

The Virgin Islands Consortium

New School Buses Purchased To Service Special Education Students On St. Croix

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ST. CROIX -- The Virgin Islands Department of Education, St. Croix District, has purchased five new school buses that will service its Special Education student population, making this a first in the department's history on St. Croix the district has owned a fleet of school buses, D.O.E. announced today.

The new buses, which were purchased through funding from the State Office of Special Education, arrived in the territory in April and officially began operating when students returned to school on September 4. The buses transport any of the district's 59 Special Education students requiring bus transportation to and from school, according to the release.

“What this does is it alleviates the Department having to pay for Special Education bus service,” St. Croix Deputy Superintendent Vaughn Hewitt explained. “Bus drivers and a bus manager were also hired to run the division.”

Hewitt further explained that it was necessary to create a new School Bus Division because “the various routes our bus drivers take, a number of students in Special Education got home much later than we wanted them to. This will help alleviate that problem,” he said.

Former employees of private bus company Abramson Enterprises, Inc. have been tapped to drive the new school buses, Hewitt said. Each bus is also assigned an aide to assist students, which is required by law when transporting students with special needs.

“We were lucky enough to interview a number of former Abramson bus drivers who are already certified, and know the routes and policy for Special Education students on buses,” he explained.

Hewitt went on to say that while school bus service for the regular student population is still contracted through Abramson, the purchase of the new buses helps reduce transportation costs for the district.

The launch of the district’s new School Bus Division was successfully realized with the guidance of colleagues in the St. Thomas-St. John District, which has owned its school buses for a number of years, Hewitt pointed out.

“We have had some good conversations with the bus manager on St. Thomas,” he said. “He has been very helpful to help create this division.”

Hewitt also praised the St. Croix District Division of Special Education, under the leadership of Director Lyrhea Bryan-Heyliger, as well as the district’s School Bus Safety Field Inspector Owen Hennemann for the instrumental roles they played in establishing the new School Bus Division.

Hewitt said plans are underway to expand the fleet to include school buses for the regular student population.