

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Governor Mapp To Announce On Friday The Demolition And Reconstruction Of Several Schools

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ST. CROIX -- Governor Kenneth Mapp will announce the demolition and reconstruction of several schools during what Mr. Mapp says will be a joint press conference with the federal government on Friday at Government House here.

"This week we will have a press conference on Friday, we will be talking, the federal government and I, on the first phase on the number of new schools -- schools that will be demolished and completely reconstructed in the U.S. Virgin Islands," Mr. Mapp said during the territory's 101 birthday event, held at the St. George Botanical Garden.

The governor is said to have confirmed at least one school set to be demolished and rebuilt while addressing members of the Hurricane Recovery and Resiliency Task Force during a meeting at Government House last week. He said the federal government had approved the demolition and reconstruction of the Arthur A. Richards Junior High School, according to a person who attended the event and heard the governor utter those words.

The Arthur A. Richards Junior High School sustained catastrophic damage during the passage of Hurricane Maria in September. Mr. Mapp has described the educational facility as being damaged beyond repair. But the school is among several that were wrecked by the 2017 storms. Another is the Eulalie Rivera Elementary School in Grove, which saw sections completely ravaged. In fact, the government abandoned ten schools following the storms, among them were the Lew Muckel Elementary School, the Pearl B. Larsen Elementary School, and the Elena Christian Junior High School on St. Croix, along with the Addelita Cancryn Junior High School, the E. Benjamin Oliver Elementary School, and the Guy Benjamin Community Center in St. Thomas.

Parents and educators have expressed concern with the Department of Education's readiness for the upcoming school. One mother of an elementary school student told The Consortium that she was awaiting word from either the governor or the Department of Education, in regards to the modular units that D.O.E. has been working to install on school grounds in an effort to move away from the split session system currently in place, which only give students 4 hours of school daily. This parent currently has her child enrolled in a private school, and would love to move the child back to public school. Her decision, however, will be based on the preparedness of D.O.E.

Lawmakers were hoping to hear more from D.O.E. officials on Tuesday, but D.O.E. representatives who were set to testify failed to show, a decision based on a directive given by the governor, according to Jean Forde, chairman of the Senate Committee on Education, Youth, and Recreation.

It was not clear what else will be addressed on Friday aside from the demolition and reconstruction of schools, but Mr. Mapp is expected to speak on a timeline relative to the modular units.