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TERRITORY'S TEACHERS' UNIONS RATIFY TWO-YEAR CONTRACT

The agreement represents a significant step forward in teachers' long-awaited pay increases

ST. THOMAS, USVI – The St. Croix and St. Thomas – St. John Federation of Teachers, AFT Locals 1825 and 1826, respectively, ratified a two-year contract with the Government of the Virgin Islands on October 12, which addresses the pay schedule for Department of Education public-school teachers based on length of time served and years of experience.

The contract has been forwarded to Government House for Governor Mapp's signature. Once signed, union members will see a significant salary increase, as the agreement brings them closer to years of service pay adjustments that had been withheld by the V. I. Government. Currently, many school employees are behind up to nine years on the salary schedule.

"The agreement members ratified moves them a little closer to where they should be," said Rosa Soto-Thomas, chief union negotiator and president of the St. Croix Federation of Teachers.

The Territory's Chief Negotiator Attorney Natalie Tang-How expressed her satisfaction with the ratification that came Friday evening.

"It's been a long and challenging process, but perseverance prevailed and I'm happy for all of the AFT members, to include teachers, support staff and paraprofessionals," she said. "They stayed the course and the government has done its part to preserve the integrity of the process, while ensuring higher wages and a better quality of life for the people."

Tang-How also congratulated AFT presidents Rosa Soto-Thomas and Carol Callwood for their efforts.

Education Commissioner Dr. Sharon Ann McCollum, a long-time advocate of pay raises for teachers, is pleased negotiations were successful and union members voted to accept the collective bargaining agreement.

“Congratulations to the unions for reaching an agreement that would provide better wages for our educators,” she said. “It was long fought, but worth it. This I know would give an added boost of morale to our teachers. We still have a long way to go but this is a step in the right direction.”

Commissioner McCollum also thanked all parties involved in the lengthy negotiation process, including the Department of Education’s legal team, Attorney Tang How and the Office of Collective Bargaining, and the St. Croix and St. Thomas – St. John Federation of Teachers.

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