

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Two-Thirds Of C.A.H.S. Shuttered; Students In Multiple Schools Affected

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ST. THOMAS -- The Virgin Islands Department of Education – under intense scrutiny over a series of recent missteps and controversies – on Tuesday announced sweeping changes in where some of St. Thomas' high school, junior high and elementary school students will attend class in the new school year.

On the steps of the Charlotte Amalie High School this morning, department officials said nearly 1,000 C.A.H.S. students, and hundreds more elementary and junior high children from the Lockhart and Addelita Cancryn schools are being shuffled between buildings and modular classrooms, as officials scramble repair and ultimately replace the 64-year-old current C.A.H.S. facility. (C.A.H.S. itself turns 100 next year.)

Two-thirds of the aging and storm-damaged high school has been shuttered for safety reasons, forcing C.A.H.S. students to take classes in the coming school year in a series of modular buildings on the ball-field and along the outskirts of the campus.

A part of C.A.H.S. Building B was closed off to students and teachers in 2018. Engineers discovered “some structural damage” to Building A during a recent walk-through assessment. “In recent weeks a decision was made to close the whole of Building A and B for the upcoming school year to err on the side of caution,” D.O.E. Chief Operations Officer Dr. Dionne Wells-Hedrington said.

The third main building on campus – Building C – will remain open for the first semester of the upcoming school year. “Building C does not have any structural damages that were made known to us. Building C is operable,” said St. Thomas-St. John Superintendent Stefan Jurgen.

The department, during the course of the coming year, is likely to close-off Building C as well, triggering another round of relocations for students. “We are hoping to close Building C. That is because we are moving towards new construction and we know the main buildings must be dealt with. ... All three buildings must be demolished,” Mr. Jurgens said.

The Bryan administration’s top education officials held a press conference Tuesday morning on the steps of C.A.H.S. to discuss plans for repairing and rebuilding the territory’s aging schoolhouses – many of which are still hobbled by hurricanes Irma and Maria two years ago. Many more years of neglected maintenance and unfunded repairs have further worsened conditions for Virgin Islands’ schoolchildren.

“C.A.H.S represents the challenges we face at our aged school buildings that are rapidly deteriorating,” said D.O.E. Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin.

Like C.A.H.S., other schools seem to have been placed on the back burner by government officials holding the purse strings. There have been “... years of neglect at our schools,” said Ms. Berry-Benjamin.

The changes

Charlotte Amalie High School

Buildings A and B have been condemned. The high school will now be housed in the modular classrooms on the field and on the outskirts of the main campus – occupying the full complex that had been Cancryn Junior High.

The high school’s Building C remains in use, at least for the first semester of the 2019-2020 school year. The band room, auditorium, gymnasium, career and technical education room will continue to be utilized by C.A.H.S.

It remains to be seen whether Building C – only portion of the century-old schoolhouse safe for students and teachers to occupy – will stay in use beyond the second semester of the school year.

Lockhart Primary School

Lockhart Elementary will now be known – temporarily – as the Lockhart Primary School for students in Kindergarten through the 3rd grade. The K through 3rd graders will attend class in the colorful modular buildings located at the southeastern side of the campus.

Lockhart Primary School students will wear their traditional Lockhart uniforms.

Addelita Cancryn Intermediate & Junior High

The Addelita Cancryn Junior High will become the Addelita Cancryn Intermediate & Junior High with students attending class in the Lockhart school building and in modular classrooms located on the tennis courts (behind the C.A.H.S. gymnasium).

Cancryn students in grades 4 through 6 will wear the Lockhart uniform. Students in grades 7 and 8 will wear the Addelita Cancryn Junior High School uniform.

St. Thomas – St. John District Start/End Times for 2019-2020 School Year

NOTE: All schools will serve breakfast a half-hour before the classroom instructional times listed below. Students are encouraged to participate in the Breakfast Program. Paraprofessionals and other school staff will be on campus to ensure student supervision.

