



## Phew!!!

It sure has been a busy time for everyone as we have adjusted to the pandemic for the past five months. Even with school out since late May, staff and volunteer committees have been focused on allocating scholarships and enrollment for the coming year. Teachers have been taking professional development courses on teaching in these new conditions and planning a new academic model.

We realize that our newsletters in recent months have been full of challenging news and asking for donations. Not this one! We have lots of good news to share -- and none of that good news would be possible without the outpouring of donations from our amazing supporters.

And just for fun, to start off the good news, that's a sloth to the right that visited a tree by the school parking lot this , perhaps encouraged to visit while there are so few of us physically present.



## What on Earth Would We Do Without You?



*"Adapt, Survive, Triumph" -- such an appropriate message for these times! This and following artwork is by local artist Mario Rivera, who substitute taught at MFS last year. It is on a blackboard backing to a Monteverde bus stop. Each week, along with Edda Pacheco, current MFS art teacher, an*

A few months ago, we were having depressing conversations, thinking that with 50% pay cuts we could eke our way through the last two months of the 2019-20 school year, but prospects were bleak for opening again in August. We calculated that with the scholarship donations we had been collecting, we might be able to bring back about 30 students (a quarter of our existing enrollment), and maybe a few more whose families could pay tuition. But how would we ever select which students would be in such a limited group?

The previous year, we had reached \$75,000 in donations, which was a record. How could we close the gap between that and our usual \$550,000 budget?

That's when the amazement started. Donations started rolling in. \$20,000 in March alone -- then rising to \$40,000 in May! In total, 375 donors provided almost \$195,000 in the fiscal year that just ended.

**Beyond our wildest dreams, with those donations we were able to award scholarships, at the levels families requested, to all who requested them.** We wish you could have been here to see the emotional responses as grateful families completed their enrollments for the year.

Even at that, we had to make difficult decisions to cut both our budget and the tuition for families by 25%, laying off 3.5 staff and cutting much of our teaching staff to 80% of their usual time and pay.

*uplifting message is posted by [Resilienza](#).*

We are not totally out of the woods yet. In requesting scholarship, families had to estimate what they could pay beyond the scholarship. In these uncertain times, none of us can really predict whether that tuition will materialize. But we take a deep breath, figuratively cross our fingers, and in less than a month, we will welcome all of our returning students.

And that's not all your generosity has allowed us to do! Read on ...

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## **Meeting a Challenge to Help the Monteverde Community**

In the midst trying to adjust to the pandemic challenge, another great need arose. What did our Quaker values tell us to do when we see a great need in our community?

On June 24th, a nearby K-12 private school that also offers bilingual education announced that they will remain closed for the coming semester. Their school had shut down in March so their students have already been out of school for four months.

That left their students with unattractive choices -- to enroll in local public schools, and repeat most of a semester of the grade that they had nearly completed or remain out of school until February 2021.

Applications, phone calls, emails and letters started arriving at MFS with families pleading for MFS to accept their children, many of whom had been on the MFS waiting list for years. We knew MFS could not absorb any more students in the primary grades. But for the *colegio* grades (7-12), we had a bit more flexibility and it seemed much more crucial for students at those ages to be back in school.

Since our generous donors made it possible for MFS to open, and we were already scrambling to create a new academic model in this pandemic, did our values tell us to focus on protecting our MFS community or to reach out to the larger community?

