

DONATIONS TO A **CUBAN** ELEMENTARY **SCHOOL** FROM **THE** RUNNYMEDE **PUBLIC** **SCHOOL** COMMUNITY

Dear Members (parents, students, teachers and supporters) of the Runnymede Public School Community:

I am a parent at Runnymede P.S., who has recently made three presentations to the PTA about a possible twinning arrangement between our school and one in Havana, Cuba. With the support of the Human Rights Committee, the PTA and the Principal, there has been agreement that I could send a letter to Runnymede P.S. members asking whether they would like to make a donation to an elementary school in Havana.

Havana is the capital of Cuba, has a population of roughly 2.5 million inhabitants, is host to numerous international events, and is a truly rich city in terms of history, geography, cultural life and social patterns.

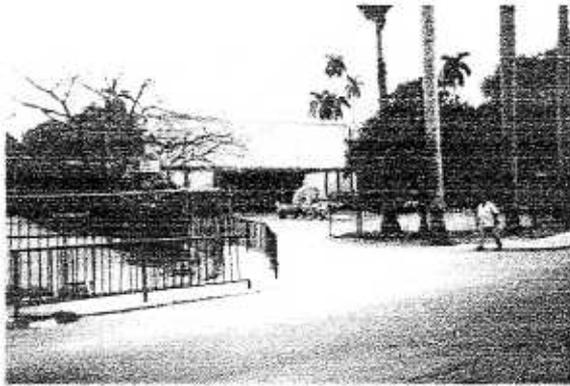


Photo 1 - Escuela Unificada Felipe Poey in Havana.

The school which would receive the donations, Escuela Unificada Felipe Poey, is located in central Havana, and has one thousand students in grades one through eight, which is comparable to the size of our school. Canada has excellent relations with Cuba, with over 100,000 Canadians visiting the island annually, extensive investments there, and thousands of Canadians in dozens of groups across the country maintaining direct non-governmental links with Cuban groups and individuals.

I have visited the school in Havana on two separate occasions, and was invited to tour the classrooms, talk with the children, spend time with the principal, take pictures, and, generally, ask any questions I wanted to. For those of you who do not know Cuba, it has been my experience that Cubans are an extremely warm and hospitable people, and are very interested in cultural exchanges at all levels. I also visited the Cuban Ministry of Education where they have a Canada desk to facilitate relations between Canadians and Cubans. While at the Cuban school with another Runnymede parent, Steve O'Brien, we were extremely impressed to see the high level of student achievement, the cultural enrichment built into the curriculum, and the way that the agricultural program is integrated into the learning process. All of the children eat lunch at the school, and some of the produce comes from the garden they tend. There is also a very high level of parental involvement in the school. In a very short period of time, Cuba has achieved what most nations have not: a fully literate population.



Photo 2 - Steve O'Brien and Paul Carr with the Principal.



Photo 3 - A grade 3 class.

Cubans clearly are trying to make the best despite their shortages. However, they are in need of many basic materials. Another Toronto Board of Education parent, Ingrid Winberg of Denlow Public School, was recently able to achieve consensus around her school being twinned with a similar one in Santiago de Cuba. Her small school of some 350 students was able to raise over \$1000 and some 20 boxes of supplies for the sister school.

I would like to clarify that this letter represents, up to this point, an individual effort, although many parents have told me that they are very supportive. Should there be significant interest in the short-term, we could discuss the possibility of twinning Runnymede P.S. with the school in Havana in the Fall. The twinning could bring many benefits, including a more systematic exchange of letters between students, an exchange of curriculum units on Canada and Cuba, the possibility of Runnymede members (parents, students, teachers) visiting the school while in Cuba, potential 1-2 week exchanges of teachers and the principals could be considered, cultural events could be held emphasizing Canadian and Cuban culture, and periodic visits from people familiar with the school and education system in Cuba. In general, it would also be hoped that our children would have access to another important learning experience, which would help them to more critically assess their own lives and identities.



Photo 4 - Answering questions about Canada.



Photo 6 - Boys perform a rap dance for us.

