

[The Pointer Sisters' "Yes We Can Can" plays]

Now's the time for all good men
to get together with one
another.

We got to iron out our problems
and iron out our quarrels and
try to live as brothers.

And try to find peace within
without stepping on one another.
And do respect the women of the
world.

Remember you all have mothers.
We got to make this land a
better land than the world in
which we live.

And we got to help each man be a
better man with the kindness
that we give.

I know we can make it.

I know that we can.

I know darn well we can work it
out.

Oh, yes, we can.

I know we can can.

Yes, we can can.

Why can't we?

If we wanna, yes, we can can.

I know we can make it work.

>> Good morning, Virgin Islands.

This is "Ability Radio -- You
and Your Life."

It's a beautiful morning over
here by Market Square.

Come out and get some of that
ginger juice over there, and we
have a peaceful Atlantic as we
go in through this hurricane
season.

And for a lot of parents, and
this goes for a lot of children,
looking for that next week.

School's about to open.

Yeah.

I always remember those days.

Sometimes it was a dread of
going back to school, and
sometimes I was happy to go back
'cause I might see that little
sweetheart that I hadn't seen
since last May.

So, again, what we're doing this
morning is we have a guest, one
of the school administrators

which we deal with at the Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands on a regular basis is Ms...

>> Dr. Renee Charleswell.

>> Dr. Renee Charleswell, Special Ed State Administrator, and that way we'll have a full umbrella of what's going on and what your lead-in is to the issues starting with the school. We also may have someone else that's going to join us in a little bit, but I would like to go ahead, and, Dr. Charleswell, go ahead and explain what your programs are.

>> So, hello, listening audience.

My name is Dr. Renee Charleswell.

I am the State Director of Special Education, or what some people refer to as the Territorial Director of Special Education, and in my role, I oversee -- my office oversees -- the district offices.

We ensure that the regulations of IDEA are carried out and followed through so that students are receiving, indeed, what their IEPs stipulate.

>> Okay, and when we say IEP, does that refer to the Individual Education Plans?

>> Yes.

>> And that relates to programs and services for a child or student with a disability.

Is that correct?

>> That's correct.

>> And how does that all play in with the overall works of the school system?

Like, you're the state.

Is there another aspect with regard to delivery of educational services?

>> Yes. The district offices -- we have two district offices, one in the St. Thomas/St. John District and the St. Croix District.

And the district offices are the ones that actually develop the IEPs.

They do the evaluations to ensure that students are, in fact, receiving or assigned the resources and supports that are needed, so that IEPs are developed on the district level and is developed with a team of professionals as well as the child's parents and sometimes the student.

And once the IEP is developed, it is executed in the classroom.

>> Okay. And that's carried out by the teachers?

>> That's correct.

>> And how about related services?

>> And related services -- if a student is in need of related services, that, too, is carried out in a classroom by related-services personnel, such as a speech therapist or an occupational therapist and someone that has that specialized field that will work directly with the student.

>> Okay. Can you break it down, districtwise, who comes after you with regard to delivering those services?

>> Districtwise, we start, like I said, with district offices.

We have two district directors. In the St. Thomas/St. John District, we have Sheryl Serano-Griffith.

In the St. Croix District, we have Lyrhea Bryan-Heyliger.

We also have supervisors that work to develop the IEPs that work closely with the schools to ensure that these IEPs are developed, so we have -- from the directors, we have the supervisors, and then down to the related-service personnel and teachers.

>> Okay. And in regard to identification of children who may need these services, how

does that operate?

>> So, in terms of identification, there are several ways.

It may be a situation where a teacher in a school may realize that a student may need more support than it's actually giving in a general-ed curriculum.

It may be a parent concerned, where a parent realizes that, "My child may need more services."

And the district offices, as well, put out child-find announcements, and once a child is recognized or suspected of having a disability, this child can be evaluated in our district offices, and that determines whether that child is eligible for special-education services.

But I want to also stress that students with disability are first general-education students.

What they receive is a service to our program.

So, first and foremost, they often start off in the general-education setting, and support in most cases are given to students in that setting.

The majority of our students that have IEPs actually sit within the general-education setting.

>> Okay, and when you mention general-education setting, as opposed to what?

>> As opposed to a self-contained classroom which would be a student in a classroom that's receiving strictly special-education services.

>> Okay.

