



# Haitian Project News

The Louverture Cleary Schools Network, Transforming Haiti through Education

Volume 35 • October 2022 • Issue 1

## How Inflation is Affecting Haiti—and LCS

by Connor Branham (THP Vol '14-'15, THP Staff '17-'19)

With inflation recently hitting 29 percent, Haiti has not been spared from the cost-of-living crisis rocking the globe. Between gas prices, electricity prices, and the cost of rice imports from the U.S., inflation is stretching the ability of everyday Haitians and small businesses to pay for their basic needs. While the situation is complex, global supply chain issues and commodity shocks are familiar culprits. So, too, is a historically-strong dollar, which has an outsized impact on an import economy like Haiti's. The current insecurity in the country only adds fuel to the fire as gang activity raises the costs of transporting essential goods and services.

As a small island nation, Haiti's

*(continued on page 2)*

## Gearing Up for a New School Year

by Amanda Haluga (THP Director of Charism and Missionary Program)

*The economic and security situation in Haiti remains extremely challenging. These challenges were key factors in the decision by Haiti's Ministry of Education to delay the start of the 2022-23 school year. Although school is starting later than usual this year, there is no shortage of work to do at LCS. As you'll read below, many things go into getting LCS ready for the first day of school. The staff at LCS will be making good use of the extra time, making improvements to campus, preparing lessons, and continuing their work on the staffing plans for LCS 2! (Look for more about that in a future edition of HPN.)*

The energy and excitement that fills Louverture Cleary School (LCS) each fall is extraordinary. Despite Haiti's persistent



Incoming Louverture Cleary School students attend new student orientation in August.

difficulties, the new school year brings stability for the community and the renewal of hope for a future where order, transparency, justice, and peace thrive. For LCS to be prepared for the new school year, the administration, staff, and students all play a part.

In the weeks leading up to the start of school, students work together with staff to get the campus ready by cleaning dorms, painting walls, and most importantly (at least in the view of many students), getting the soccer field set up.

*(continued on page 4)*

## THP Highlights

**Foundation Haitian Project is Official!** After a years-long process, FHP has received official recognition in Haiti by being published in *Le Moniteur*, the journal of the Republic of Haiti which records all official state business. This milestone grants FHP the rights of all legal entities in Haiti. The publication spelled out FHP's objective: "The establishment of Catholic schools throughout the Republic of Haiti with the aim of training responsible citizens cognizant of their duties towards their country and their fellow citizens." Remarkd FHP President Patrick B., "It took a lot of patience and determination, and finally FHP is officially a registered institution in Haiti. We are ready for the future!"

**Perfect Once Again:** Louverture Cleary School continued its tradition of excellence in 2022 with another 100 percent pass rate for both the *Katryèm* (U.S. 9<sup>th</sup> grade) state exam and *Philo* (U.S. 12<sup>th</sup> grade + 1) Baccalaureate exam—a particularly impressive achievement during a period of remarkable difficulty in Haiti. LCS's historic pass rate is over 99 percent, and nearly double the national rate. This is just one of the many reasons LCS remains one of the very best secondary education programs in the country. Congratulations to these Louverturians and to all the Louverture Cleary faculty and staff who supported them!

**Dressing Down for a Great Cause:** In September, St. Philip School in Smithfield, RI, held a *Dress Down for a Cause Day*, raising over \$1,000 for THP! School Principal Keith Kline heard THP President Reese Grondin speak during Mass this past summer at St. Philip Church, one of THP's assigned parishes for its Mission Cooperative Plan initiative, where missions are invited to visit parishes to spread awareness and garner support. Immediately expressing enthusiasm about THP's mission, Principal Kline designated the Project as the beneficiary of the school's fundraising event—and THP couldn't be more grateful or excited to have this school join the THP community!

### Inflation

(continued from page 1)

economy is based on the importation of goods from abroad, making it sensitive to international prices. When oil, energy and food prices go up globally, Haitians are especially exposed. As their purchasing power decreases, many have to choose between necessities.

Louverture Cleary School has seen this impact firsthand. For example, as a boarding school the food budget is a major part of the school's day-to-day operations. Unfortunately, food costs alone for the school increased by 70 percent over the last academic year. Prices for books and other school supplies have more than doubled when compared to last year.

