

RE: Committee on Education and Workforce Development Meeting

Attn: Senator Marise C. James, Esq.,  
Chairperson  
3022 Est. Golden Rock  
Christiansted, St.Croix USVI 00820

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Good Day, Honorable Marise James, Esq., Chairperson James, and Members of the Committee on Education and Workforce Development.

My name is Maqueda Noorhassan, an extremely proud parent of a 7th grader who currently attends the John H. Woodson Jr. High School. The reason why I am submitting this testimony before you is concerning the health, wellness, and safety of my daughter, fellow students, and the staff at JHW who is temporarily placed at the St. Croix Central High School as of Wednesday, November 8, 2023. Based on my observation on said date November 8, 2023, I noticed and observed some things that include the following.

Due to no prior orientation for parents or students, it was unclear what to do and where to go. (Where was the temporary office for the principal, administrative staff, and counselors?) At the designated area at the main gate entrance at CHS where the JHW students were supposed to wait to be called to go to class, it had a septic smell/scent. After meeting with the Asst. Principal, she directed me to the 400-wing where my daughter will be having classes. I noticed several things onsite that need to be brought to the Dept of Education's attention along with the principal of JHW.

- Wood and debris near the courtyard near the 400-wing
- Steel exposed in the courtyard near a cement covering.
- There is an opening in the ground near the 400-wing directly across from the courtyard about 2-3 inches deep (unsafe)
- The girls's Bathroom near the 400-wing and 200-wing there was no soap, and NO wall/switch plates on the light switch (safety hazard)
- The AC unit near the stage of the CHS cafeteria needs to be cleaned. You can visually see. (how healthy is that)
- The ceiling tiles in the CHS cafeteria are missing, wet, or have dust particles on them. (how safe and healthy is that)
- The CHS cafeteria leaks with excessive rain through the window boarded up near the stage to the right.
- The CHS cafeteria has a square opening that gives you access to both bathrooms for the boys and girls. (no privacy and unsafe)
- In classroom 901 at Central High School there are about five or more extension cords running in the classroom to accommodate the fans to produce air and numerous power strips as well. (in my opinion this is not only unsafe, but a fire hazard)

Also, with all due respect, I have much more concerns about the health and safety well-being at the temporary learning location at St. Croix Central High School for my daughter, the John H. Woodson Jr. High School staff, and students.

1. Temporary Entrance and Exit Plan for Drop Off/Pick Up for JHW Students
2. If inclement weather is expected on the island, what is the temporary plan for where students are supposed to gather for drop-off and pick-up stations?
3. Since the Immediate Release from the Dept. of Education issued on November 3, 2023, parents have not been notified of a proper orientation at least to tour this temporary school setting for students. As a result, parents are unaware of where the office for the principal, staff, and counselors are.
4. Why are gym classes for JHW students expected to be held in the cafeteria at CHS and not in the gymnasium? If CHS is already dismissed why cannot the JHW PE teachers and students utilize the Gym? In my opinion, it is a health and safety hazard.
5. When and if classes are held in the courtyard, it is swampy and is filled with mosquitoes.
6. Termites/red ants are reportedly the JHW students/parents dropping on students in the courtyard and the temporary waiting area (near the main gate) by the JHW students/parents. Can that be looked into?
7. Can some type of gravel or mulch be placed in the areas that are muddy and cause difficulty in walking to class? (in the waiting area by the main gate and courtyard)
8. With the current advisory with the lead and copper situation found in the potable water and the public is advised not to ingest or cook with the water, does the school have enough water to supply the JHW school daily at their temporary setting at the CHS campus for cooking and consumption?
9. Where is the lunch being prepared for the JHW Jr. High Students?
10. The Hybrid schedule for (A/B Days), indicates the students break off from lunch from 12:20 pm - to 12:40 pm and then students are expected to attend 4th period at exactly 12:40 pm - 1:40 pm, how are the students taking the school lunch be given lunch and to eat lunch? Is it a grab-and-go?
11. The infrastructure of the music building is rotten and rusty. Looks as though any minute the stairs can collapse. (please look into this matter)
12. The CHS cafeteria entrance near the stage has a board up on the window. It leaked and had excess water on the floor. At that time the A/C wasn't working on Wednesday, November 8, 2023.
13. In case of an emergency, how does a parent or guardian contact the JHW Jr. High School Staff? Do they have full or temporary access to the CHS main office?
14. Emails are currently sent out, for the "21st Century Afterschool Program Gr:7 that is supposed to take effect from 3:30-5:30 pm for the JHW Jr. High School Students, how will the plan be executed? Although it will be online until an in-person site can be conducted for parents to pick up students or students that will have to take the bus is this going to be possible?
15. What is the mandatory learning hours per week or month for the students of the Virgin Islands? (According to the law for in-person learning only versus Virtual learning)
16. What is the tentative plan for the John H. Woodson Jr. High School?

17. How long is the expectancy of this temporary Hybrid Schedule?
18. Since the 30-day plan to complete certain goals for all schools on St. Croix including CHS and JHW is now subject to change-- "Due to Delays in the STX School Repairs After Ambitious 30-Day Completion Plan Meets Roadblocks" effective November 09, 2023 (according to the Dept. of Education) **IN MY OPINION THE SCHOOLS ARE CURRENTLY UNSAFE AND ISN'T FIT FOR PROPER IN-PERSON LEARNING.**
19. What is the estimated timeline to do most repairs for schools currently as of November 16, 2023? Are projects going to just get extended with no type of solutions/deadlines and considerations for the physical, mental, and emotional state of our staff and students?

According to the Board of Education Distant Learning Policies, it indicated in Sec. 41-7 "ACCESS" Paragraph two that "Distance Learning shall be available and accessible for all students who are unable to participate in-person learning due to reasons beyond their control, including but not limited to health and family related issues, extended emergencies, disasters, and school closures. Distance learning shall also be available and accessible when appropriate for credit recovery, academic remediation, reinforcement, and acceleration when approved by the Commissioner or designee". Also, according to The VIBE Distance Learning Policy Sec. 41-14 "Communication with Students and Parents" It states "At all times, department personnel shall exercise their best professional judgment and act with integrity and concern for their students".

At this time this summarizes most of my concerns for not only my daughter attending the JHW Jr. High School but for the priority of the health, well-being, and safety of the administrative staff and other students. With most of these concerns, it is my opinion that the Dept. of Education reconsider this hybrid plan and have the JHW staff and students remain instructional learning "virtually" until these problems are addressed and solved. To The Dept. of Education this temporary placement at CHS in my opinion, is an Education and Environmental Neglect. Please reconsider a better plan to accommodate parents/guardians, students, and the staff at the John H. Woodson Jr. High School. Who feels it knows it. I leave with this quote from Bob Marley, "Get Up, Stand Up, Stand Up for Your Rights".

Thank you for allowing me to testify and I am now available for any questions.

Respectfully,  
Maqueda Noorhassan