>> All their needs are being met within that self-contained classroom.

>> Okay. Now, parents are a very important element in regard to delivery of services, and one of

the things that's always been, which I think you're addressing now, is the issue of data and information as to what is going on in the schools and how can the schools give better services to the children.

What takes place with regard to the Virgin Islands regarding that data and data collection?

>> Okay. So, the State Office of Special Education -- everything that we do is driven by data, inclusive of training, the special trainings.

And the trainings and professional development -- we actually create and develop these trainings through the data that we collect.

Now, the State Office is responsible --

Like I mentioned before, we oversee, we have the federal oversight of, special education. And we have oversight over 17 areas within special education, ranging from graduation, assessment, dropout, evaluation, due process, whole-school outcomes, and we actually use the data that we gather.

We monitor the districts, and we use that data to develop whatever specific technical assistance teachers or administrators or even the district offices' personnel would require.

So, the data drives exactly what we do.

We collect data on all these indicators, 17 of them, and we monitor annually and collect that data.

That seems to drive what we do in terms of support for all the schools and our personnel.

>> And now how are the parents involved in this data collection?

>> One of the indicators that I mentioned is our parent-satisfaction survey.

That's an annual requirement by the Office of Special Education Programs, OSEP, that we collect this data where we survey parents annually.

And we don't pool parents.

All our technicians speak to every parent that has a child with an IEP.

Now, there are times where we have incorrect phone numbers or we don't have updated phone numbers.

Some parents refuse to do the survey for various reasons.

But our goal is to talk and target every parent that has a child with an IEP, and in doing so, they provide feedback to us to improve services -- you know, the areas that are of most concern today.

>> Okay. So, parents really have to really participate if they want an increase or enhancement of the services, correct?

>> That's correct.

That's correct.

>> And who goes about collecting the data?

>> Okay. So, the State Office -- we contract with the University of the Virgin Islands Eastern Caribbean Center, and they have been the one collecting this data.

They hire interviewers.

We provide the contact information for them, and they reach out to parents, and it's not a one-time --

If they're not able to get a parent for whatever reason, they have a system where they try several times to get in contact with that parent, because parent information is important.

We need to know what's taken place.

And in most instances, the parents have that information, and we need to know what we have to do to increase that support to make sure that these students

have positive outcomes.

>> All right.

Are the teachers also informing the parents that this is something that is a requirement of the Department of Education?

>> Yes, and what we also do -- we send out announcements, so it's on our website when the survey's taking place.

We also have a public announcement of the survey where we actually discuss the data that's collected through this survey, and the next public announcement of the survey will take place in the month of September, when the results of the most recent survey would be shared with the general public.

Everyone is invited.

We don't have an exact date yet. Usually the university sets that date, but it's going to be out in the media as to when that will take place.

>> Okay. Do you have a location where parents can keep an ear out for the --

>> Usually it takes place at the university, sometimes at the ECC building, but I'm not sure this year where they're gonna keep it.

>> All right.

And with regard to incorporating what goes on in special ed, how are the students incorporated into the general population?

>> Like I mentioned before, they start out in the general population.

They are general students first, and if they are such that there's a need where they need our support, they have been identified as a student with a disability, the student -- the goal is to look at the least restrictive environment, and in looking at the least restrictive environment, we then are able to place students with the services that they need.

In most instances, services takes place within that general-education environment.

>> And one of the things we talked about a little bit was the identification.

Who should be involved in the identification process so that parents have an idea that not only they can report it but who else should be involved in it?

>> The teacher plays an instrumental role in the identification process.

They actually are the ones that collect the data in terms of students' progress in a classroom, and it takes place over several months.

They use work samples, and they're able to provide information on the students' strength and weaknesses, along with the school counselor, and this information, like I said --

You know, once you suspect a student has a disability, it's no longer just saying, "Well, the student failed one test, they failed two tests," but if you're seeing that this student is consistent in not achieving success, then, you know, teachers have a duty to ensure that this information gets to the Special Education District Office, where they can actually start a process of evaluating the student.

>> Okay.

What we have today also is the Commissioner of Education, Ms. Sharon McCollum, and good morning.

>> Good morning.

Good morning to you and to the listening audience.

>> Thank you for coming.

>> Thank you.

I'm happy to be here.

>> Well, it's been a rough year for you, to say the least.