The impact on Louverture Cleary students and their families is also apparent. Djim G. (LCS '14), head of the Economics Department at the school, noted, "Many of the incoming *Sizyèm* (U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> grade) students reported in their school interviews that they were eating smaller meals at home, or reducing the number of meals they have been eating to two meals a day, or even one." Sacrificing food during childhood is devastating for development and underlines the dire trade-offs families in Haiti are now forced to make on a day-to-day basis. Thankfully, LCS continues to provide three meals a

day when students are at school.

Working in this economy, many parents are forced to make hard choices. Workers are paid in *gourdes*, Haiti's currency, and most have not seen their pay increase as they might have in the United States. Businesses have strong negotiating power in a country with significant unemployment and underemployment, where more than two-thirds of the labor force works in the informal sector. The base minimum wage of 540 *gourdes* a day (approximately \$0.60/hour) is increasingly lagging behind inflation.

The political situation and the related insecurity caused by gang activity are also contributing to the crisis. It is difficult for importers to get goods into and transported throughout the country, which leads to increased costs for businesses and consumers. The situation has also suppressed commercial activity more generally; when businesses can't open their doors to provide their goods and services, prices have nowhere to go but up.

Crises are often met with short-run aid to ameliorate the current suffering of the people, which only makes the next crisis worse in a vicious cycle. Investment in the future through education is a proven strategy to help improve the long-term situation in a country. Louverturians are well equipped to deal with Haiti's problems and build a future where the country

will be more resilient to challenges.

A well-educated Haiti will have entrepreneurs to start businesses, responsible politicians to build sound institutions, and a robust civil society dedicated to finding solutions to challenging issues

LCS has succeeded in difficult environments for over 30 years. The school has provided jobs and consistent salaries to faculty and staff, supported the local neighborhood, and provided students with rigorous academic instruction steeped in a culture of community service and civic engagement. These are valuable and necessary services to help Haiti get through challenging times along with working towards a future of self-sufficiency.

*Connor Branham served as a Missionary Teacher at LCS from 2014-15. After obtaining his master's in economics, he returned to Haiti in 2017 for another two years as THP's in-country manager and liaison to its Partner Foundations.*

**A note from The Haitian Project: Despite rising prices and the challenges in the country, Louverture Cleary School continues to provide an excellent education and formation to Haiti's future leaders. But these conditions make continued support especially important right now. Please continue to give so that we can move forward, together.**

## Did you know there are many ways to support The Haitian Project?

- **Donate online** at [HaitianProject.org](http://HaitianProject.org) where it is easy (and very helpful!) to set up a recurring donation
- Give through an **IRA Qualified Charitable Distribution**
- Make a legacy contribution through **Planned Giving**
- Give the gift of **Stock** or **Mutual Funds**
- Give the **Gift of Education** in honor or in memory of a loved one
- Participate in your employer's **Corporate Matching Gifts Program**  
(THP can help you check if your company has a Matching Gifts Program)
- Shop and give through **AmazonSmile**
- **Donations can also be mailed** to The Haitian Project at PO Box 6891, Providence, RI 02940

Visit [www.haitianproject.org/donate](http://www.haitianproject.org/donate) for more information on these various options, or contact THP at 401-351-3624 or by email at [development@haitianproject.org](mailto:development@haitianproject.org) to learn how your tax-deductible donation can provide talented young men and women at Louverture Cleary School with a top-notch, tuition-free, secondary education steeped in service and civic-mindedness!

## BofA Private Bank Helps Prepare Louverturians for Their Next Steps

by HPN Staff

Just before LCS celebrated its 27<sup>th</sup> graduation, the *Philo* (U.S. 12<sup>th</sup> grade +1) class participated in a seminar presented by young professionals from Bank of America (BoFA) Private Bank. This first-of-its-kind virtual event, and the first of what is intended to become an annual event for each graduating class, was a valuable capstone to the robust business instruction the students had received throughout the year and an exciting evolution in the collaboration between The Haitian Project (THP) and BofA Private Bank.

