's work in restoring power to schools across the territory. In the St. Croix District,

all of the shuttered schools, with the exception of Arthur A. Richards Jr. High, were energized in March 2018.

In conclusion, D.O.E. said the number one problem in addressing many of the issues facing it is money. D.O.E. said it will be receiving funds through the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Public Assistance Program. The funds, however, have to utilize the normal procurement procedures to retain services and purchase equipment, and then FEMA reimburses the costs up to 100 percent. With a limited budget, D.O.E. said it's experiencing trouble allocating funds to finance much-needed projects.

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