



## Our New School Year Has Started!!!

A few months ago, we were afraid we might not be able to open for the new school year. But here we are! We had a week of teacher/staff development, then a week of continued development on technology applications and orientation for new students and parents -- and as of August 18, classes have started.

It's a whole new world, given that all instruction has to be online. For now, Costa Rica has required all schools to operate online, if they are open, until at least some time in September. So all of our classes are via Zoom, all the way from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade.

In the face of all of this year's challenges, our faculty have select Resilience! as our theme for the year.

Read on for examples of that resilience, and of some special help needed for our teachers and for our school families.



## Resilience and Creativity -- Within Limits

Here in Monteverde, far away from urban centers and shopping malls, resilience comes in the form of lots of creativity to come up with what we need. We see beautifully crafted wood containers where those in larger cities might have run to Walmart for a plastic container, or artwork instead of mass-produced decorations.

But sometimes more than creativity is needed. As we move into online learning for all of our students, we have found some creative solutions, but there are areas where we and our school families still need help.

On the creative side, through a generous donor and the handy work of Ulises Salazar Leiton, who covers maintenance for the school, we are able to provide every student with a white board to use in classes. That way, they can show the teacher and the class anything from artwork to math class calculations during online classes.

But while up to 20 students in person might share a set or two of erasable markers for a classroom white board, now each family needs to have their own markers -- and that's where the need for further support comes in. As pictured here, MFS has made initial supply packets for each student in the school. The contents of the packets vary by grade level and will be a big help for now --but they are also an unexpected expense and more will be needed if online learning is extended, as we suspect it will be.

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*Left, 7th and 8th grade students will pick up individual piles of books and supplies -- and even scales for a science experiment, then choose from a selection of books to read. Right, a sample of the supplies and individual whiteboards for primary students.*

Another big challenge has been scheduling. What's the right balance of screen time vs. projects with parents for younger children (hint: each parent has an opinion on this!)? What if there are multiple siblings attending MFS and only one computer in the house? When are parents available to be with primary students? What about the several MFS teachers who also have children in the school? How can they both teach and be there to help their children learn?

Somehow, with a great deal of work, the teachers have worked out a schedule that balances all these needs. In the process, and with lots of creativity, they actually found some advantages! For example, they didn't have to be limited by age and grade level – some scheduling groups students by interest area, developmental needs and strengths and weaknesses as well. And with Zoom breakout groups and creative scheduling, more specialized small group work can be done.

Our biggest challenge, and one where creativity only goes so far, has involved technology. MFS has for years provided a Chromebook to each high school student – one they can take home, often as the first computer for their family, and that they keep after graduation. That has tremendous advantages both in technology training and in career preparation, at a lower price than most computers.

That lower cost, though, comes with limitations in functionality, especially when teachers use their Chromebooks for online teaching. As professional development in early August focused on learning some of the extra functions on Zoom that are invaluable for managing classes – things like setting up breakout groups for students to work together on assignments – we discovered that Chromebooks often could not access much-needed features.

We are fortunate to have Jeynor Trejos, our math teacher and computer whiz, and some computer experts in our community who donate their skills. They pursued Chromebook extensions and modifications that help, but anything found so far is still more of a band-aid than a real fix.

What we really need are a half-dozen laptops or tablets with the features these teachers need in order to work effectively with their students. We are pursuing various avenues – and mainly asking your help – to address this.

We know that we have the resilience to get through this, one way or the other. But sometimes, the most important part of resilience is knowing when to ask for help.

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## Can you Help Us Adjust to Online Classes?

*Your financial donations go a lot further. Sending supplies internationally often ends up costing more in postage and tariffs than the supplies themselves. With financial support, we are able to buy what we need within Costa Rica.*

Donations of:

**\$10 to \$25** help us stock up on pens, pencils, notebooks, art supplies and so much more.

**\$50 to \$200** helps us subscribe to educational services, platforms and e-books for classes

**\$500 (or combinations of smaller donations)** helps us buy a desperately needed laptop or tablet for teachers who currently have only a Chromebook.

**Large or small, every donation helps!** For tax-deductible donations in the U.S. and Canada, or Costa Rica:

[DONATE HERE](#)

## Living and Communicating MFS Values

It is not the practice of MFS or of the Monteverde Friends Meeting to proselytize. Students of all faiths -- or none -- are welcomed in the school, and in fact Quakers are a small minority among students, families, and staff. We don't have a creed of beliefs; our Friends Meeting welcomes everyone from atheists to Buddhists to Christians and everything in between. We don't have a minister or a priest officiating at our worship; instead in our Meeting for Worship we settle in silence for each person to center themselves and listen spiritually. Occasionally someone may be inspired to offer a short message, but sometimes the entire hour is silent.

What we do have is a powerful set of values, what we call testimonies – values that are shared across most major religions. These values are summarized in the acronym SPICES: simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality and stewardship. It is these values that MFS carries into our education, from peace tables in each classroom for conflict resolution, to students weighing trash and recyclables each week to measure how we are treating our valuable environment to equality among students across a large range of ages.

With 11 new students in our colegio, due to the closing of a nearby high school (see our July newsletter for some background), our challenge this year is to communicate those values to new students while encouraging ongoing students to model the values.

One of the ways we are doing that is our traditional mid-week Meeting for Worship on Wednesday mornings. Instead of morning assembly, the first hour of the school day is spent in “pre-meeting” – a time for students to settle down before the silence of Meeting time and to consider a value or a spiritual question (Quakers tend to ponder questions rather than providing answers).



Students begin attending mid-week Meeting for Worship during kindergarten – initially attending for 20 minutes rather than the full 45 minutes, but getting used to being relatively still and quiet. A recent example from grades 1/2 gives a great example of how we share our values – even with our current virtual classes.

Teacher Juanita Leiton asked her students to consider what it means to be grateful as their topic during pre-meeting. After some discussion and activities on that topic, Juanita asked each student to go to a favorite quiet spot, either inside or outside their home, where they could sit and spend some time thinking about things they were grateful for. The beautiful photo to the right shows 1<sup>st</sup> grader Alejandro in his quiet spot as he sits in peace and reflects on his gratitude. Our gratitude to his mom for sharing this picture with us!