The connection between THP and BofA Private Bank began over seven years ago when then-THP Board Member and BofA Private Bank Managing Director Jim Reulbach made the introduction. Today, BofA Private Bank Division Performance Executive Soamoya Rankins enthusiastically drives the relationship. In 2021, Soamoya's desire to get her team more deeply involved with THP's mission led to new avenues of involvement and impact as young professionals in BofA Private Bank's Wealth Management Analyst program were paired with not one, but two departments at THP throughout the past year.

One team, led by Analyst Jose Aleman, worked with THP's Office of Institutional Advancement to enhance THP's online presence, including website and search engine optimization, as well as fundraising initiatives like the annual Rhode Island-based campaign *401Gives*.

Another team made up of Analysts Tyrous "Will" Ingram IV and Katherine Paglione worked with THP's Programs Office to supplement the already strong business curriculum at LCS through developing and presenting the Business Ethics and Professional Development Seminar. After months of collaboration, the Class of 2022—poised to graduate and take their next steps into university and careers in Haiti—participated in the seminar sharing practices valued by BofA Private Bank and applicable to the reality of business and life in Haiti.

As Will explained, "Initially, I was motivated to get involved to take a position of leadership and help the students develop

a more holistic understanding of 'business ethics' and what it means 'to work in a corporate environment.' My biggest takeaway from the experience is simply that curiosity is a theme that persists in societies all over the world."

The students knew that the principles would be helpful whether they were going on to study economics, business, medicine, education, law, psychology, or any of the other fields they pursued. "The students loved the activity since they learned a lot from it. They were particularly fond of the answers provided by the speakers for the questions they asked at the end of the seminar," recalled the class's economics teacher, LCS Economics Department Head Djim G. (LCS '14).

Katherine reflected, "These curious, bright, and hardworking students are future doctors, investors, computer scientists, and leaders. Being able to contribute on a small scale to their progress and learning was such a phenomenal opportunity. Learning about the economic structure of Haiti in comparison to the United States was also a unique experience."

THP Director of Charism and Missionary Program Amanda Haluga facilitated this collaboration between BofA Private Bank, THP, and LCS, and shared that "Not only was the presentation a great foundation for an annually occurring event for each graduating class, but it was a special event for this particular class of students who were preparing to leave LCS after their seven years and persevered through an exceedingly difficult year."

BofA Private Bank continued to go above and beyond even after the school year ended. In July, analysts in Charlotte, NC, held a backpack drive, gathering and preparing bags full of school supplies for new students at LCS. This initiative was led by Private Bank Vice President and Private Client Manager Steve Boland, who also oversaw the connection with the two teams during the year. "Bank of America's



*Philo students (U.S. 12<sup>th</sup> grade +1) from the LCS Class of 2022 with their instructor, LCS Economics Department Head Djim G. (LCS' 14), attend a virtual seminar presented by professionals from Bank of America Private Bank.*

partnership with THP has been a blossoming relationship, enabling a deep dive in fostering business skillsets with the students and enhancing THP's presence internally and externally from a media and consulting viewpoint," Steve said. "Personally, I have been excited to be a part of the team's efforts and become well acquainted with THP's leadership and seeing firsthand the impact on the LCS students."

Soamoya agreed and shared, "The highlight of my time working with THP is easily the warmth and brightness of the student body and the commitment of the THP staff. Seeing the students excited to engage and the staff working diligently to keep all things running smoothly makes it easy to jump right in and figure out where we can support!"

Representatives from THP were also invited to speak to an audience of approximately 2,000 Bank of America summer interns from around the world to talk about THP's mission, its partnership with BofA Private Bank, and opportunities for future involvement.

For Soamoya, the opportunity to provide real, substantive value to Haiti's future servant-leaders remains the key. "As the Executive Sponsor, our partnership with THP provides an opportunity for us to give back in a truly meaningful way that will have real-time impacts on the lives of the students that THP serves," she said. "It is a joy and an honor to help serve the students of LCS in any way that we can."

# LCS Student View

## Wolfenson M., Rhetor student (U.S. 12<sup>th</sup> grade)

My name's Wolfenson and I'm 16 years old. I have an awesome family: a brother who is cool and sometimes overprotective of me, my mother who is very friendly and loves everyone, and my father who is very nice. We look like two brothers. Having them in my life is the greatest gift that God has given me. It's a great pleasure to be able to share my experience at LCS.

