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Amid Challenges, Triumph Prevails: Educational Complex VIP Class Graduates with Resilient Spirit

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182 students received their diplomas during the St. Croix Educational Complex 2023 Graduation Ceremony on Wednesday, May 17, 2023. By. DEAR PRODUCTIONS

A sea of blue flooded the auditorium yesterday as St. Croix Educational Complex High School celebrated the accomplishments of its graduating class of 2023, fondly recognized as the Vivacious, Intuitive, Perseverant (VIP) cohort.

Principal Rodney Moorehead commended the graduates — 182 strong — for their dedication. His message revolved around the theme of making choices that would make their parents proud, comments that would be cast in an ironic light later in the program. He further acknowledged the relentless efforts of his administrative team and urged the class to continue "to shine and bleed

blue as you make a positive change in the world."

Governor Albert Bryan Jr. addressed the jubilant graduates, emphasizing the importance of family, education, faith, and the courage to seek help. He refuted the common perception of success being solely about financial wealth and instead underscored the value of a loving support system, a thirst for learning, and spiritual guidance. To illustrate the power of taking initiative, he announced that a student who had written to him expressing a desire to work in his office during the summer would be granted the opportunity. "Over five years, he's the only one that ever wrote me an email and took me up on the offer," Mr. Bryan noted.

Salutatorian Kristle Casey captured the collective spirit of resilience that characterized the VIP class, highlighting the struggles the students faced amid the Covid-19 pandemic. "Humans by nature are social creatures. And the idea of us having to isolate and distance ourselves in order to survive is crazy. Even me – I consider myself to be very introverted at times – I really felt the absence of people around me," Casey noted. Acknowledging the significant impact on mental health and the resulting spike in violence, Casey requested a moment of silence to remember adolescents lost to such tragedies. Despite the hardships, the 18-year-old celebrated the fact that the class had prevailed and managed to have an unforgettable senior year. Casey will be attending the University of the Virgin Islands majoring in criminal justice, aspiring to become a detective.

Valedictorian Lisandra Mayapin reminisced about the journey through high school, which was far from the glamor depicted in movies. She praised the school's administration and faculty for their unending support and inspiration. She cautioned her fellow graduates not to compare themselves to others as they continue along their individual life paths. "The worst thing we can do is look at someone else's road and wonder why we aren't as far as them or why we aren't as good as them. We each have to master our own journey," Ms. Mayapin said. She also encouraged introspection and self-awareness among her cohort of young Virgin Islanders. "We also have to figure out who we are so that we can figure out what we want to do for our community," Mayapin advised. Like Casey, Mayapin will also be attending the University of the Virgin Islands but with a focus on nursing, intending she says, to contribute to the betterment of the local healthcare system.

In the riveting keynote address by Tafari Nelson, he deeply resonated with the students, providing valuable insight into his personal experiences. He emphasized that one's academic journey is seldom a straight path but a winding road, fraught with unique challenges and varying degrees of comfort and discomfort.

Nelson opened by describing his early school years when academics came effortlessly to him, leading to an inflated sense of self-confidence. He recounted how he slipped into a pattern of complacency, finding a false comfort zone that, unfortunately, compromised his maximum potential.

His narrative took an intriguing turn when he discussed his transition from high school to the University of the Virgin Islands. Nelson, who was once an all-A student, candidly shared how he neglected his classes, focusing on frivolities like socialization and romance. However, he received a reality check when his second-semester grades arrived, revealing a decline due to a lack of class attendance. This was a wake-up call for Nelson — son of former Senator Positive Nelson — prompting him to begin reading syllabi thoroughly and understanding that there was more to achieving good grades than merely acing exams.

Life at UVI became challenging by the third year. The classes were difficult, and for the first time, Nelson found himself in an unfamiliar and uncomfortable situation. However, he was lucky to

have a supportive group of classmates who banded together for tests, reviews, and challenging assignments. Yet, the real test came when he transferred to the University of Florida. The cultural shock, academic difficulties, and his struggles with studying techniques took a toll on his mental health. Nonetheless, he pushed through these difficulties and eventually found a way to navigate the turbulent waters.

"It is through our failures that we learn our greatest lessons and grow as individuals," said Nelson, Complex's salutatorian of the graduating class of 2013. Now working as a mechanical engineer at the V.I. Port Authority, he encouraged students to step out of their comfort zones. Noting how his complacency had almost jeopardized his academic journey, he urged students to venture into uncharted territories, even if they seem challenging initially.

The congratulatory mood was momentarily dampened shortly after the graduates had finished crossing the stage to receive their diplomas. Although cameras broadcasting the streaming ceremony did not capture the moment, video taken by someone attending the graduation and circulated on social media showed a fistfight breaking out off to one side, interrupting the ceremony.

As uniformed personnel and other bystanders tried to break up the scuffle, Principal Moorhead urged graduates not to get distracted from the significance of the day. "Regardless of what is happening at this point, we cannot lose the focus for why we are here today," he cautioned. The ceremony continued with final remarks shortly afterward. There has been no official report from the V.I. Police Department providing details about scuffle, but it appears to have involved several adults against security personnel and law enforcement.

Despite the disruption, the graduating VIP class of 2023 showed their resilient spirit and their ability to triumph in the face of adversity is a testament to their spirit. As these graduates embark on the next chapter of their lives, they carry with them the lessons of their high school journey – including the poignant one delivered on their final day at St. Croix Educational Complex – but also they move ahead, eyes bright with dreams of their future.