

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Department Of Education Gives Status Update On Reopening Of Schools For 2018-19 School Year

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All students will return to full sessions instead of split sessions in the upcoming academic school year, Education Commissioner Sharon McCollum told senators during a Committee on Education, Youth and Recreation meeting at the Capitol Building Wednesday, but the accomplishment required many difficult choices.

One of those difficult choices, she [testified](#) was to put the Addelita Cancryn Junior High School (ACJHS) on Charlotte Amalie High School (CAHS) field.

Temporary Facilities: Modular and Sprung Units

Those schools are two of seven campuses within the St. Thomas-St. John district that are receiving modular or mobile facilities. The complete list of St. Thomas-St. John schools receiving temporary facilities include:

- Julius Sprauve;
- Charlotte Amalie
- Addelita Cancryn
- Lockhart
- Joseph Gomez
- Wheatley Skill Center
- Ivanna Kean High School

On St. Croix, modular classrooms will be set up for the following:

- Arthur Richards
- John H. Woodson
- Eulalie Rivera
- Lew Muckle
- Pearl B. Larsen
- Central High School

The Federal Emergency Management Agency approved these campuses for temporary facilities, according to Ms. McCollum. The modular units are currently being constructed off-island at five manufacturing plants in three states – Georgia, Pennsylvania and Florida – she said. Mobile units, known as sprung units, are being constructed in Utah.

A total of 203 units have already arrived in the territory via the shipping company Global Go and D.O.E. anticipates another shipment of 80 units by Sunday. Most sprung units are already here, Ms. McCollum said, but there are six more units for the Curriculum Center that are slated to arrive.

AECOM Caribe, LLC is responsible for the designing and building the modular structures and will begin erecting those units within the next week on all 13 of the FEMA-approved campuses, Ms. McCollum said.

According to the education commissioner, the cost of these temporary structures is represented by FEMA project worksheets totaling \$117,941,204.

During the update meeting, education leaders Ruby Simmonds Esannason, Carmen Howell and Glenn Davis expressed opposition to the establishment of 56 modular classrooms on the athletic field and the tennis court at Charlotte Amalie High School. Their opposition came from a concern that athletic programs at the public schools are in jeopardy, they testified. Concerns that heavy rains could cause flooding on the fields and put the students in danger were also aired.

Senator Jean Forde, committee chair, told these testifiers that their concerns were legitimate but it appeared that relocating the modular classrooms to a new location would delay full-session operations and continue split sessions.

“The goal is to return student to full-session while repairing permanent school structures,” Mr. Ford is quoted as saying in a press release from the legislature.

On the same issue, the press release quotes Senator Tregenza Roach as saying, “These concerns are from people with vast experience in education. I hope that the issues raised will not be an even bigger problem later.”

Permanent and Temporary Repairs

According to Ms. McCollum’s testimony, D.O.E. is transitioning out of a phase of temporary repair to permanent repair for structures damaged by Hurricanes Maria and Irma as quickly as possible.

APTIM, a D.O.E. contractor, has begun temporary repairs for seven schools in St. Croix: Lew Muckle, Pearl B. Larsen, Eulalie Rivera, Alexander Henderson, Alfredo Andrews, John H. Woodson and the Central High School Music Building. AECOM has begun temporary repairs in St. Thomas and St. John for two schools: Joseph Gomez and Ulla F. Muller Elementary Schools.

The department received \$35 million to fund both temporary repairs and facilities from insurance proceeds that Governor Kenneth Mapp allocated through the Department of Property and Procurement. D.O.E. is waiting on reimbursements to fund equipment purchases and final repairs for the 2018-2019 school year, Ms. McCollum testified.

Combined School Campuses

On St. Croix two schools are being combined as the education department seeks to restore full sessions. They are the Elena Christian and John H. Woodson Junior High Schools.

Within the St. Thomas-St. John district, some Gladys Abraham students will go to school with Lockhart Elementary students and some will go to the Ulla F. Muller Elementary School. Some of the E. Benjamin Oliver students will go to the Joseph Gomez Elementary School while others will go to the Yvonne Milliner-Bowsky Elementary School.

Feature Image: Modular classrooms arriving in St. Thomas. (Credit: D.O.E.)