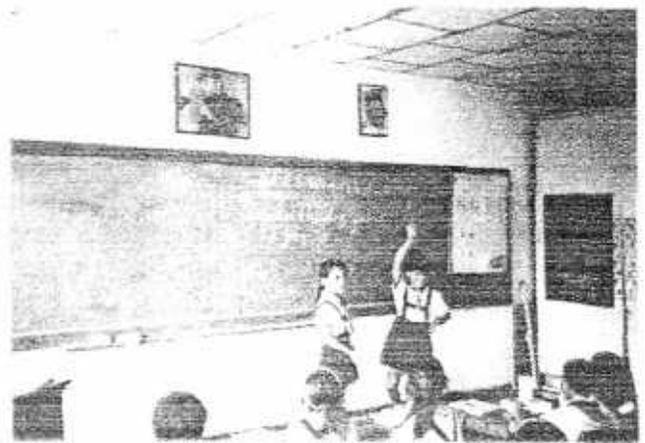


Photo 5 - Girls doing a traditional Spanish ballet.

In order to facilitate the collection of materials on behalf of the Runnymede P.S. community, a few boxes will be set up in front of the principal's office. For those who are interested and able, here is the list of items that I would like to collect for shipment to Havana:

Educational Supplies (i.e., pens, pencils, markers, chalk, erasers, rulers, staplers, paper, glue sticks, games, flash cards, scissors, colouring books, toy animals, binders, dictionaries, etc.)

2. Running Shoes and T-Shirts (used or new)

3. Medical Supplies (i.e., asthma inhalers, hand-aids, first-aid supplies. etc.)

4. Cleaning Supplies (i.e., sponges/scrub pads. soap, rubber gloves, brooms, etc.)

5. Miscellaneous (i.e., baseball hats, bats, gloves and balls, musical instruments, Canadian flags, banners, any type of computer equipment, soap, toothpaste, tooth brushes, toilet paper, etc.)

6. Toonies and Larger Monetary Donations (a specially marked box will be placed in front of the principal's office to collect toonies and larger donations; please contact me if you would like a tax deductible receipt for donations over \$25)

7. Cards and Crafts from Runnymede Students (please ensure that the envelopes clearly indicate the name, age and grade of the Runnymede student, and I will try to ensure that a Cuban student responds to the letter; have your children write about their experiences at Runnymede, in Toronto, in Canada, as well as any questions they may have)

These boxes will be in front of the principal's office from Wednesday June 3 to Friday June 19.

All supplies donated will be catalogued, boxed, and delivered to the school. Please let me know if you are interested in helping out in this process. The Havana school will be made aware that this donation is on behalf of the Runnymede P.S. community. A report on the shipment will be provided to the school in the Fall.

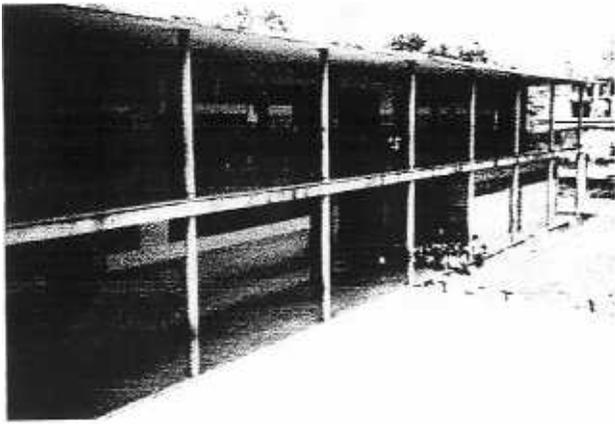


Photo 7 - An outdoor Library class.

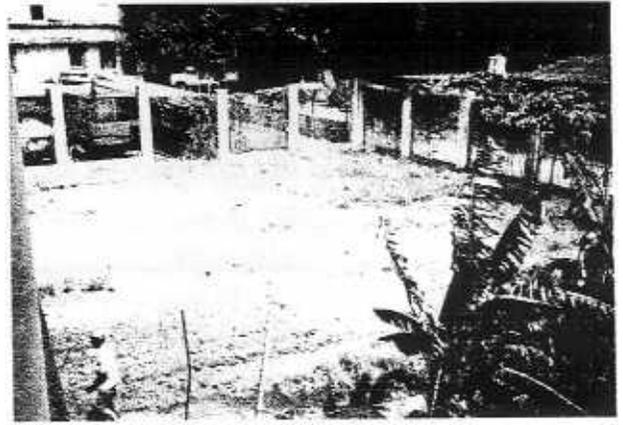


Photo 8 - A partial view of a garden that is tended by the students.

Finally, while I am personally convinced that this type of initiative can only be beneficial to our children and the school, I can appreciate that not everyone may agree with me. Participation is strictly voluntary. If you are interested, please bring your donations, cards and monetary contributions into the school and if you would like to talk to me directly about this project, please feel free to contact me

Thank you for your support.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Paul Carr". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background.

Paul Carr