>> There's going to be a continuation, so to speak.

I'm on the front page of the "Daily" this morning.

>> Oh, I haven't seen it this morning.

Yes.

>> We are feverishly preparing for the opening of school.

>> Okay.

Well, do you want to give, like, the State of the Education statement today to give a view?

>> Well, I spent the week in St. Croix last week, got back last night.

The contractors are aggressively working over there, just as they are over here.

The six schools that were shuttered were turned over to us this week, that being Pearl B. Larsen, Lew Muckle, Eulalie River, Henderson, Woodson -- Woodson still has work still ongoing there in the building -- and there's one I'm not recalling.

Alfredo Andrews.

Work is going on in terms of building under AECOM, which is the company that is putting in the modulars, that is ongoing.

They're also installing Sprung shelters which are the large buildings that will replace the cafeterias and the gymnasiums.

What the community needs to be mindful of is the fact that this is temporary work.

We have not gotten to the permanent stage.

We must go through permanent after temporary.

We have to follow the FEMA guidelines.

So, they will not be coming in to brand-new schools.

The school buildings will be clean, they will be environmentally safe, and I'll use something as simple as painting the walls.

FEMA considers painting as permanent work, so the walls have been cleaned.

They have been wiped twice, as well as all of the furniture, with an environmentally safe product that kills mold, mildew, also is hospital-grade, and kills viruses as well as any evidence of HIV.

It is a chemical --

I don't want to use the word "chemical."

It is a product that is used in hospitals.

We are able to replace ceiling tiles because that's an environmental issue.

We're able to replace air conditioners -- again, an environmental issue.

And when you look at floor tiles, in many cases, those that we've had to replace, we cannot put down the permanent tiles.

We have to put down the peel-and-stick tile.

We have to adhere to the FEMA guidelines, which are very, very strict.

We are going to be opening.

We will be welcoming our students back starting the day after Labor Day.

There will be some hiccups.

The community needs to be prepared for that.

Work will be ongoing after the students come in.

At the end of the day, the contractors will come in, weekends, so we are an ongoing process.

We're a work in progress.

But the most important thing, I would say, is our students will be returning to a full school day.

They will not be on double session.

>> Yay!

>> Yay!

[Both laugh]

>> I'm sure the schoolchildren appreciate it, the parents...

>> The parents, everyone.

>> ...appreciate it.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> And it works out well for the community.

Are there other sort of curriculum changes or anything of that nature?

'Cause we talked about bricks and mortar.

What about the actual delivery of educational services?

>> I think once we are up to full speed, everything is in place, delivery of educational services will be better, and what I'm anticipating is that the teachers are going to be in a bit of a competition or jealousy mode.

The modulars are very, very nice, and that will be the brand-new effect, so to speak -- brand-new classrooms for those teachers and those students, brand-new furniture, new computers, new textbooks, new everything, fully air-conditioned with individual air units so they can adjust the temperature.

I don't foresee any dramatic changes in curriculum or delivery of services at all.

>> Okay. Well, one of the things that I always thought about after the hurricane stuff --

"Out of chaos comes opportunity."

>> Absolutely.

>> And how do you foresee, visionwise, how Virgin Islanders and the educational community can take this opportunity to go forward and maybe create some different things?

>> The hurricane, or hurricanes, were catastrophic events, but, as you have said, out of every dark cloud or in every dark cloud, there's a silver lining.

This is giving us an opportunity to build new schools, to redesign the Department of Education.

When this administration came

in, we knew we needed new schools.

There was no doubt about that. The issue was, "How are we going to pay for it?"

And through this chaos, through this disaster, we now have the funds to do that.

The change in the Stafford Act not only allows us the opportunity to build new schools but to also do the mitigation work in those schools that will remain in regards to what we call "deferred maintenance."

We have a huge amount of maintenance that was not done for years, which is termed "deferred maintenance."

So, at the end of all of this, we literally are going to have a new Department of Education. The Department of Education has over 3 million square feet of property in the three islands, and all of this will be addressed, not only the schools, which we seem to talk about, or focus, but our buildings, as well.

We lost the Curriculum Center here.

The headquarters building in St. Croix is severely damaged. Employees are still displaced over there.

All of these facilities will be repaired, including the headquarters where the State Offices are here, downtown St. Thomas.

But more than the buildings, we are going to be organizing a Community Advisory Group.