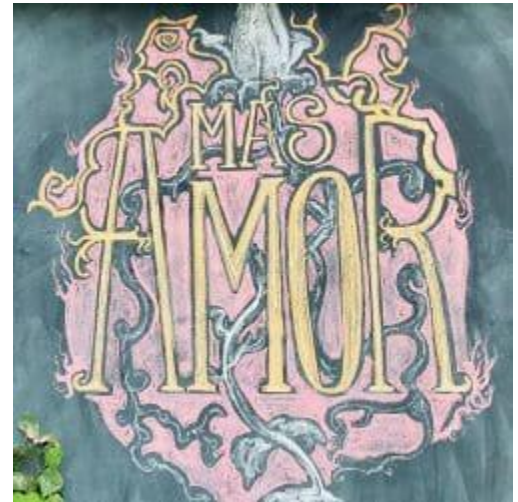
This was carefully considered in a variety of individual and group Zoom meetings with staff and faculty to secure input, identify concerns and seek solutions. Two additional informational meetings by Zoom were held with members and attenders of the Friends Meeting.

On July 19th, a special Meeting for Business (also via Zoom) was held with the Friends Meeting, under which the school operates, to seek approval to expand the school to 138 students. In a multi-hour gathering, Friends spoke of logistical concerns, calls to help those in need, and our values. With careful consideration, a temporary expansion to include these transferring students was approved.

Where we worried in recent months whether we would survive the pandemic, here we are expanding to serve more students. There is no way we could have even considered this without our generous donors.

We have seen whole families in tears of gratitude and joy as they learn that their child will become part of the MFS community. Thank you, thank you for making this possible.

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*More Love*

(Continued)

**Academic Planning in Uncertainty**

Looking at our teachers now, it sure doesn't look like summer vacation! We see them stopping by their classrooms, or in Zoom meetings, all working away to plan the new academic year.

The challenge is, we don't know what format will be allowed for schools. Costa Rica is not allowing in-person classes for August, but perhaps opening in September though no indication of when in September -- and holding out the possibilities of further delays depending on pandemic numbers. Even when in-person classes are allowed, we don't know whether there will be limits on the number of people in a classroom, which might require splitting classes into separate shifts or combinations of in-person and online or other options. So planning is a real challenge!

"As a team, we have to be flexible, think outside the box, and throw out what we've done in the classroom in the past. We need to look instead at what works in this new environment and what doesn't in the new environment. Our team is more than willing to do that." indicates Maggie Fatovic, our newly appointed Academic Sub-director. Maggie has already worked at MFS for two years as our Special Ed teacher and previously filled an academic administration position in the United States.

Last March, when schools closed with only a couple of day's notice -- and thought at first to be only for a couple of weeks, our colegio (grades 7-12) teachers scrambled to convert their curriculum into an online format while also trying to learn the ins and outs of Zoom technology. As online teaching extended until the end of the school year in May, they learned a lot of lessons that they are now sharing with teachers for the primary grades. In addition, teachers have used the summer to meet and plan for the upcoming school year and some have pursued professional development particularly regarding distance learning.

Despite all the uncertainty, Maggie outlines some parameters for the preparation:

- Teachers are trying to build a schedule with more integrated learning. For example, a reading class might use scientific readings to teach both reading and science in the same class time.
- Students are hungry for group time with their peers, so more group classes are planned, but with technology, there will also be the use of breakout groups for exercises and assignments.
- Some MFS traditions will happen in groups that incorporate past practices simply to provide a sense of normalcy.
- Importantly, the approach for each grade will vary, reflecting differences in attention span, development and amounts of screen time appropriate for the age group.

To support all of this, we are working with families to ensure that they have needed computers (colegio students already receive a Chromebook). Where internet access at home may not be adequate, we are working to create access. For example, the Monteverde Institute has offered us the use of their computer lab and are installing enclosures for each computer so that each student or family would essentially have their own cubicle.

We don't know yet what this will all end up looking like. What we do know, though, is that teachers are more than eager to see their students and to teach, while our students are looking forward to being in school, seeing their teachers again and most of all, contact with their peers.

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*Inspiration Is Medicine -- with the artist, Mario Rivera. The Resilienza project be found on Facebook, Instagram and at their **web page**.*



*Sweet memories of when students could be this close to Juanita,  
Grades1/2 teacher .*

We would love to return our staff to 100% time and we are desperate for technology!

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