

## Director seeks to replicate success of school throughout Haiti

By [Brian MacQuarrie](#) Globe Staff, June 16, 2017, 5:50 a.m.



Dr. Theony Deshommes, Craig F. Walker/Globe staff/Globe Staff

Dr. Theony Deshommes is working for three weeks as an observer at Hasbro Children’s Hospital in Providence, gaining valuable experience before he returns home to Haiti and its daunting medical challenges.

That he is a doctor instead of a taxi driver, Deshommes said, is due to improbable good fortune — receiving a free education at the Louverture Cleary School, a private Catholic institution near the Haitian capital of Port-au-Prince.

“I was born and raised in poverty,” Deshommes said. “It’s not only a school. It’s a family and a dream.”

The boarding school is the driving passion of its director, Patrick Moynihan, a former commodities trader turned Roman Catholic deacon who wants to extend its model nationwide, dramatically expanding educational opportunities for middle- and high-school students in the Western Hemisphere’s poorest country.

His \$75 million plan would build nine schools over the next 10 years, creating a network that serves 3,600 students selected through competitive admission. The schools would be free, and their \$13 million annual budget would include funds for about 1,200 university scholarships.

“You don’t have to be a genius to see something that works,” said Moynihan, a Brown University graduate who has led the school for 21 years. “People in the private sector are hiring in Haiti because they see the talent we’ve brought through the school, and they’re hungry for that talent.”

It’s an ambitious plan in a country still reeling from the devastating effects of the 2010 earthquake. But Moynihan brings a missionary’s zeal and a businessman’s focus to the task.

“Our graduates are not only earning 10 times what their family of origin had to struggle to survive on, they have proven to the private sector that there is a wealth of talent just waiting to be engaged in the poorest of neighborhoods,” Moynihan said.

Moynihan is scheduled to give a preliminary briefing on the plan June 23 in Providence, headquarters of the Haitian Project, a nonprofit organization that underwrites the school’s \$1.3 million annual budget.

“I believe that when someone sees what they can get in return, that they can be positively involved, they’ll say, ‘Wow,’” said Moynihan, whose brother Brian is chief executive of Bank of America.

If the board of the Haitian Project endorses the plan, the group will embark on a fund-raising campaign.

“The Haitian Project and Patrick have proved that developing leaders by creating quality educational opportunities for children in Haiti works,” said Brian Moynihan, a former president of the Haitian Project. “Expanding on that proven success can only be a good thing.”

The 360-student school, founded in 1987, has a strong record of success. Three-quarters of its graduates have a university degree, compared with less than 5 percent of the country as a whole. And 90 percent of its alumni choose to remain in Haiti, compared with one-third of the country’s college graduates. The average annual income for graduates is \$13,000, far above Haiti’s per-capita earnings of about \$850, according to data provided by the school.

“We have a commitment that the education we are receiving here, we will give it back,” Deshommes said. “It’s a school with a vision — a vision for a better Haiti. It’s not for yourself.”

The average Haitian over 25 years old has fewer than five years of education, according to the US Agency for International Development. Only 61 percent of the population is literate, and almost 80 percent of teachers enter the profession without training, according to the agency, which has donated \$81 million to education in Haiti since the earthquake.

While opportunities are limited, the hunger for learning is strong, educators say.

“Education is the key to the kids’ future, we all know it,” said Filis Casey, director of the Alliance for Children Foundation, a Needham-based group that provides housing, health services, and schooling for Haitian orphans and others. The group now plans to add teacher training to its work.

“I think he has a great mission,” Casey said of Moynihan’s efforts. “He has a good model, it’s working well, and it can be expanded.”

Moynihan’s proposal would be a small step in a long journey. Many of the country’s private schools are available only to the elite, and public options usually charge prohibitive fees.

The free tuition at Louverture Cleary made all the difference for the 32-year-old Deshommes, who graduated in 2003 and serves as the school's night physician. His vision for the country, an outlook pressed by Moynihan, hews to the belief that education reform is the nation's top priority, beyond even its myriad health problems.

"The generosity of the people in the United States to make a difference, to be involved, needs to be commended," Moynihan said. "But they have missed the target. Health, food, and water sound so good until you realize they solve so little. Education allows people to do all those things for themselves."

Moynihan's philosophy invites argument. On May 8, he submitted a question about spending priorities to Microsoft cofounder Bill Gates during a panel discussion on the cable network CNBC. Moynihan believes education comes first; Gates chooses health.

"You really need both. If a kid is malnourished, they are not developing either their body or their brain," Gates said on the program. "First is health, then it's education, then third is a government that creates opportunity. When these three come together, you get out of this poverty trap."

Boston College law professor Richard Albert, whose mother came from Haiti and who spent part of his childhood there, called the question "a hard choice."

"Do you need to be healthy to learn? Yes, but you do need to learn," Albert said. "There's a sequencing question: What comes first? The truth is that everything needs attention. I'm not convinced that one thing is more important than another."

To Deshommes and many others involved with Louverture Cleary, the primacy of education is undeniable.

"With a better education," the physician said, "we can change ourselves and Haiti can thrive again."

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