We are also going to be hiring -- we will be putting the RFP out -- for professionals to come in and guide us through the process, pretty much like what was done in Orleans Parish.

We need to design a new curriculum.

We need to let education be the lead agency in changing the

territory.

As Nelson Mandela said,
"Education is the weapon that
will change a nation."

We need to look at creating a
dual-curriculum track for those
that are college-bound or and
then for those that will be in
the career- and
technical-education areas.

Once we get a clear vision and
definition of what our new
curriculum will look like, that
will help us guide the design of
the buildings.

We're not going to be
duplicating the same curriculum
at every school.

We will operate similar to the
concept of magnet schools.

One school will have a
specialty, whereas another one
will have a different
specialization.

Students will be allowed to
cross boundaries in terms of
where they live, going to the
school that offers what they
want in terms of the
specializations of the
curriculum.

For instance, it would be
advisable to do the career areas
in the medical, medical-science,
technology areas closest to the
location to the hospitals so
that we can partner with them.

The marine-industry program,
those schools that are closest
to the ocean and to the marinas,
so we're going to be very
creative, and it will be a
different and new Department of
Education.

But the thing that I'm going to
ask is that the community be
patient.

I think we've done remarkable,
and we have not even hit the
one-year anniversary.

We started opening schools 34
days after Maria.

That was just an unbelievable
task.

And here we are, very close to the one-year mark, and we're taking children off of double session.

We're putting in over 246 modular classrooms, 7 Sprung shelters.

It's been nonstop since the hurricane.

Literally, we've been working seven days a week, around the clock, for the last year to get this done.

But there's more to be done, and the permanent work will not begin for at least 9 to 12 months because we have to go back to the negotiation table with FEMA.

We have to go back and access all of the buildings again.

So, just be patient with us.

We're a work in progress, but we're moving forward.

>> Just like in New Orleans -- I had some family that came from there.

I even lost someone during Katrina.

I went back in 2008, 2010, 2015. You could see the progress, but it takes a long time.

>> Yes, it does.

>> And it takes the patience and I guess the participation of the community in rebuilding.

We can't all just drop it on Sharon McCollum for that.

>> And that's one of the things I think that people seem to want to say, is, "This is Sharon McCollum."

This is not.

It is a process.

There are a lot of people at the table, and I've heard this and in this phase that we're moving to with permanent construction, we're going to be creating a community advisory board.

We will agree to disagree, and we will hopefully come to a consensus as to where we want to go, but this is not a solo

process, by any means.

>> By any means.

>> Not at all.

But I want the community also to understand, let's take our time because we want to get this right.

In rushing, often, you forget or you leave things out, you overlook something, but if we do this in a methodical, logical way, the territory will be far, far ahead and far different than where we are today.

Thank you.

>> Yes. We've got a little time for our sponsors, and we'll get right back to "Ability Radio -- You and Your Life."

>> And we gotta take care of all the children, the little children of the world, 'cause they're our strongest hope for the future, the little bitty boys and girls.

We got to make this land a better land than the world in which we live.

And we got to help each man be a better man with the kindness that we give.

>> Welcome back to "Ability Radio -- You and Your Life," with our special guests this morning, Ms. Sharon McCollum and Ms. -- I always get your name mixed.

>> Renee Charleswell.

>> Renee Charles.

>> Charleswell.

>> Charleswell. Okay.

And it's one of those issues where I had somebody by the name of Charles, and I keep -- That's why I had to ask you that.

But, again, we're back here with Department of Education representatives, and, Ms. McCollum, you're giving a State of the Territory address on the Department of Education, and your follow-up now that the classrooms are back up -- you

mentioned curriculum.

What about the future, some of the ideas you may want to just throw out there for the parents and the community to think about?

>> Well, as we were talking on the break, volunteerism is important, as well as community and parent involvement in the schools.

Schools cannot operate in isolation.

Children, yes, are with us for 6 1/2, sometimes up to 8 hours a day, but we need the community to be involved.

We need the parents to be actively involved.

We invite them to come into the schools, help us with whatever you feel your expertise is, and that can be anything from helping us in the cafeteria with lunch, with breakfast, helping the children line up at the buses in the morning and meeting them in the afternoon, come in, read to them.

We need the support of the community.

It's more than just the teachers and the staff members that are in the buildings.

