
1.8 million children will begin school year in Cuba

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On Sept. 1, one million 800 thousand students will begin the school year in Cuba, from pre-school to technical and high school classes, said Education Minister Ena Elsa Velásquez Cobiella.

The figure represents more than 10 percent of the Cuban population, although it has dropped because of aging and the low birth rate.

Ten thousand 366 schools will be open for the school year 2014-2015 and 172,000 teachers and professors will be ready to teach.

However, the minister said, that figure covers only 93.1 percent of the demand for teachers. The deficit involves about 11,000 educators.

All this despite the fact that 4,402 graduates from pedagogical schools will join the workforce at elementary, pre-school and special schools, as well as 1,820 student teachers from the Pedagogical Science University.

One solution to the staffing problem has been to encourage the return of retired teachers to the educational system.

Four thousand 23 docents will be hired, Velásquez said. Two hundred and 82 supervisors will perform classroom duty and 1,420 teachers will have their workload increased.

Flexibility in organization is one of the features that the Education Ministry has introduced this year.

“For a long time, we have been criticized for our verticalism,” the minister said. “We know that our schools don’t all have the same characteristics, so we’re giving each school the ability to set its own schedule.”

"This does not mean the elimination of the double session or the lunch break in junior high school. It is an option, so the family may decide if the student will eat lunch at school during that 90-minute break or if he wants to eat at home, with his family's authorization."

"This arrangement must be reached with a commitment from the parents, and the teachers have to caution them, if a student lives far from school," she explained.

The minister said that the changes will not affect the students' preparation. The authorities are hoping that that adjustments in schedules will allow the teachers more time to prepare their lesson plans, something that the teachers have requested for years.

"We have not removed subjects from the study plan; we have not reduced the time for each subject, but we must devote more effort to the vocational training, to the work of the art teachers with their students, to the rescue of research classes, to exposure of circles of interest, to work with the supervisors, to the agricultural fairs."

"Everything we do has to contribute to a better integral formation for the student, to bring him knowledge, to enrich his skills and habits."
