

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Senator Sarauw Calls On D.O.E. To Delay Start Day Of C.A.H.S., Cancryn And Lockhart: 'They Are Not Truly Ready To Open'

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ST. THOMAS -- Before the opening of each school year, many teachers visit their assigned school to clean their respective classrooms. This sometimes includes a lot of work -- taking out garbage, dusting windows, cleaning floors. Yet imagine doing all of this cleaning work only to be reassigned to another school by the Dept. of Education.

This happened to at least one teacher in the St. Thomas-St. John District, while many others, according to Senator Janelle Sarauw, were reassigned at the last minute. It accentuates, according to the senator, the unpreparedness of the Department of

Education, at least with the Charlotte Amalie High School, the Addelita Cancryn Intermediate & Junior High School (formerly the Addelita Cancryn Junior High School), and the Lockhart Primary School (formerly the Lockhart Elementary School).

Ms. Sarauw toured the aforementioned along with the Joseph Sibilly Elementary School on Friday and found a number of issues at all of them. From a moldy and dirty door and the only freezer at Sibilly appearing as if it should be in the dump and not at a school facility, to garbage piled up at Lockhart Primary. There were also issues at Ulla F. Muller which the senator also toured. "With the open holes in the wall, all the lizards roll on in," she said of Muller. "Schools are struggling with a rodent issue."



Only freezer at Joseph Sibilly Elementary School, according to Sen. Janelle Sarauw



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After her tour on Friday, Ms. Sarauw said she would give the Dept. of Education until the weekend before commenting.

On Saturday, Ms. Sarauw, D.O.E. Chief Operations Officer Dionne Wells-Hedrington and three prisoners cleaned Lockhart Primary. "I believe the governor should delay the start of C.A.H.S., Cancryn and Lockhart" for three days, the senator said.



Addelita Cancryn Intermediate & Junior High before the Saturday cleanup

A number of pictures shared with the Consortium show the mess at many of the schools. They also show Ms. Sarauw helping with the cleaning. The senator's passion for education recently [hit the spotlight](#) after she assailed a VI Housing Authority official for failing to install working lights on basketball courts in St. Thomas housing communities. The lights, Ms. Sarauw said, had been in a state of disrepair for two years. During the lambasting, she highlighted the importance of education and the difference it made in her life. A day after, lights were installed on at least one of the basketball courts that previously lacked them.

The Department of Education during a press conference mid-August [detailed its plans for the 2019-2020 school year](#), announcing a myriad of changes in the St. Thomas-St. John District after engineers discovered “some structural damage” to Building A during a walk-through assessment.



Addelita Cancryn Intermediate & Junior High after the cleanup

During the press conference, the Consortium asked D.O.E. Commissioner Racquel Berry-Benjamin if she could guarantee the public that the new school year would begin on-time in September. "Well I would love to tell you, 'yes schools will not be delayed,'" she said. "But tomorrow if a new finding surfaces ... As it stands now, we are on target to open schools."

Ms. Sarauw, however, said at least three days of delay should be given to C.A.H.S., Cancryn and Lockhart.

"Administrators, teachers and support staff are performing herculean tasks at this stage in the game. They are indeed a precious natural resource. Given the latest developments and reshuffling of CAHS, Cancryn and Lockhart school there is still a bit of chaos and uncertainty. Ironically on Labor Day weekend, where we observe the social and economic achievements of workers, many of those union employees will be working through the holiday in order to prepare for Tuesday. But, I firmly believe that school should be delayed two - three days for those three schools in particular. They are truly not ready to open. If we rush the opening of school for those three schools, staff will begin the year disorganized, burnt out and stressed. The mental state of our professionals should be taken into account," Ms. Sarauw said.

As it currently stands, the Department of Education is slated to begin the school year on September 3, which is Tuesday. Calls placed to Cynthia Graham, the department's communications director seeking comment relative to the state of preparedness at C.A.H.S., Lockhart and Cancryn, were not returned at time of writing.

Feature Image: Sen. Janelle Sarauw cleaning Addelita Cancryn Intermediate & Junior High (formerly the Addelita Cancryn Junior High School) on Saturday.