Also, we want to hear from the community, and we will be putting together, again, the advisory board that I spoke of.

What does the community want the schools to provide, moving forward, for the territory?

I have heard and I understand the need for career and technical training, and with the hurricanes, we do not have enough electricians, enough carpenters, enough skilled workers, plumbers.

We will be increasing our training in that.

We do certainly need individuals who will come in and will teach the trades.

The opportunities in the schools

for involvement is by no means limited.

It is only limited by the vision of an individual.

If you feel that you can help us, that you can come in, you can work in the office.

You can work in the cafeteria, the library.

You can help teachers.

We can unload/load buses.

Please contact my office, contact the principals at the schools, and we certainly welcome the input and the involvement of the community.

>> Yes. Thank you.

We have a caller who had a question.

>> Hi. Good morning.

>> Good morning.

>> Good morning, Archie.

>> Good morning.

>> [Laughs]

>> It's my cohost, Mr. Julien Henley, right?

>> Yes.

>> All right, Julien.

>> You guys are doing a great show.

Dr. McCollum, it's really nice that you're there on "Ability Radio" to share with our population ideas that you have.

I guess my question goes back to, somewhat, what you were just saying, but I was already calling in -- to look at your advisory board and to see do you have someone with a disability on that advisory board and not just a person with a disability but a person who speaks on behalf of individuals with disabilities in the community?

>> The advisory board has not been formed yet.

We will be seeking community members.

We're starting that process October 1, and I appreciate the question.

I think that it is a very valuable statement, and one of

the things that we will definitely do is solicit the involvement of someone who can advocate for our special-needs population.

>> Yes, and I know that accessibility has to be a challenge, not just in the schools but, you know, throughout the community. And, you know, even seeing new construction that's being done, there still continues to be an issue where you look at the type of ramps that are different. But they should be in place for accessibility.

Within the Department of Education -- I don't know how it works out there -- do you have someone that assists you with the types of technical things that need to be put in place for accessibility, especially now that you're going to have modulars and so on?

>> Yes, we do.

The Department of Education has an engineering department, and it is headed by Mr. James Bernier, and I'm very happy to say that we just hired a new architect that will be coming on board hopefully next week, once we complete the paperwork.

So, yes, we do have that service within the department, as well as I might say that Dr.

Charleswell does an excellent job in regards to reminding us what we must do, and all of our principals and school administrators have had training in regards to the accessibility issues and what we must provide in our buildings.

>> Great. My last question is we have, I know --

I got on a little late, and I'm sure you covered this, but when you look at the students that, after they get the certificate, is there a way that a lot of these students don't transition

into the schools or different things?

Do you find that a lot of individuals who have economic challenges and, on the other hand, has abilities to do different things, do you do an evaluation process to see how some of these students might have other skills outside of the curriculum?

>> I'm going to let Dr. Charleswell answer that.

>> Okay.

>> Hi. Good morning.

>> Good morning.

>> Yes. One of the things that we do when it comes to transitioning our students -- we don't only have the professionals, such as teachers, that sit in developing these plans.

We also have -- We're now actually working to bring the Department of Labor back on board with us.

We're developing an MoU with the Department of Labor.

But I say this to say that we involve other important agencies that would help us in the transitioning of students, you know, once they leave high school.

And in terms of evaluation, these students are actually tested.

There's an actual assessment that's given to these students while they're in high school to determine the career path that best suits their interests.

One of the things that we're doing in transition planning and writing regulations, we must assess them to determine their interests, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses, so this assessment actually helps the teachers and the stakeholders develop a transition plan that actually is tailored to that student, so

there is an assessment that's done so that we can meet students where they are.

>> Okay. I am a person with an ability/disability, and I see the challenges and I know opportunities have been extended to me off of, outside of, the territory, and when you look at things in the territory, you don't see any of these, not just on the educational level in schools, but the whole community, there's not a lot that really shows opportunity for individuals with disabilities to really gain, whether it's the kind of things -- you know, different things that you could actually participate in, and I see this as a total community, not just in education, and I think it's something that's not in place that, you know, once you put the advisory board, hopefully, it's something that you have started looking at.

I think it brings out the best things, because if they don't have an exposure to something, how do they know that this is something that they want?

>> And I want to share with you, Mr. Henley, as Dr. McCollum mentioned, the Community Advisory Board.