High Schools	Start Time	End Time
Charlotte Amalie	8:30 AM	3:30 PM
Ivanna Eudora Kean	7:50 AM	2:50 PM
Edith Williams Achievement Academy	7:30 AM	Staggered
Day Adult	8:30 AM	11:30 AM
Adult Continuing Education	5:00 PM	9:00 PM
Junior High	Start Time	End Time
Addelita Cancryn	7:45 AM	2:35 PM
Middle School	Start Time	End Time
Bertha C. Boschulte	7:20 AM	2:35 PM
Elementary	Start Time	End Time
Joseph Gomez PM	7:50 AM	2:30
Joseph Sibilly PM	7:50 AM	2:30
Lockhart	7:50 AM	2:45 PM

Jane E. Tuitt	7:50 AM	2:35 PM
Ulla F. Muller	7:50 AM	2:40 PM

Yvonne M. Bowsky	7:50 AM	2:45 PM
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St. John	Start Time	End Time
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Julius E. Sprauve (K-8)	7:50 AM	2:45 PM
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St. Croix District Start/End Times for 2019-2020 School Year

High Schools	Start Time	End Time
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STX Central	7:30 AM	2:40 PM
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STX Ed. Complex	7:30 AM	2:40 PM
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CTEC	7:30 AM	2:40 PM
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St. Croix Alternative	7:30 AM	2:40 PM
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Education Program

Junior High	Start Time	End Time
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John H. Woodson	8:00 AM	3:00 PM
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K-8	Start Time	End Time
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Juanita Gardine	8:15 AM	3:15 PM
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Pearl B. Larsen	8:15 AM	3:15 PM
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Arthur A. Richards	8:15 AM	3:15 PM
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Eulalie Rivera	8:15 AM	3:15 PM
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Elementary	Start Time	End Time
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Ricardo Richards	8:30 AM	3:30 PM
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Alfredo Andrews	8:30 AM	3:30 PM
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Lew Muckle	8:30 AM	3:30 PM
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Claude O. Markoe	8:30 AM	3:30 PM
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Given these territory's financial constraints, parents and students should be clear: "We are going to be in modular classrooms and campuses for at least the next five years. There will be ongoing construction on weekends, during long holidays and every opportunity we get. This will be our new norm for sometime."

According to the commissioner, the territory's budget-writers have cut funding for routine maintenance to the bare bones. "The department has received various levels of funding over the years. And we've seen it dwindle. We've had millions. We've had \$600,000. This last year, we had \$300,000.

"Literally, for this summer we've had no funding. The 2019 budget that I met did not have adequate funding to do the regular maintenance. We got creative at the department and we had to shuffle funds, reprogram some funds to make sure that regular summer maintenance got done," she said.

"We are at a cross-roads, and the time has come for some things to change," Ms. Berry-Benjamin said.

"Year after year. Years of neglect at our schools. Neglect that predate this administration," said Ms. Berry Benjamin, who was once the Deputy Superintendent of Schools during the Mapp administration. "Trust that we will get to the other side."

For some parents and teachers, Tuesday's event does not go nearly far enough. Parents have taken to social media to voice frustration with what they believe is a breakdown of timely communication with the public.

Idalia Dockery, a foreign language teacher, took to the C.A.H.S. steps after the press conference to call for teachers to be informed about changes at the school. "Do you see anybody here representing teachers?" she asked rhetorically.

"I love my job. I love teaching. I love what they are doing. But this meeting is only for news people? And what will they (news media) go back with? A bunch of words but not the truth?"

Ms. Dockery said the education bureaucrats must share information openly and regularly with the public, including teachers.

Tuesday was the first the public heard directly and in an open forum from Ms. Berry-Benjamin and others about the state of affairs at the schools. Even after the administration declared a state of emergency to expedite school repairs in the territory, the department was oddly silent.

On the subject of transparency about C.A.H.S. changes, Ms. Berry-Benjamin said the department has regularly scheduled updates for the public on matters of public importance. "Now, truth be told, a week prior to today we were coming to the public but because of the new findings ... we were developing our plans when information was released to the public. So the department did not feel the need at that time to come with a half story. We wanted to go back to the drawing board and come with the full story."

Ms. Berry Benjamin said she wanted the public to know that if the C.A.H.S. situation were an emergency, "the department would have come before you."

Asked if she could guarantee the public that the new school year will begin on-time in September, Ms. Berry Benjamin hedged. "Well I would love to tell you, 'yes schools will not be delayed.' But tomorrow if a new finding surfaces ... As it stands now, we are on target to open schools."

