

Liberia's Most Populous City Boasts Only One Public School; Principal Laments

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Buchanan, Grand Bassa County

The principal of the only public senior high school in Grand Bassa County, the Bassa High School System, is appealing to Liberian Government to erect another senior high school to accommodate the rising student population in the port city.

The 2008 National Population and Housing Census indicate that Buchanan is the most populous county capital with 34,270 persons, most of whom are youth of school going age.

In an exclusive with FrontPageAfrica's Bureau Chief at his Bassa High School office, Mr. Vee Moillaoh Sheriff said government has pronounced a policy of free education throughout the country, there is scarce capacity to accommodate the growing demand.



He confirmed an increase in student enrollment at the Bassa High School compared to previous years.



"For this academic year (2009-2010), we have realized an increment of between 25-28 percent in the student population," Sheriff said.

Expecting much more

Though the academic year began in early September, Sheriff disclosed that his school has already confirmed an enrollment of nearly 850 students. “We expect much more to register before the cut off date for our late registration,” he said. For last academic year (2008-2009), the school had an enrollment of 1,225 students, which he predicts will increase by 25–28 percent this academic year.

With the increase in student population the school lacks everything, the principal admits. “For now, we have scarce capacity to accommodate the growing demand. We would have absorbed more, but we do not have that capacity,” the principal lamented; adding that even for seating, the school has some limitations.

He noted that despite the fact that the Liberian Government is trying, they still need to do more to enhance quality education that is perceived by government.

Sheriff appealed for more chairs, better science laboratories, more materials for their outdated library and most especially qualified teachers. He admitted the lack of qualified science instructors to cover subjects including chemistry, physics, biology and mathematics is a serious handicap.

He noted that because of the lack of qualified science instructors, he along with the county’s superintendent, Mrs. Julia Duncan-Cassell appealed to the Ghanaian Contingent Commander, Lt. Col. Asare to assist them with teachers for the science courses.

Lt. Col. Asare consented and has seconded two peacekeepers to the school where they are teaching chemistry and biology in the senior high division.

Thrilled to help

One of the instructors, Captain Patrick Effah, who also serves as the contingent’s pharmacist, teaches chemistry at the school. He’s thrilled that he could be of some assistance to Liberian students who are eager to learn. “Though it’s been quite challenging at times understanding the way Liberians speak and them understanding me, but we’ve found a way around that,” he said.

Though this contingent ends their tour of duty here shortly, the Contingent Commander assured the country officials that his successor will continue to provide its volunteer teaching services to the school.

It must be known that the Ghanaian Contingent does not only provide voluntary educational support to the Bassa High School. They also have four volunteer instructors teaching biology, physics, mathematics and geography at the Gorblee Junior and Senior High School, now the proposed Ellen Johnson Sirleaf High School in Compound #3, near the Liberia Agriculture Company.

Sheriff, also appealed for the renovation and the reactivation of the science and vocational annexes, which is a part of the Bassa High School System. These annexes of the school went down as result of the civil war and has since not been renovated.

The school’s principal thanked the Bassa High School Alumni Association and the Liberian Government for all the assistance they’ve rendered the school especially after the civil war to enhance quality education.

'Tower of light'

He noted however, that with this huge influx of students wanting to learn, it has become necessary that the Liberian Government contemplates on establishing another public senior high school in the port city.

Bassa High School, established in 1905, was then known as Hatzel Academy. It was constructed and operated by the Methodist Episcopal Church Overseas in joint collaboration with their Liberian

counterpart. In 1926, a joint agreement was entered into and signed between the foreign board of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Liberian Government for its operation.

From 9 March 1926 up to the end of the 1943 school year, the institution was still called Hartzel Academy. In February 1944, the then Department of Public Instruction, RL, now Ministry of Education, approved of the request which was made in 1943, by the faculty of the academy to rename the school Bassa High School. In 1944, the Bassa High School graduated its first student in person of Mr. Henry Kparkay Weah.

Since 1944, the Bassa High School remains a "Tower of Light" (Turrus Lucis). The school continues to forge ahead providing quality education despite the mounting difficulties of the time.

In 1981, the Ministry of Education merged the Adult Night School known as the Government Night School under the administration of the Bassa High School as the Extension Division - "the P.M. Session of the Bassa High School System."

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