This year I will be a 12<sup>th</sup>-grade student, I entered the school in September 2017. It was difficult but I was really happy I got in. My father always wanted me to go to a great school but he couldn't afford a private school in town. He was looking for a good school and a neighbor told him about LCS. My father tried to register my brother, too, but unfortunately he was not chosen, even though he's a smart guy. My brother was able to tell me all those cool things about the school he learned which made me feel excited

about coming to the school.

At LCS, one of many things that I like is that it's not just like any other school in the country but it's the type of formation and education that'll prepare you for life. The connection between the students is something extraordinary because our thinking is all about helping and changing the country and, furthermore, the world.

We don't act like students from different areas but like one big family. I have met my best friends here and they'll still be my friends after graduation because we have a strong foundation. LCS does not only create people capable of changing the world but it shows us how to accept and learn to love the people we are living with. That's my favorite thing about LCS. I don't really have a favorite class, because I understand and I have fun in all the subjects, but I'm mostly interested with biology and mathematics. Also, I really like when we do fun activities like sports and knowledge championships or *Kreyòl Day*, and I like the clubs too: English Club and Craft Club.

Like my father, I really care about my future, and LCS offers a really good edu-



LCS Rhetor student Wolfenson M.

cation and it'll definitely help me to realize my dreams. I have always wanted to be a neurologist, with that I can help my country.

I know some people say to me that I'm trying to build a castle in the air, but I really want to help my country become wealthy. The education I'm receiving from LCS is allowing me to have a better vision of our society. I don't think I need to be the president to create a safe environment for people around me but just to treat them as human beings.

## Gearing Up

(continued from page 1)

The Academic Office organizes the textbooks needed for the many courses across the seven grades, including the school's four languages (Kreyòl, French, English and Spanish), economics, religion, math, social science, biology, chemistry, citizenship, music, and more. The Operations Office conducts contracting and hiring, ensuring that personnel are ready for school to begin.

Some of the most vital preparation is the formation of the older student leaders, as well as the newest Louverturians. After a months-long admissions process including registration, entrance exams, interviews, and home visits (when possible), the 60 newly-selected *Sizyèm* (U.S. 7<sup>th</sup> grade) students—as well as students filling any open seats in other grades—arrive at LCS for orientation. Led by administration, staff, and student leaders, these new students are incorporated into daily community life, through receiving training in the school's waste manage-

ment system composed of the incinerator, compost, and recycling center; learning the school song and key community prayers in the four languages; and getting to know each other through shared meals, games, and even a talent show.

Next, *Rhétò* (U.S. 12<sup>th</sup> grade) and *Philo* (U.S. 12<sup>th</sup> grade +1) students arrive on campus for their annual leadership seminar, preparing them to serve as *Monitors* and *Guides*, respectively. Through lessons, activities, and work, the school's oldest students hone their leadership skills, practice teamwork, and embrace the school's culture of service. Facing the challenge of their own studies as well as helping the younger students succeed, the *Guides* and *Monitors* must both set an example for and help guide the students who are new to the community, just as they were led when they were new.

According to LCS Principal Marjorie M. (LCS '07), "The seminar is to teach them how to be great Louverturians, to represent the administration in their dorms, their groups, and in their community, because staff members cannot be present

all the time and everywhere. We teach them to take responsibility, to take care of themselves and their community, and to make it a beautiful and safe place to live."

LCS Director of Operations Esther P. (LCS '02) has been an integral part of this important time of year at LCS for many years: "School reopening is always a big challenge for people in Haiti, even more this year because of inflation, the struggle to find fuel, kidnapping, people leaving their homes because of the gangs...things are really complicated. These preparatory activities remain very important for when we return to school because they give hope to people in our community. It says to people that even in this messy situation around us, we are prepared to start again this year. This helps our staff and students understand the importance of working for the good and the accomplishment of showing devotion to others."

With that devotion in mind, our community enthusiastically answers "YES!" to the question prominently painted on campus: *Nou pare poun rebati Ayiti, e ou?* (We are ready to rebuild Haiti, are you?)

