

## Proposed Relocation of Woodson Students to Eulalie Rivera Sparks Capacity and Facility Concerns

Board members pressed for transparency on enrollment figures, waiver policies and facility readiness, warning that relocating middle school students to a campus designed for elementary grades may require structural upgrades not yet confirmed.

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The Eulalie Rivera K-8 School on St. Croix. By. V.I. CONSORTIUM.

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The proposed relocation of John H. Woodson Jr. High School students and the wider redistricting effort underway in the territory drew concern Friday from members of the V.I. Board of Education, who questioned whether the plans are practical and adequately communicated.

During an emergency meeting, board members discussed reports from recent school visits on St. Croix indicating that some officials believe moving Woodson students to Eulalie Rivera K-8 would be inappropriate. Board member Winona Hendricks said that school representatives felt the receiving campus lacked facilities necessary to support Woodson students' involvement in athletics and community activities. "They felt that there was no gymnasium there or nothing to accommodate their strong involvement with sports and other community activities," she said.

Board member Mary Moorhead raised additional concerns about the condition and capacity of the Eulalie Rivera campus. Noting that "Eulalie Rivera school enrollment is quite high," and that the campus "is not of the best condition," she questioned how the facility would absorb additional middle school students. "Technically, there's no cafeteria, there's no auditorium," she said. "There's so many things that are lacking at Eulalie Rivera that to really...relocate the students of the Woodson school to that facility would be sort of ridiculous to my determination," she concluded.

Board member Abigail Hendricks Cagan echoed that sentiment. "Trying to put middle schoolers into a school that was designed for elementary children...it just doesn't fit," she said.

Board Chair Kyza Callwood acknowledged that Education Commissioner Dionne Wells-Hedington recently told lawmakers that Eulalie Rivera has sufficient capacity to accommodate additional students. The campus "had more than sufficient capacity, and it includes some of the largest instructional spaces in the district," he said, summarizing her remarks. However, he noted that the board still needs "to get the information from the coordinators of the school operation to determine why the decision was made and how we could further address it."

Timing was also raised as a concern. Ms. Hendricks questioned whether the Department of Education could make the necessary upgrades before the start of the next academic year in August. "Are we going to have any type of gymnasium placed there? Are we going to address the situation with the kitchen...are they going to do bathroom upgrades?" she asked.

Board member Emanuella Perez-Cassius expressed frustration with what she described as a lack of communication from the Department of Education. "It does not feel inclusive," she said. "The board is clueless to what is happening or how these decisions are made." Ms. Hendricks Cagan added that the Bureau of School Maintenance and Construction "seem to have not been working together of late," and said the board should receive concrete answers during a scheduled meeting with the commissioner later this month. "I don't want to hear that we're going to get back to you," she said.

A motion to formally object to the relocation of Woodson students to Eulalie Rivera K-8 was introduced but ultimately voted down. A majority of members preferred to wait until the March 12 meeting with Department of Education officials before taking a definitive position.

Beyond the Woodson relocation, board members also addressed the broader redistricting plan. They urged early notification for parents to allow adequate preparation for the upcoming school year. Ms. Hendricks said several factors must be considered when reassigning students. "Based on...the attendance data, based on location of schools, based on the availability of uniforms, we need to discuss this matter," she said.

"When we're redistricting, we need to make sure that we have a lot of students at schools who need different services. If you send me away from the closest place for me to get the service, that's another issue," she continued, emphasizing that the decision on redistricting "isn't just are you living in the district."

Dr. Callwood agreed that outstanding questions remain, including how many students will be affected and whether waivers will be granted. Those issues are expected to be addressed when education officials appear before the board in mid-March.

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