

The Virgin Islands Consortium

D.O.E. To Hold Press Conference Tuesday To Address Issues At C.A.H.S., Give Update On State Of Public Schools Territory-Wide

VIC News / **Published On August 10, 2019 11:10 AM /**

Staff **August 10, 2019**



Under a barrage of criticism from the community and lawmakers alike for keeping the public in the dark on problems at Charlotte Amalie High School that has reportedly resulted in the school's limited use or complete shuttering for the 2019-2020 school year, and the apparent last-minute scrambling to ready the facilities for learning two weeks before school reopens, the Department of Education late Friday issued a press release making known that it will address the public come Tuesday.

The event will be held on the steps of the Charlotte Amalie High School in St. Thomas at 10:00 a.m., where D.O.E. said it will share "recent developments at Charlotte Amalie High School" and "general information pertaining to the opening of the 2019-2020 school year."

D.O.E. will also provide "the latest updates on the assessment of school buildings."

But it doesn't appear that D.O.E.'s planned press event will allay the frustration of concerned residents. The universal criticism on this matter has been why just two weeks before school reopens, that D.O.E. is now in a frantic dash to prepare the territory's learning facilities. The Bryan administration even [declared a state of emergency](#) -- which was [deemed illegal](#) by Senator Janelle Sarauw, and [too little, too late](#) by Senator Alicia Barnes -- that the administration said would hasten the process of procurement to move forward with desperately needed repairs.

The situation was brought to the fore when Senator Donna Frett-Gregory [lashed out at the department](#) and its commissioner, Racquel Berry-Benjamin, earlier this month.

"At the very least, parents need to understand how the status of these main buildings will impact their children's education when school resumes in the next few weeks," Mrs. Frett-Gregory said. "I understand that a solid plan may not be in place, but it is the responsibility of the Commissioner to share critical information with parents, teachers, students and stakeholders. So far, that has not been done."

Then, days later, the Consortium reported that it was told by a person with knowledge of the situation at Charlotte Amalie, that D.O.E. planned on restricting the facility's use or would abandon it altogether for the 2019-2020 school year because of structural concerns. An assessment of Building B, which houses most of the students, concluded that the building should not be utilized, but D.O.E. to date has failed to communicate the findings with the public. Building A also faces challenges, but there, too, D.O.E. has been mum.

"This department has come before the Legislature numerous times within the last few months and concerns were expressed over the lack of apparent planning to ensure that schools territory-wide would be ready for the opening of the 2019-2020 school year. There has also been expressed grievances of the drawdown of federal funds, campus maintenance and what appears to be arbitrary reshuffling and consolidating of schools and administrators. These sentiments have been met with the resounding 'we will be ready' from the leadership of the department," said Ms. Sarauw.

Now, three weeks before school is scheduled to start, "and we are not ready," she stated.

"It is no secret that Charlotte Amalie High School's facility appears unable to accommodate students, and another reshuffling is imminent. With the pending change, Department of Education has yet to inform stakeholders, parents, teachers, or senators of the plan to make necessary accommodations. Instead, the transmittal of sketchy information is through WhatsApp messages on the status of upcoming changes," Ms. Sarauw added.

