
Looking toward the 2016-2017 academic year

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Cuban schools will welcome a student body of more than 1.7 million students this September, including 69,000 in boarding schools and 764,000 receiving part time room and board.

Assuming the task are 10,600 educational institutions, with enrollment increasing slightly in elementary schools, which has not been the case for several years.

To ensure that classes begin as planned, the country has allocated extensive resources. To cite only a few examples: 17.5 million dollars to import materials for the new academic year; 3.96 million for middle school science laboratory equipment (Physics, Chemistry, Biology); and 4.6 million for building repairs and maintenance.

Some 1,085 vocational-professional school modules have been acquired to support the development of skills in the fields of electrical engineering, tile-setting, textiles, water supply systems, motor vehicle repair, machining, welding, and drafting.

A LOOK AT CLASSROOMS

During the final weeks of August, Dr. Ena Elsa Velázquez Cobiella, minister of Education, toured all of the country's provinces to check on preparations for the beginning of school throughout the country.

A recurring theme during meetings she held was the attention and motivation provided to teaching staff. Along these lines, Velázquez praised work done in the provinces of Camagüey, Santiago de Cuba, Cienfuegos, Sancti Spíritus, Granma, and Pinar del Río, but nevertheless commented, "We believe that the potential exists in every municipality in the country to give our teachers better attention, not only on the moral plane. Motivating teachers cannot be limited to Educators' Day in the month of December and the end of the school year in July. It must take place throughout the entire year."

Dr. Velázquez likewise emphasized the role of pedagogical high schools in guaranteeing teacher coverage at the primary and preschool levels, in special education, and in training English teachers for elementary schools, with a view toward transforming instruction of this language.

In this regard, she noted the opening of a teacher training school in the municipality of Manzanillo, in Granma province. With this addition, the country now has 24 institutions of this kind, where 21,000 students are enrolled.

HIGHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES GUARANTEED

For the first time, in conjunction with the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, and other state bodies, a plan has been prepared establishing study options in a number of areas for students who will not be attending university after graduating from high school.

Among these options, students may apply for intermediate level technical studies in public health and education, plus other training programs offered by state entities like the country's customs agency, postal service, and Ministry of the Interior.

On the other hand, some 2,707 students will be beginning pedagogical studies at the university level this year, while 1,200 new teachers graduated from higher learning institutions this past July.

TEACHER COVERAGE

The 2016-2017 academic year will begin with 94.2% of teaching positions filled, with the incorporation of recent graduates from pedagogical high schools and universities. School staff will be completed with the hiring of experienced retired teachers, and thanks to the participation of some 1,000 university students in their fourth and fifth years of study, who will be giving classes at the secondary level.

