

COMMITTEE UPDATED ON THE STATUS OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN LIEU OF SY 2018-2019

Date : August 8, 2018

St. Thomas – The Committee of Education, Youth, and Recreation, chaired by Sen. Jean Forde, held a meeting at the Capitol Building on Tuesday, to receive testimony from officials of the V.I. Department of Education (VIDE), on the status of public schools in preparation for School Year 2018-2019.

“We know that the beginning of the school year is rapidly approaching. Therefore, we want enlightenment on the conditions of the schools and to find solutions if necessary,” said Sen. Forde.

Sharon McCollum, Ph.D., Commissioner of VIDE shared the update. “We established a very aggressive schedule in our efforts to meet SY 2018-2019 opening deadline. To date, FEMA project worksheets totaling \$117,941,204 for the Temporary Facilities Project is obligated.”

Thus far, negotiations for temporary and permanent repairs to the schools are ongoing. Commissioner McCollum stated that there are nine schools in the St. Thomas-St. John District that will have temporary repairs in preparation for full-session for the SY 2018-2019. On St. Croix District, temporary maintenance began in seven schools. Additionally, VIDE received \$35,000,00 from insurance proceeds allocated by Governor Mapp through the Department of Property and Procurement to fund temporary repairs and temporary facility projects in conjunction with project worksheets approved by FEMA.

Furthermore, Public Schools were combined for a smooth transition from split-session to a full-session. On the St. Thomas-St. John District: a percentage of Glady’s Abraham students and Lockhart Elementary, a portion of Glady’s Abraham students and Ulla F. Muller Elementary School, a percentage of E. Benjamin Oliver students and Joseph Gomez Elementary School students and a percentage of E. Benjamin Oliver students with Yvonne Milliner-Bowsky Elementary School. On the St. Croix District Elena Christian and John Woodson Junior High Schools are combined. Although consolidation was necessary for those schools, there will be thirteen public schools receiving modular and sprung units in preparation for the full session for SY 2018-2019.

However, education leaders Ruby Simmonds Esannason, Carmen Howell, and Glenn Davis expressed opposition to the establishment of 56 modular classrooms on the athletic field and the tennis court at Charlotte Amalie High School stating that athletic programs are in jeopardy.

“This calculated scheme undermines the future of the young athletes,” said Davis. Howell stated that it threatens the critical standard for continued accreditation for the Health and Safety of students because one of the purposes of the field is to function as a viable evacuation site that

allows ongoing drills in anticipation of emergencies. “The students will be placed in danger every time a heavy rain causes flooding on the fields,” added Esannason.

Sen. Forde stated that these are legitimate concerns. “However, authorities expressed that it is simply too late. If modular units are relocated, then in the commencement of the upcoming school year classrooms will not be ready on time, and split sessions will continue. The goal is to return students to full-session while repairing permanent school structures.”

Sen. Tregenza Roach said, “These concerns are from people with vast experience in the Education. I hope that the issues raised will not be an even bigger problem later.”

Separately, senators voted to hold in committee: Bill No. 32-0014-An Act amending Title 17 Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 9, section 86 relating to school attendance, absenteeism, and parental responsibility; and Bill No. 32-0203-An Act amending Title 17, Virgin Islands Code, Chapter 3 relating to the permanent closure of public schools.

Senators present are Jean Forde, Kurt Vialet, Novelle Francis, Kurt Vialet, Tregenza Roach, Neville James, and Janelle Sarauw. PHOTOS: <http://www.legvi.org/committeemeetings/Media/>

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