The State of the Special Education also has a Virgin Islands Advisory Panel on Special Education, and this is an actual panel that's approved through the commissioner and the governor, and this panel consists of individuals with disabilities, parents of students with disabilities, agencies that are there to support individuals with disabilities, so it's an active panel, and one of the things that I'm trying to do, one of my goals in terms of changing the course of this panel, is, you

know, before we meet and discuss the challenges and ways that we can support individuals, however, one of the things is we're not -- that the panel is not known to the community. It's known to schools, it's known to the educational community, but not to the community on the whole, so one of the things that we are planning to do moving forward -- We have a new board and a new panel, and they are going to be doing more radio shows, you know, just being out there in the community at KMart, giving out flyers, more or less kind of letting the community know what their purpose is.

But it is an active panel. We have several communities within this panel, and they actually work closely together so that they can bring about that change that's needed, and, like I said, I think the important thing about this panel -- the majority of folks that sit on this panel are individuals with disabilities and parents of students with disabilities.

They're the ones that make their own decisions.

They have bylaws that they function from, and they are very active, and, in fact, we have a meeting that's coming up.

I think it's scheduled for either late September or early October.

However, it's a meeting that's also open to the public, and we alternate districts, so one meeting, we will hold it in the St. Croix District.

The next one will be in the St. Thomas/St. John District.

However, because of the situations we have with the hotels, our next meeting will be held in St. Croix, and, actually, a meeting previously

was held in St. Croix.
But it is an active panel, and we're actually gearing up. I actually got someone to come in and train individuals on this panel because we had no phones operating there, and it was important that they got the training so that they can know what their function, role, and responsibilities are.

But, again, it's important that we also involve the community and having agencies represented, some different agencies there.

It makes it a whole lot better because they understand that education is not just an education, a Department of Education, function.

It's a community function.

So it's very important that everyone is involved.

And just if we take it a little further, one of the indicators that we're working on in the State Office is our State System Improvement Plan.

And this plan -- overall, it works on improving outcomes for students with disabilities.

We have stakeholders that include policymakers, such as our senators.

Of course, we have educational personnel.

We have folks on the Chamber of Commerce that actually sat on the stakeholder group, and they were able to support us with resources.

So, as much as we can, we're trying to involve folks within the community because we realize that a win is a big issue.

We need to have our students out there, need to have our folks out there, and let folks know this is how our community really evolved, and, like I said, it's important that everyone takes part in what's taking place.

We cannot do it alone.

It's impossible for us to do it

alone, so it's important that, through these stakeholder groups, we are able to pool people together and do what's necessary to improve these outcomes.

>> I'm glad to hear all that you're saying, and I do hope on that list of agencies that the Disability Rights Center is involved and highlighted on that list.

And just before I get off, we look at a lot of positive things, and I would say that I do hope that, you know, in what you're doing that we can see how, if we're in the community, can move more freely, not just in the schools but outside of the schools.

And Archie and myself -- we do a lot of training, whether it's accommodations, whether it's sensitivity, whether it's just a night of training, throughout the community, and we've done several on St. Croix and on St. Thomas.

And what we are hoping to do is to help show the community that when you start looking at your transition and different things that they can open up some doors, hopefully, to give some of these individuals opportunities as we look into the future.

Thank you for being here.

I'm glad you could make it.

Archie, I'm turning it back to you.

>> Okay. Thank you, Julien.

And just for your information, we are part of the panel that ms Charleswell was speaking of.

It's just that we can't be everywhere.

It's a metaphysical impossibility to cover everything.

So, Julien, you may be into next week, and he may call.

But the other aspect is that the

elephant in the room is the business community.

It's one of my old rants that they are not more involved in the educational aspect of this community to give not just resources but summer jobs, things of that nature.

Where I grew up, most students had some business community sponsoring so many summer jobs over the years, not all in government.

I see a very imbalance here that there are so many students that are employed by government during the summer, but when I was growing up, I got to work for IBM one summer in the stockroom, following somebody around, but I got that exposure. It's a powerful exposure.

A friend of mine worked for Honeywell, you know?

They put him in different --

I came from a factory town, so they had, you know, Goodyear, Goodrich, and all those places, but they provided an opportunity, and that's where I think we really need to be --

The business community needs to step up and be a real part of the community as we rebuild and, again, go in a different direction, a better direction, for the community, for everyone, and it starts with the Department of Education, really, from each according to the ability, to each according to their need.

