

The Virgin Islands Consortium

All Students Will Be Off Of Split Session For 2018-19 School Year, D.O.E. Says

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ST. THOMAS -- All students attending U.S. Virgin Islands public schools will be off of split sessions for the 2018-2019 school year, according to testimony from Department of Education (D.O.E) Commissioner Sharon McCollum, who will testify before lawmakers today at the Earl B. Ottley Legislature here.

"I can report to the 32nd legislature that all students in the territory will be off split session for the 2018-2019 school year," reads Ms. McCollum's testimony, which has been posted on the [Legislature's website](#). "Throughout the disaster recovery process a plethora of difficult choices were made to manage the FY 2018 Budget and disaster recovery."

Ms. McCollum's testimony follows a school tour organized by D.O.E. of the Arthur Richards Junior High School and the Pearl B. Larsen Elementary School on St. Croix on Wednesday. During the tour, contractor AECOM, which is working on the sprung structures and modular units for schools, assured The Consortium that its work will be completed on August 28. APTIM, a contractor working on school repairs to include mold remediation, gave the same date for completion of work. A similar tour was held on St. Thomas, where the Julius E. Sprauve School and Lockhart Elementary were toured on Thursday.

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If the contractors meet their deadline, it means they will have six weeks to complete their work. It was not clear if the same companies were contracted to prepare classrooms with necessities such as desks and chairs.

"We have made tremendous progress and have made significant adjustments to minimize the impact on our students, families and community in a number of critical areas, including student transportation, school lunch, technology, and capital projects," reads Ms. McCollum's testimony. "This includes careful selection of temporary facility placements, vendor payments and the postponement or continuation of selected capital projects. We have been considering the strategies required to sustain the progress made in School Year 2016-2017 while continuing our efforts to manage our recovery and restructure the department to meet the community's demands for a quality public education in the 21st Century."

AECOM is working territory-wide solely on the sprung structures to house school administration and the modular units for students. The media was given a tour of the construction site at the Arthur A. Richards Junior High School, where laborers could be seen working to prepare the foundation for the modular units.

Arthur Richards makes up 55 percent of the work on St. Croix for AECOM, according to Josh Gerard, construction manager for AECOM on St. Croix. He said 49 modular units and 3 sprung structures will be built on the site.

Aside from Arthur Richards, AECOM is performing work on 4 other schools: Lew Muckle Elementary, John H. Woodson Junior High, Eulalie Rivera Elementary and Pearl B. Larsen Elementary. But Mr. Gerard said the work on those sites is much less in comparison to Arthur Richards. The reason for this, he explained, is that while the entirety of Arthur Richards will be utilizing sprung structures and modular units, the other schools, which were not completely destroyed by the 2017 storms, will utilize some modular units and sprung structures, along with facilities within the schools that are being repaired and are undergoing mold remediation.

APTIM is solely working in the St. Croix district and only on the repairs and remediation effort. The Consortium toured the Pearl B. Larsen Elementary School, which sustained damage — including flooding — where APTIM employees, wearing masks, could be seen removing wet tiles, cleaning classrooms and performing other work in what appeared to be the early stages of the repairs and remediation effort at the school. Just like AECOM, APTIM is working on five schools on St. Croix.

What was not discussed during the St. Croix school tour was whether other essentials such as utilities and technology would be in place in time along with the contractors' August 28 deadline for completion of work.

As for the department's budget, it will accept the proposed \$172. 2 million, of which \$127,359,639 was allocated from the general fund -- \$66,026,801 for the St. Croix District and \$61,332,838 for the St. Thomas/St. John District -- and \$44,849,362 for the department's [State Educational Agency](#).