

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Dept. of Education Announces Merger of Arthur A. Richards School With Eulalie Rivera K-8 and John H. Woodson Jr. High

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**The Eulalie Rivera K-8 School**

The V.I. Dept. of Education announced Wednesday that the Arthur A. Richards school will merge with the Eulalie R. Rivera K-8 and John H. Woodson Jr. High schools for the 2021-2022 school year. The decision was announced Tuesday during virtual meetings held for parents of Arthur A. Richards K-8 School and Claude O. Markoe Elementary School.

The decision to merge Arthur Richards into the two schools, detailed by St. Croix District Superintendent Carlos McGregor, was due to the ongoing, long-standing air-quality issues at the Arthur Richards modular campus, which was constructed following the 2017 storms, said Mr. McGregor. D.O.E. said its Operations Division has been working closely with the original contractors hired to build the modular campus and other local agencies to resolve the issues.

According to the release, issued Wednesday, Mr. McGregor explained that the merger would not amount to the schools following a double-session schedule, which is defined as one school attending classes in the morning and the other school attending classes in the afternoon. Rather, the merger will afford all students to attend a full day of classes on the same campus, at the same time.

“It is clear that the occupancy of the Arthur Richards modular campus by our students, faculty and staff is potentially detrimental to their health,” he said. “This plan will allow students and employees to settle into a healthy and safe school environment, while we continue to rectify the situation at the current campus. Furthermore, the merger represents our commitment to ensuring the social, emotional, and academic well-being of the Arthur Richards family, and we ask for your understanding and support during this necessary transition.”

D.O.E. said district officials have also met with teachers, school administrators and union leaders to discuss the changes.

Below, the changes:

### **Arthur A. Richards K-8 School**

- Arthur A. Richards K-8 School will not be in operation for the 2021-2022 school year; the school will fully merge with Eulalie R. Rivera and John H. Woodson Jr. High schools
- Arthur Richards’ students entering Kindergarten through 6th grades in school year 2021-2022, will now attend Eulalie R. Rivera K-8 School; these students will be required to wear the Eulalie R. Rivera uniform
- Arthur Richards’ students entering 7th and 8th grades in school year 2021-2022, will now attend John. H. Woodson Jr. High School; these students will be required to wear the John H. Woodson Jr. High uniform
- Arthur Richards’ teachers, administrative staff, and other employees will be dispersed to Eulalie Rivera and Woodson campuses, as well as other schools throughout the district
- Funding has been secured from FEMA to rebuild the new Arthur A. Richards K-8 School on the grounds of the old Evelyn M. Williams Elementary School; the projected completion timeline is August 2024

### **Claude O. Markoe Elementary School**

- Sixth graders promoted from the Claude O. Markoe Elementary School who would normally attend Arthur A. Richards K-8 School for 7th grade in SY 2021-2022, will instead attend John H. Woodson Jr. High School; these students will be required to wear the Woodson uniform

- **IMPORTANT NOTE:** Claude O. Markoe Elementary School will continue to service students in grades PreK-6 at the school's Frederiksted location – no changes are being made to the operations of Markoe Elementary
- For school year 2022-2023, nine new classrooms are planned for construction on the Claude O. Markoe Elementary School campus; the school will then transition to Claude O. Markoe PreK-8 School

### **School Bus Transportation**

- Bus transportation to and from school will be provided for all students needing those services
- In keeping with CDC guidelines for social distancing, busing will include multiple trips from pick-up and drop-off locations

### **Class Size and Campus Occupancy with Merger**

#### **Arthur Richards to Eulalie Rivera**

- With the merger of K-6th grade students from Arthur Richards into the Eulalie Rivera K-8 School, the Rivera campus will be occupied by 618 students (the Rivera campus was built to accommodate 900 students)
- All class sizes will meet the collective bargaining agreement in place for teachers and will adhere to CDC guidelines of 3ft social distancing between student desks
- All safety protocols will remain in place – wearing of masks, regular sanitization of hands and desks, Plexiglas barriers around student and teacher desks

#### **Arthur Richards to John H. Woodson**

- With the merger of 7th and 8th grade students from Arthur Richards into the John H. Woodson Jr. High School, the Woodson campus will be occupied by 680 students (the Woodson campus was built to accommodate 1,300 students)
- All class sizes will meet the collective bargaining agreement in place for teachers and will adhere to CDC guidelines of 3ft social distancing between student desks
- All safety protocols will remain in place – wearing of masks, regular sanitization of hands and desks, Plexiglas barriers around student and teacher desks

During a question-and-answer segment, district leaders assured parents that every effort is being made to ensure the transition into the new school year is a seamless one, according to the release. They announced that all campuses would undergo a specialized deep cleaning, which will be conducted quarterly, going forward. Regular custodial services will continue throughout the school day, with additional staff added to support campus cleanliness.

When asked if parents would retain the option to have their children continue learning virtually, Mr. McGregor said while the district's desire is to have all students resume in-person learning in August, plans may change, based on health guidelines at that time.

"Some of this is very fluid," he said. "As we get closer to the start of the new school year and based on the guidance of the Department of Health, we will make those final decisions. But, currently, the goal is to have all of our students back onto our school campuses for the new school year."

D.O.E. said parents will be provided additional information during orientation at the two schools before classes begin in August.

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