So let's really get out there and rebuild the community in a way that, in a vision, we all are working together to bring it back together, and, at this point, we may have a little break as far as back to our sponsors with regard to "Ability Radio" staying on the radio.

* [The Pointer Sisters' "Yes We Can Can" plays]

Now's the time for all good men

to get together with one another.

We got to iron out our problems and iron out our quarrels and try to live as brothers.

And try to find peace within without stepping on one another.

Oh, yes, we can.

I know we can can.

Yes, we can can. Why can't we?

If we wanna, yes, we can can.

>> Welcome back to "Ability Radio -- You and Your Life."

Department of Education -- we have Ms. Charleswell, Ms.

McCollum, and you wanted to address an issue with regard to upcoming training and some of the modules?

>> Yeah, sure.

We have some tentative training planned for the upcoming school year, and, again, like I mentioned earlier, our trainings are driven by the data that we collect and the need to ensure that students, the educators, the parents are getting that support that's needed.

We are currently looking for a mediator and hearing officers, and we'll be doing a training once we have our mediators and hearing officers in place in October.

And then in November, we have transition-planning training for our educators, as well as a transition-planning forum for parents and guardians.

It's really important for parents to understand their role in transition planning and more or less answer their concerns, get them up to speed as to sitting at the table and being able to be an active participant when transition plans are being developed.

That will be taking place in November.

And, again, these trainings are taking place in both districts.

In November, we're going to be

having our leadership conference.

This is a conference for administrators and counselors, and it targets the law, IDEA, 'cause it's a changing thing when it comes to services.

It's a changing something when it comes to regulations.

And, also, we have new administrators that are coming up or new counselors, so it's important that administrators and counselors are up to speed when it comes to IDEA and what it entails.

So that takes place in December.

We also -- We're planning in April an autism training.

That's one of our rising disability categories.

We have a lot of parents that are reaching out to us concerning autism, so it's a training that's going to take place for teachers, because teachers, as well, when we do our monitoring, they let us know that, "Hey, we have a student with a disability or with autism that sits in our classroom, and we're not aware of -- you know, we're not sure what we need to be doing to assist this student."

So that's something that's going to be taking place this school year, as well.

Something that's coming, you know, in a spotlight for our students, and I'm not sure if it's hurricane-related or just something that's in the atmosphere, is managing physical abusive behaviors, as well as sexual.

We find that teachers are having -- you know, they're struggling with managing these students that may have behaviors that are bordering on mental issues, so that's something that we're looking into.

It's something that we want to

ensure that our teachers and those personnel that are working with these students have the training that's needed to do so.

And sensitivity training for businesses -- that has been an outcry in our community.

We need our business partners to be part of the solution.

As you mentioned before, Attorney Jennings, we need them to actually be more active in accepting our students, so we're going to be putting on a sensitivity training for the general public.

It's not just for businesses or nonprofits.

Anybody in the community -- it's open to the community so that they can be more sensitive to the needs of our students with disabilities and their families.

>> Well, you've mentioned a very important thing -- childhood trauma.

>> Yes.

>> And I just did a little forum with the Head Start teachers and reminded them that everybody was traumatized.

Whether or not there are post-traumatic stress syndromes that have set in, this is when we should look for it because there are certain key triggers that they should be looking out, especially for the children, but also for themselves.

>> Correct.

>> Compassion fatigue.

You know, we used to call it "burnout" in the legal field, but they call it "compassion" 'cause you're always helping others.

You're always helping, so you got to be careful about, you know, with the teachers themselves, administrators, everybody as you roll into this next year.

The stress of we're still in

recovery, we're still trying to get back things to the way it used to be and move forward, and this is the year you really got to watch out for those triggers. But it looks like you have a very good outline for some training and training events, and everyone should take advantage of it in regard to taking all these issues into play as they deliver educational services and especially with the sensitivity training for businesses.

Are there other issues that you wanted to talk about?

There was these modulars over there by Lockhart School.

What's that all about?

>> The modulars at Lockhart School are very colorful...

>> [Chuckles]

>> ...and that is a deliberate decision made on the part of the Department of Education, and I might give a lot of credit to that to Superintendent Dionne Wells-Hedrington, and that's part of her vision.

