

Resolution 2021R-023

By Directors Peterson and Baez

On COVID, Education, Culture and the Normalization of Relations with Cuba

1. WHEREAS, As of January 2021, the United States has the highest number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the world --25 million infected, and deaths exceeding 420,000, with these deaths and disabilities falling disproportionately on Black and Latino/a communities, seniors, and increasingly among our youth; and
2. WHEREAS, This disease has caused severe disruption in our efforts to educate our children and has put teachers, staff, and students at serious risk; and
3. WHEREAS, This crisis demonstrates the importance of international cooperation and solidarity in the fields of public health as well as education for the common good; and
4. WHEREAS, In 1960, the US government adopted a policy intended “. . . to bring about hunger, desperation, and overthrow of the government” in Cuba resulting in the longest and “. . . most comprehensive set of US sanctions [imposed] on any country . . . ” and
5. WHEREAS, The Trump administration severely tightened the constraints against Cuba, enacting more than 40 new restrictive measures in 2020 alone, including restrictions on the right to attend professional conferences and other curbs on our right to travel, all of which was a reversal of the policies enacted by President Obama, who visited Cuba; and
6. WHEREAS, This policy of hostility has provided no benefits to the people of the US and has cruelly impacted the standard of living of the 11.3 million Afro-Latino/a people of Cuba; and
7. WHEREAS, Cuba, a small and poor nation, has prioritized education and universal healthcare and is currently providing free medical education to students from all over the world, including the US, one whom is Alexandra Skeeter, a 2010 graduate of Rufus King High School; and
8. WHEREAS, In 2017 Cuba sent medical experts to Chicago to work with public health authorities in addressing the high rate of infant mortality on its southside, a serious public health issue we also face in Milwaukee; and
9. WHEREAS, Cuba’s biomedical research has produced many medicines, including one used successfully by a West Bend, Wisconsin resident to treat his stage three lung cancer (who traveled illegally to receive treatment), and one that reduces the need for amputations among sufferers of diabetes, which disproportionately affects people of color in the US; and
10. WHEREAS, Cuba has responded to the COVID pandemic by implementing public health measures that have limited fatalities to 194 deaths among its over 11 million people [Johns Hopkins University], compared to Wisconsin with over 6,000 deaths among half that population; and
11. WHEREAS, Cuba has shared its expertise all around the world by sending 4,000 medical practitioners to 38 countries to assist their local efforts to fight COVID; and
12. WHEREAS, Cuba has also shared its methods for advancing literacy in many countries, including here in Milwaukee, where Cuban teachers have made presentations to our teachers and families; and

13. WHEREAS, Cuba's educational system has been recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Laboratorio Latinoamericano de la Calidad de la Educación, and in numerous studies and by educational scholars—including U.S. scholars—for its investments in education, its consistently high academic performance, its focus on cultural inclusiveness, equity, and student engagement—all things that U.S. educators could benefit from through cultural exchanges; and
14. WHEREAS, All MPS students, staff and families, particularly those of Cuban heritage would benefit from closer ties to educators in Cuba; now, therefore, be it
15. RESOLVED that the Milwaukee Board of School Directors call on the Biden administration and all other appropriate political, health, and educational authorities to promptly invite negotiations with their Cuban counterparts to explore mutually beneficial cooperation, as a step toward normalization of relations between our countries.

January 27, 2021