## From the Ground Up: A Conversation with Scott Hill

by THP Director of New School Construction Jimi Grondin

“From the ground up, that’s how I started.” Long-time THP community member Scott Hill could be talking about the initial stages of designing a building, or his first job in an architectural firm, or his childhood. He’s really talking about everything.

It was from the ground up that Scott developed his interest in architecture. Growing up on a farm in North Central Illinois, “a hammer, a bucket of old, experienced nails, and a hand saw” were readily available for him to transform scrap lumber into forts. A tinkerer from a young age, Scott would piece together old lawnmowers into seat-of-the-pants go-carts. When he was around 11, he took a discarded vacuum tube intercom into his closet and wired the whole house with speakers so he could communicate, spy on, and play games with his family. Coming from an extended family full of educators, his mother always kept a subscription to *National Geographic*, thereby capturing his curiosity in the wider world. Scott kept busy on the farm, with the local Farm and Fleet store, and working his way through college, first at Northern Illinois University and then at the University of Illinois to finish his degree in architecture.

In the year 2000, Scott would find himself in the ground at Louverture Cleary School outside of Port-au-Prince fitting septic pipe. Just two weeks prior, a friend in Rockford, Illinois, long-time THP supporter Bill Durako, left a message on Scott’s answering machine: “I heard a spiel at church today about some guy who does some stuff in Haiti who needs to have an architect go down with him in two weeks.” That “guy” was then THP President Deacon Patrick Moynihan (now THP President Emeritus) whom Scott would be working beside in that septic trench. Students had gathered around the hole and, according to Scott, Deacon Moynihan told them, “You can’t get all uppity when you leave here, you have to be able to get in here and do this. You know what this guy really does for a living? Well, he’s here digging out and fitting septic pipe.”

Seeing things from the ground up is how Scott approaches everything, including his experience in Haiti.

“When I first went down, they had just started with the foundation of the Agora building [which now houses classrooms, the library, and boys’ dorm]. Patrick handed me the building design and said, ‘Get familiar with these. You’re my communicator between what needs to be done [with these plans] and local construction.’ So, chuckling, I said, ‘Okay,’ and just jumped in with both feet.”

Scott kept a keen eye on how the local construction process worked, learning the relationships between the in-country engineers, the local crews, the carpenters, the ironwork foreman, and the masonry foreman. Through close observation and working side-by-side with the crews, volunteers, and staff, he came to relish his role in the THP community. “That’s why I love working with THP—running conduit, pulling wire, carpentry. The full gamut of the skills you have come into play. It’s not just architecture, it’s relationships, and working the tools, and enjoying life.”

From that trial-by-septic-pipe start, Scott continued to design and help build out the LCS campus, including site-built roof trusses for the school kitchen, the girls’ dorm, and the Radia Science and Computer Laboratory. He also helped in assessing damage from the 2010 earthquake. By his estimate, he has taken about 25 trips to Haiti. When the vision for the Louverture Cleary Schools Network came into view, the administration at The Haitian Project knew who to call. And, of course, Scott said yes to being involved.

Scott’s plan for the Model Campus, borne from the lessons learned at the current LCS campus, his experience as principal of Scott Hill Architecture, and in collaboration with the Haitian design/



THP community member Scott Hill at Louverture Cleary School in the early 2000s.

build firm Technique et Construction, will serve as the template for future Louverture Cleary Schools: low aspect ratios for stability; long roof overhangs for shade; steel trusses, decking, and roof panels to reduce weight; stressed-skin foam ceiling panels for insulation; and dedicated outbuildings for community housing, dorms, school kitchen/cafeteria, chapel, and maintenance shop. “These are the design features we will maximize to create an image for the campus so that when you walk through the gates you’ll say, ‘Hey, we’re in a Louverture Cleary School!’.”

Starting from the ground up has made Scott, in addition to being the husband of 39-plus years to Karen, a teacher, and the father of five equally-talented children, a man of many talents: architect, farmer of beans and corn, robotics teacher, harmonica player, sailor, philosopher, septic pipe fitter, and dedicated volunteer. “One of the main reasons I like working with The Haitian Project is that my skill set applies at a level where I can make a direct impact and contribute to the Project with what I can do. The key is that it goes to advancing education. Not just giving somebody what they need to survive but giving them the knowledge, impetus, and hopefully motivation that the world is a fantastic place and it’s full of wonder.” And something worth building—from the ground up.

