

The Virgin Islands Consortium

USVI's 2019 State Teacher Kerra Samuel And STT-STJ District Teacher of the Year Shernore Prince Honored At Gov't House

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The Virgin Islands Department of Education recognized its 2019 Virgin Islands State Teacher of the Year Kerra Samuel and 2018-19 St. Thomas-St. John District Teacher of the Year Shernore Prince at a festive ceremony held at Government House on Friday, the Department of Education has announce.

The territory's top teachers were lauded by D.O.E. officials, colleagues and family members at the mid-morning gathering, which began with a catered breakfast and musical entertainment by the St. Croix Educational Complex High School (SCECHS)

Jazz Ensemble, according to the release.

Samuel, the intermediate computer lab teacher at Pearl B. Larsen Elementary School on St. Croix and Prince, a sixth grade math, science and health teacher at Joseph Sibilly Elementary School on St. Thomas received bouquets of flowers, plaques, gift baskets and various other tokens of appreciation for their achievements.

Attorney Emile Henderson, Government House chief counsel, offered remarks on behalf of Governor Mapp and Lt. Governor Potter.

"Governor Mapp is very proud of each of your accomplishments and commend you both for a job well done," he said.

Henderson went on to praise Prince, calling her a "phenomenal teacher," and said it was an "honor to represent the Governor" in commending Samuel, his former classmate at St. Croix Central High School, on the work she is "doing in the community for our students."

Education Commissioner Sharon McCollum reminded the honorees of the importance of their role in the community.

"As educators, we know no one can take away the skills we have given to our students," she said. "Kerra and Shernore, you are the golden key that unlocks the door [to freedom] every time you walk into your classroom. I am so proud of what this Department is doing. It is because of young people like you that I know we are in good hands."

Speaking on behalf of St. Croix District Insular Superintendent Colleen Mae Williams, Deputy Superintendent Faith Dane George-Boone pointed out the commitment that teaching requires.

"Teaching is not an easy job," she began, "but it's wonderful when we see our former students at the supermarket and they greet us and express their thanks. We mold children. Teamwork all the way as we embrace all of our students."

Sheryl Serano-Griffith, St. Thomas-St. John District Special Education director, congratulated the honorees on behalf of St. Thomas-St. John District Insular Superintendent Dionne Wells-Hedrington.

"The superintendent wanted to convey her thoughts to you and congratulate you on your achievement," she said.

Twenty-seventeen Virgin Islands State Teacher Dinah Browne, currently an assistant principal at Central High School, provided Samuel with some insight into her year ahead.

"Kerra, you are about to embark on an incredible journey as State Teacher," Browne said. "You are about to meet fifty-plus state teachers who will help solidify some of your ideas and cause you to question others of them. Both of you ladies are phenomenal."

The ceremony was punctuated by heartfelt presentations from former students, colleagues, dignitaries and family members. Presenters shared stories of their interactions with the honorees and the impact the teachers have had on their respective schools and communities.

Near the close of the program, Samuel and Prince expressed appreciation for the support of their colleagues, educational leaders and family. They also spoke of their passion for teaching.

“Public education is rigorous education,” Prince stated, garnering applause from the audience. “I have two little boys at home and I have the same passion for teaching other children, as my sons are also receiving a great public education.”

Despite challenges, such as not always having the right materials and technology equipment for her classroom, Samuel said she puts her “best foot forward and I thank God for where I am and where I am about to go.”

Other officials in attendance included Acting Assistant Education Commissioner Yvette McMahon-Arnold; St. Croix Deputy Superintendent Vaughn Hewitt; Board of Education Chairman Terrance Joseph; AFT Presidents Rosa Soto-Thomas and Carol A. Callwood; and Pearl B. Larsen Elementary Administrators Joan Claxton and Delicia Sealey-Espinosa.

The SCECHS Jazz Ensemble, under the direction of Kevre Hendricks, provided musical entertainment throughout the ceremony. Dr. Saul Santiago, St. Croix District assessment coordinator, gave the opening and closing prayers, and Keva Muller, Department of Education public relations director, served as mistress of ceremonies.

According to the Council of Chief State School Officers, each year the organization “brings together State Teachers of the Year from the 50 states, U.S. territories, Washington, DC and the Department of Defense Education Activity for a year of professional learning, and facilitates the selection of the National Teacher of the Year.”

Samuel will visit Washington, DC in the spring to participate in official State Teacher activities.