What I said to the superintendents was I did not want the modulars looking institutional and that we needed to order them in the school colors, but we took it one step further, and that being the colorful array at Lockhart.

That entire wing of modulars is for the primary children, and research says those children should be stimulated.

One of the things that I enjoy and I have always enjoyed in my years in education is going into the kindergarten, 1st-, 2nd-grade classrooms.

They're just amazing.

It is unbelievable the things that teachers can do with construction paper, some tape, and glue.

They're very vibrant.

They're very colorful.

So the idea of that is not only will it be inside the classroom, but we start stimulating the children as they walk into the buildings.

And one of the things that has been a joy for me that I have been told is that the teachers are bidding for who is going to get what color classroom.

>> [Chuckles]

>> So, that's one of the nice things.

It is a rainbow effect, and it is to start learning from outside with the array of colors for those children.

I might also add that we have ordered classrooms with the needed specifications for our special-needs children.

All of those classrooms will have private bathrooms inside the classrooms as well as what other physical accommodations are necessary for those children, and I'd like to thank Dr. Charleswell and her staff for assisting us in that and making sure that those classrooms are properly outfitted, as well.

>> Well, it looks like it's going to be a bright and colorful year.

>> It's going to be a rainbow year.

It's going to be a great year.

>> And you also mentioned one for vocational students.

There was a certain --

>> The modulars also are outfitted, yes, for the vocational students.

Those have special requirements as well as those that will be for our cooking classrooms, for culinary arts, because there will be cooking in there.

So they have to have additional safety measures and things put in them to accommodate what will be going on in those classrooms as well as, for

instance, the ones for music
have special acoustics...

>> Oh, great!

>> ...and areas for storing the
instruments.

So, we really have left no stone
unturned, and I might say this
has been very much --

Perhaps we should look at as our
dry run for new school
construction because we've had
to think of all of those things
that have to go literally into a
new school...

>> Right. Right.

>> ...as well as the furniture
and all of those things that
come with it.

>> Well, if no one else is,
thank you, Dr. McCollum.

>> I appreciate that.

I get a lot of knocks, but I
take every "thank you" that I
can get.

I appreciate that.

>> But look at it this way.

You're still standing.

You've shown that resilience is
a fact of life for you, frankly.

>> My faith -- my prayer and my
faith.

>> Well, whatever it takes.

>> And a great team.

>> Okay.

>> I have to compliment my team.

The leadership team is simply
awesome, and we have been
working around the clock.

This is not a one-woman show.

It is every area within the
department, and I also have to
extend my deep appreciation to
all of the other agencies,
because this has taken all hands
on deck, from getting building
permits, fire department helping
us, OMB.

You name it -- Office of
Collective Bargaining, Julio
Rhymer with Management & Budget,
because, of course, this is
driven by money, finance.

I cannot thank everyone.

It has been an all-hands-on-deck

and definitely a coordination of all the agencies as well as my team within the department.

Thank you.

>> As they say, it's a community, and it takes a village.

>> Indeed.

>> And, again, thank you, Ms. Charleswell, Ms. McCollum, and, hopefully, you know, as you go rolling through the new year, we can help you out with some of the training.

Of course, we're doing a lot of training -- sensitivity training as well as a little childhood-trauma training for the teachers.

We're there and ready to help in those efforts.

>> Thank you.

>> Thank you.

>> So, again, Virgin Islands, been a great show.

Hope you got a lot of information and that, parents, you are the advocates for your children.

You are the primary force in driving, making sure your child gets a good education, and for the future, they must have an education that is very technology-driven, 'cause when I came in, I was still doing pen and paper when I started my law practice.

Now I would not be able to survive if I hadn't learned most of what I do now, learned after the age of 30, because it's all computerized and it's all technology.

So, thank you, and, Virgin Islands, you have a great weekend.

This has been "Ability Radio -- You and Your Life."

>> We got to make this land a better land than the world in which we live.

And we got to help each man be a better man with the kindness

that we give.
I know we can make it.
I know darn well we can work it
out.
Oh, yes, we can.
I know we can can.
Yes, we can can. Why can't we?
If we wanna, yes, we can can.
I know we can make it work.
I know we can make it if we try.
Oh, yes, we can.
I know we can can.
Yes, we can.
Great gosh almighty.
Yes, we can.
I know we can can.