

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Mapp Signs Two-Year Step Increase Contract For Educators Following 9-Year Stall

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Governor Kenneth Mapp has approved a two-year contract that will give teachers long-awaited step increases following an almost nine-year stall, Government House announced Friday.

The agreement was reached between the St. Croix and St. Thomas-St. John Federation of Teachers - AFT Locals 1825 and 1826 - and the Government of the Virgin Islands on October 12, 2018 following weeks of intense negotiations, alongside job actions by mostly St. Croix educators.

Joined by Lt. Governor Osbert Potter and St. Croix Federation of Teachers President Rosa Soto-Thomas, Mr. Mapp signed the agreement Friday to the applause of AFT members attending the 2018 TEACH conference held at the St. Croix Educational Complex High School, Government House said. The annual gathering brings teachers together for a day of workshops and presentations that celebrate and reinforce the profession of education.

"I want to thank you for your service, commitment and dedication to the children of the Virgin Islands," the governor said before signing the important agreement, according to Government House. He acknowledged that some conditions under which teachers work are not ideal, stating, "We are working to make that better."

Mr. Mapp further outlined four areas his administration prioritized as it relates to teachers and government employees when he took office in January 2015: Unpaid portions of AFT members' 2010 collective bargaining agreement, low entrance wages for new teachers, an 8 percent pay cut that was unlawfully enacted on government employees in 2011, and higher retention wages for senior-level educators.

"We have addressed all four of those issues," the governor said, pointing out that in 2016, his administration satisfied the outstanding portions of the teachers' 2010 collective bargaining agreement; in 2017, he offered legislation to return the 8 percent wage reduction to government employees; on July 28, 2018, the administration successfully increased the base pay for new teachers and qualifying government employees by \$10,000 -- raising entrance wages for new teachers to \$44,000; and, most recently, a two-year contract that would bring teachers up to the current pay schedule was ratified between the AFT and the Government of the Virgin Islands, according to the Government House release.

The governor also highlighted developments in the rebuilding of the territory's public schools, noting that four schools qualify for demolition and total reconstruction based on federal government guidelines, including Arthur A. Richards Junior High on St. Croix, Julius E. Sprauve School on St. John, and Addelita Cancryn Junior High School and Charlotte Amalie High School on St. Thomas.