# Leaving a Legacy of Education

by Scott and Mary Jo LeGrand

*Haitian Project News interviewed long-time community members Dr. Scott and Mary Jo LeGrand about their decision to include The Haitian Project in their estate plan. Scott is a former THP board chair who served on the board from 2014-2021. Mary Jo, who introduced Scott to THP, served as a Missionary Teacher at LCS from 2000-2001, then as THP's director of development, and later preceded Scott on the board before returning to work in THP's development office once again.*



Scott and Mary Jo LeGrand with their children: Maria, Charlie and Kate.

## **HPN: What factors go into your philanthropic decisions?**

We could look at our lives from a purely material standpoint and say that our hard work and our investment of time have brought us good things. However, as Christians, there is a much deeper invitation to realize that really nothing that we have has been brought about by our own doing. Our ability to work, to earn, or to participate in anything good has been gifted to us. So, the decision to give of ourselves in any way becomes less of a "decision" and more of a response to God's goodness.

## **HPN: What first led you to consider leaving a gift to charity in your will?**

After we made the first step to set up our estate plan, the decision to make a bequest came naturally. We thought about the institutions and the organizations that have been an important and positive influence in our lives. THP was at the top of the list.

## **HPN: What inspired you to leave a legacy gift for The Haitian Project in particular?**

Being a part of THP's community has been transformative for both of us as individuals, as a couple, and as a family. We have been given an opportunity to participate in THP's work for lasting change in Haiti, and we've seen how education is a long-term solution to poverty—literally

because of the students and staff that we have met as a part of this community. Each of us has benefitted from Catholic education, and we want to make Catholic education possible for others.

## **HPN: What family values do you see this gift teaching your children?**

Our children have grown up with THP being a part of our family life in different ways. We have both served on THP's board and committees and [Mary Jo has] worked for THP from our home. We've told them stories about our experiences at Louverture Cleary. They've listened in on phone calls and meetings, have cleaned our house for fundraisers, helped make food for community dinners, and have learned hospitality when friends from the THP community need housing. They've benefitted from the Christian kindness that THP community members have shown them. While we've not talked to them specifically about our bequest, we think it will be no surprise to them that it exists.

## **HPN: What piece of advice would you give to someone who may be considering leaving a legacy gift?**

If you are thinking about estate planning, it is a good time to consider leaving a bequest to THP! With the Louverture Cleary Schools Network in the works and construction well underway on the Model Campus, we think it would be difficult to find a more sound investment. God willing, THP and the good fruits of education in Haiti will far outlast anyone reading this newsletter. That is happy news!

## **The Haitian Project, Inc.**

P.O. Box 6891  
Providence RI 02940

**Phone:** (401) 351-3624

**Email:** [development@haitianproject.org](mailto:development@haitianproject.org)

**Web:** [www.haitianproject.org](http://www.haitianproject.org)

### **Corporate Officers**

Reese Grondin, *President*  
Colby Bowker,  
*Vice President & Secretary*  
Elizabeth Koskelowski, *Treasurer*

### **Board of Directors**

Thomas Pesce, *Chair*  
Timothy Scordato, *1st Vice Chair*  
M. Aimée Maier, *2nd Vice Chair*

Alexander Albertine  
Colby Bowker  
Collin Daviscourt  
Reese Grondin  
Sabine Guerrier  
Elizabeth Koskelowski  
Robert Moynihan  
Kristin Soukup

### **Haitian Project News Staff**

#### **Editor-in-Chief**

Reese Grondin

#### **Managing Editor**

Sandy Whewell

### **Mission Statement**

*The Haitian Project through its support of Louverture Cleary Schools, a national network of tuition-free, Catholic, co-educational secondary boarding schools in Haiti, provides for the education of academically-talented and motivated students from Haitian families who cannot afford the cost of their children's education in order to maximize their potential and enable them to work toward building a Haiti where justice and peace thrive.*

### **To donate, visit**

[www.haitianproject.org](http://www.haitianproject.org), Venmo at @TheHaitianProject, or mail checks payable to The Haitian Project.

HPN printed by Minuteman Press

 @THPSpeaks

 The Haitian Project

©2022 The Haitian Project