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Children First: Let's Make St. John's Dream School a Reality

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Dear Friends, the planned land swap of Whistling Cay for the Catherineberg Estate parcel negotiations are now complete. The next steps are approval by the Virgin Islands Legislature and the official signing of the documents. This will mark the end of a decades long pursuit of building a new public school for St John. The obstacles were many, the public hearings numerous, and the public's patience has worn thin.

No one is against the new school, everyone understands the need for it, and the time has come to do it! The aging condition and in town location of the old Julius E Sprauve school drove the many years of negotiations with the National Park for school land, however, they were never able to produce results. The destruction to the Sprauve School by Irma and Maria's storms of five years ago made it imperative to conclude negotiations.

Now, finally after several years of open transparent negotiations a deal has been struck, and by many measures a fair one. To add to the optimism of finally getting the land secured, the Federal Government through FEMA has agreed to fund \$121,000,000. toward its design and construction. The land, the need, the money are now finally in alignment.

The decision to move forward now is in the best interest of the children, the parents, and the community. The temporary status and the current location of the Sprauve School trailers are not suitable nor acceptable for educating children. This is the number one priority of St John. If we do not act now we will have a whole generation of current Sprauve students educated in aging trailers, with no facilities for recreation, sports, assemblies, or school events.

I ask in this plea to make the Children First! Do not let us get sidetracked by grievances with the National Park, political maneuvering, disruptive voices, or personal vendettas. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to make the decades long dream of St John families a reality and end the long daily commutes to St Thomas for their high school age children. St John parents and students deserve to have their own school with state of the art facilities in a quiet mid-island location. It will be a place for all the community and parents to gather for school events, sports, and recreation. A school the children can be proud of, one that shows them they are important and valued.

I ask you to please make your voices heard, whether you have children or not, whether you are from here or there, local or immigrant, rich or poor, what matters is that you care. When the Legislature meets soon they will decide to support the Swap or not, let them know you support Children First, and to approve the land swap.

Submitted Wednesday by: Andy Rutnik.