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St. Croix Senior Students Plan Protest, Parents Seek Refunds After Rejecting Dept. of Education's Drive-Thru Graduation Plans

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ST. CROIX — Students of the St. Croix Educational Complex and the St. Croix Central High School will be joined by their parents and members of the community Saturday morning for a protest at Gov't House in Christiansted, after trying — to no avail — to convince the Dept. of Education's District of St. Croix leaders to abandon their plan of hosting drive-thru graduation events for this year's graduating class.

For a number of days this week students have been reaching out to the Consortium, furious that D.O.E. had planned to host drive-thru graduation ceremonies on St. Croix for seniors, while in St. Thomas, including at the Charlotte Amalie High School with its 240 graduating seniors, in-person, sit-down events are planned.

Asked about this decision, St. Croix Superintendent of Schools, Carlos McGregor, initially gave a vague response, telling the Consortium, "While following Covid-19 protocols, in looking at the plans submitted by the principals, as opposed to last year when graduations were 100 percent virtual, this year graduates will be able to walk across the stage and receive their diplomas with family members present. Speeches and congratulatory remarks will be prerecorded. Graduates receiving their diplomas will also be streamed live on the VIDE Facebook page."

Asked whether D.O.E. had abandoned its plan to host drive-thru graduation events for seniors on St. Croix, Mr. McGregor said, "No, parents will drive in with graduate and when arriving at the stage area, exit vehicle. Graduate will have name called, walk across the stage, receive diploma while parents below taking pictures and cheering. As graduate leaves the stage, graduate and family will then re-enter vehicle and exit."

Mr. McGregor said there appeared to be a belief that the graduates would not leave the vehicle, "but the plan was and is to have graduates leave the vehicle and walk across the stage."

Yet students and parents are well aware of the department's plans, and have expressed their displeasure with not only the drive-thru decision, but also that they were left out of the process, said students speaking to the Consortium, including Anthony Mardenborough Jr., a St. Croix Educational Complex senior.

Anthony said parents sought refunds from the department of funds provided as part of the graduations being hosted. Some questioned what D.O.E. would use the funds for. He said parents and students were left out of the decision-making process relative to the ceremonies, and that the department plans on allowing only two parents and a student in a vehicle as part of the drive-thru method.

"They tried to blame the Department of Health when we asked them since March in regards to how the in-person graduation will be successful," said Anthony.

Speaking of Charlotte Amalie High School, Anthony said, "The sad part about this is that one school has 240 students on St. Thomas but are having a sit-down graduation. How is that fair? Our class had less students and we have to have a drive-thru graduation."

He said there were concerns relative to traffic, gas, timing and other constraints posed by a drive-thru graduation ceremony, with well over a hundred cars at each event waiting as students receive their diploma. Both events on St. Croix are to take place on the grounds of the respective high schools.

"As some parents and students expressed, St. Croix has huge spaces of land, why we can't use the land to host the graduation," said Anthony, adding, "Students and parents are also requesting refunds for the inconsiderate decisions that were made without our opinions."

He added, "We also tried to voice our concerns; they just won't listen and eventually left with us remaining on the call."

"As always, we were given information late. We spoke to several government officials and individuals in the public about our disappointments in regards to the graduation."

The experience of a traditional graduation, whether high school or higher education, is one of the most memorable milestones for students and, in many cases, more so for parents. According to the Wall Street Journal, a number of schools on the U.S. mainland plan on hosting in-person, sit-down

graduation ceremonies for the classes of 2020 and 2021 this year. At Howard University, 2020 graduates will be welcomed back in May for a combined ceremony with the Class of 2021, [according to WSJ](#).

The WSJ article spoke of 2020 graduates eager for a redo. "After learning last month that there will be an in-person graduation for Colorado College's Class of 2020, Vi Nguyen decided to make the nine-hour drive with her mother and two younger siblings from Edmond, Okla., to Colorado Springs," reads the article.

The protest is planned today from 11:00 a.m. at Gov't House in Christiansted, and will last until 3:00 p.m.

The graduation events are planned for the following dates and times:

- The St. Croix Central High School on May 18 at 10:00 a.m.
- St. Croix Educational Complex High School on May 19 at 10:00 a.m.
- Ivanna Eurdora Kean graduation on May 20 at 1:00 p.m.
- Charlotte Amalie High School graduation on May 21 at 1:00 p.m.
- St. Croix Career and Technical Center graduation on May 17 10:00 a.m.
- Raphael O. Wheatley Skill Center & Adult Education graduation on June 4 at 2:00 p.m.
- St. Croix Adult Education Program on May 17 at 4:00 p.m.
- Adult Continuing Education Program on May 27 6:00 p.m

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