

## Haiti: What Can We Do?

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On April 21st I went to Haiti for a week with Karen Dross, a math teacher and trainer. The teachers at St. Joseph School in Dubré had requested teacher training in math. The first day at the school, Karen observed a math lesson in each class. The second day, after the students were dismissed, Karen presented a methods workshop for the teachers. We brought many math materials and manipulatives to leave with the teachers. All of the activities were designed to engage all learners in student-centered classrooms. The teachers at St. Joseph School were very receptive to the math methods. I was the French translator for Karen. The following Monday, Karen and I and the teachers tried out the new methods in the classroom with the students. All students were engaged and seemed to be enjoying the activities. Prior to our visit, I received the math standards for Haiti from Father Gabriel Julmice, the Director of the Cape Haitian Bureau of Education. Karen was able to align the math methods and instructional objectives with the Haitian math standards (le programme détaillé).

During a previous visit to St. Joseph School, the teachers had requested an illustrated alphabet and science posters. My sister-in law, a talented artist, made an illustrated alphabet, which I had copied and laminated. French students of Jessica Cuello and Robin Brown at Marcellus High School made detailed, colorful science posters by hand-copying pictures from a French visual dictionary. As requested by the teachers, they made posters of the systems of the body, photosynthesis, etc. During that same visit, I noticed that the two preschool classes had no developmental materials. This visit I was able to bring developmental toys that would help the children to learn colors, shapes, and numbers. The teachers had also requested paints and paper

for the children. We brought donated watercolor sets and paper. All of the materials that we brought with us were donated by individuals. I realized that if I asked for something specific, people were eager to donate.

Karen and I traveled and spent the week with Bob Hood, from St. James twinning parish in Cazenovia and with Dr. Dave Eldridge, a dentist from Cazenovia who was volunteering his time in the dental clinic across from the school. I did some translating in the dental clinic for him. It was difficult to see so many people lined up for hours in pain with swollen cheeks waiting to see him. The last time the dental clinic was open was seven months ago. Most of the people had to have extractions because the dental disease was so far advanced. Young teenagers were losing their teeth due to a lack of access to dental care. One little first grader had such an infection in his mouth that he had to have an antibiotic before it could be treated. To get the antibiotic, Bob Hood had to rent a motorbike and drive 30 minutes to the health clinic and, of course, pay for the antibiotic. The little boy's teacher went in person to explain to the mother how to give the medication. The dental clinic was operating on a generator and Dr. Eldridge had no running water. It was a challenge to fight bacteria. The surgical instruments were sterilized by pouring alcohol on them and then igniting them. There were so many dental emergencies lined up that the dentist was not able to provide the preventative care he had hoped to provide for the school children.

Everyone can't go to Haiti, but everyone can help in some small way and it will make a difference! I was overwhelmed this time when I looked out the window as we were landing in Port au Prince and I saw the thousands of tents where people were living. We visited two tent cities and the heat and the odor of sewage was almost unbearable. It doesn't help to feel overwhelmed and that we can't do anything. Even before the earthquake, I felt that quality

education was the key to long-term change in Haiti. As French teachers, we can do something to improve the educational system in Haiti. Marcellus High School students have done it by making the science posters for St. Joseph School. Those posters will help students to visualize the systems of the body that they need to know in order to pass the 6th grade state exam. If they don't pass the exam, they are not allowed to go to high school. The alphabet cards that my sister-in-law made will be hanging in the classroom and will help students in first grade learn to read and write.

### **So what can you and your students do for Haiti?**

I have asked the principal, Serge Louis-Jean, that question, and he has given me a list of the school's needs. Even if you can help with only a small part of the needs of this one school, that will be significant. If you are interested in helping with any of these needs this year or next year, please email me at [gschmidt@twcny.rr.com](mailto:gschmidt@twcny.rr.com).

These are the needs of the school according to the principal and teachers:

1. Seven metal French globes to be purchased in Cape Haitian for \$30 each—thus supporting the Haitian economy
2. Seven corner wooden shelves for globes at \$20 each made by the local carpenter in Thibeau.
3. Uniforms (12) for the school soccer team (purchased in Haiti if possible)
4. First aid kit for the school
5. Shelves for the principal's office/teacher workroom (to be made by local carpenter in Thibeau)
6. Desks for teachers and principal (to be made in Thibeau by local carpenter)
7. Gym uniforms (beige t-shirts with school name and brown shorts) for 280 students. (The principal would like to have two hours of physical education every Friday. Students can't wear their school uniforms for physical education class.)

8. Money to make a playground (St. Joseph School has been cited by the state as having an unsafe play area because there are jagged rocks and large pieces of concrete in the area where the children have recess. The principal would like to level the area, plant grass, and put a concrete platform under the flag area to reduce the dust in the classrooms. He would also like to have a volleyball area, basketball corner, soccer area, and a swing and slide for the youngest children [ages 3–5]. This involves renting a tractor etc.)
9. Financial help in celebrating teacher appreciation day (The principal wanted to have a dinner for the teachers and give them each a small gift of appreciation.
10. Yearly funding (\$600) so that the principal can hire one combination art/music/sewing teacher.

Please consider meeting one or part of one of these identified needs. St. Joseph School is just one of 90 schools in the rural north but it can become a model school with our help. Change in Haiti will come only through education. Even before the earthquake, there were 500,000 children in Haiti not enrolled in school. Is it any wonder that less than half of the adult population in Haiti is literate?