



# THE VIRGIN ISLANDS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

## Office of Public Relations

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### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **3<sup>RD</sup> ANNUAL LATINO MEN READ ALOUD AIMS TO SHOWCASE HISPANIC MALE ROLE MODELS**

ST. CROIX, USVI - The Alfredo Andrews Elementary School English as a Second Language (ESL) program held its third annual *Latino Men Read Aloud* event on October 4, featuring seven successful local Latino men reading to students in grades K-3 in celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month.

"We are very proud of [Hispanic Heritage Month]; it's a celebration of our culture," said St. Croix District English Language Acquisition Coordinator Jose Perez.

Perez went on to say that while many are familiar with the celebratory aspects of the Hispanic culture, there is much more to it.

"You hear a lot about music, food, and festivity, but we want to demonstrate that the Latino men are more than that," he said. "The Latino men are about being successful, education, contributing to our community with our hard work and we want to serve as role models to the students."

The much-anticipated annual program has been a joint effort between Mr. Perez, and Alfredo Andrews' Kg-3<sup>rd</sup> ESL Teacher Maria Velazquez and 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> ESL Teacher Brenda Resto since 2015. The event was postponed in 2017 following Hurricane Maria.

"The purpose of this activity is to gather Latino men from the community, of different types of careers, and to come and read aloud to the students," Perez further explained. "The objective is to have a male figure share with [students] the importance of learning to read, reading and to remain in school."

Principal Andrea Hobson expressed her satisfaction with the work of her ESL staff.

"I do have an excellent group of teachers dealing with our ESL students," she said. "They take their time, they are diligent, and they make those home connections that are so necessary and they ensure that these students are making strides."

This year's *Latino Men Read Aloud* guests included Senator Samuel Sanes, Special Education State Office Supervisor Eddie Parilla, Real Tech Exterminating Technician Jose Tavarez, Jr., Owner of "Air R Us" Paul Martinez, Virgin Islands Chief Conservator Julio Encarnacion, Commissioner of Parks and Recreation Pedro Cruz, and Deputy Director of Forensics and Medical Examiner Roberto Soto.

Each guest selected up to two books to read to students and expressed why participating in the activity was important to them.

"Kids are the future," said Tavarez, Jr. "You have to look out for them. If we don't look out for them who will?" Tavarez read "Moo-Who" and "Dot the Fire Dog" to kindergarten and first grade students.

Soto, who read "Where I Live" and "Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ear" to students, highlighted the importance of students seeing people like themselves represented in a positive light.

"As the elders in the community, we need to give the kids an aspiration to see what they can achieve and what they can become," he said. "If they see it in us, coming back to give to them, they would do the same thing when they grow up. They can also do what we are doing today."

During his reading of "Where I Live" to kindergartners, Soto asked the youngsters where they lived, to which they proudly replied, "St. Croix!"

"It's extremely important to me because we have to show the younger generation of Hispanic students that there are role models out there, especially male role models," said Sen. Sanes. "In this time and era, we have too many of our young Hispanics and Black children getting into trouble at an early age because they don't have anyone to look up to."

Senator Sanes read, "The Duckling Gets a Cookie" and "The Little Scarecrow Boy" to students.

As guests moved around to various classrooms to read to the students, the youngsters could be seen engrossed in the stories. At the end of each story, the students were given the opportunity to ask questions and share experiences of their own that were similar to the topics in the books.

"It is important to have an education because without an education, there is nothing for them out there' it doesn't matter if you want to be a fisherman, a truck driver or a plumber," Velazquez said. "They need to know how to read, they need to know how to do math and follow instructions. We have to motivate these students to have a love for reading so they can see the importance of it all."

Perez and the Alfredo Andrews ESL teachers thanks the Estate Profit Action Committee for donating refreshments and to the guests who made this year's program a success.

The Alfredo Andrews Elementary School has the highest population of Hispanic students in the St. Croix district, with 42 percent of students recognized as having Hispanic heritage.

For more information, contact the Office of Public Relations at (340) 774-0100 x 8136

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