

Congo Education Excellence Project

Teachers in the Congo's 834 Presbyterian Schools Need Your Support

Due to the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the economy and the Congo government's lack of support for education, the Congo's Presbyterian Schools are in critical need of durable buildings; books; teacher training programs; scholarships; and vehicles. A group of U.S. and Congolese Presbyterians and others have joined forces to raise funds and advocate for effective schools by forming the Congo Education Excellence Project (CEEP).

The 7,011 teachers in the 834 Presbyterian Primary and Secondary Schools of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have dedicated themselves to teaching some of the poorest children in the world. The government pays the teachers only \$45 to \$60 a month to teach 50 - 100 students. The teachers have few teaching resources for either themselves or their students. Most teachers have only a high school diploma but are eager for additional education. They want to be the best teachers they can, and develop capable students. They need our support.

The 206,000 students in Presbyterian schools in the Congo also need our support. Poverty is so serious that tuition and uniforms for school are an extreme challenge, especially for orphans and girls. A 2011 report by Presbyterian educators indicated that of the 14,925 students entering first grade in one region, only 1,480 completed high school. In the same region, only 241 of the 6,858 girls who entered first grade completed high school. These statistics are a call to action by churches, individuals, organizations, educators and advocates alike.

When American Presbyterians arrived in the Congo in 1891, educating children and transcribing Tshiluba into a written language were two of their highest priorities. The first Presbyterian schools were built in the Kasai, by Sheppard and Lapsley shortly after they arrived from the U.S. Some of their first students were ransomed slave children.

As a result of the seeds planted by these early educators and because of the Congolese's on-going dedication to education, there are now 834 Presbyterian schools in five Congo provinces -- Bandundu, Bas Congo, Kinshasa, West Kasai and East Kasai. These schools are usually on the grounds of churches, and work cooperatively with the churches to provide the best education they can. The challenges are immense. Teachers walk great distances to school. They work without teaching materials, addressing children who have no books. Many teachers have classrooms with leaking roofs so they huddle with the children in the dry corners of the room to work during the 9-month rainy season, or send the children home when it is too wet.

In 2007 and 2008, Congolese Presbyterian education leaders (working with a team of U.S. educators) developed the Congo Education Excellence Project (CEEP) to strengthen their schools by providing textbooks, teacher training, motorcycles, durable buildings and scholarships for girls and orphans. The leaders and their partners were eager to develop "excellent schools" that produce "capable students".

Just recently, in August 2011, these Congolese and U.S. educators met again in Kinshasa and Kananga to review progress on the CEEP's initial goals, develop a comprehensive teacher training program for all Congo teachers and learn grant writing skills to seek more funding for education improvements. These educators also met with UNICEF to urge support for the Presbyterian Schools of the Congo.

There is hope for the Congo's schools and their teachers. A growing number of individuals, churches and organizations are donating time and money to the Presbyterian schools of the Congo. Grants are also being written, including a recent one by Gwenda Flethcher (Mission Co-Worker in Kananga) to the Presbyterian Women of the PCUSA to start a "High School Girls' Empowerment Project" and another by Bill Sager to Oregon and Kananga Rotaries for science, French and math textbooks.

Many education goals have been met since 2008, including the provision of:

- Teacher textbooks, teacher education programs, motorcycles and durable buildings for a couple of primary and secondary schools (over 600 schools still need renovations or rebuilding);
- Tin roofs for several schools;
- Strategic planning meetings for Congolese education leaders;
- Attendance of 3 education coordinators at the 2010 eLearning Conference in Zambia;
- Annual planning meetings of the CPC's education coordinators;
- Government accreditation for 148 schools;
- School scholarships for orphans and girls;
- A computer center in Kananga to improve communication and computer training for pastors and educators;
- 4 wheel drive vehicle by the Out Reach Foundation;
- Teacher guidelines for the new government curricula for secondary school teachers.

Much remains to be done so you are much needed.

Help build strong schools and students in the Congo. --- Become involved.

Contact Members of the Education Excellence Team, Tom or Jan Sullivan about ways to participate in or donate to the Congo's Education Excellence Project:
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