



October 2021

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## Measuring Our Progress



*An old-fashioned report card from a more traditional school.*

How many of us remember report cards as a series of letters or numbers that seemed to sum up our lives? How many lived in dread as the day for report cards neared and had to make that scary trip home anticipating parental reactions? Or maybe you were one of the lucky ones who did well and couldn't wait to show parents how well you had done well.

Thankfully, we do things differently now, as we explain below in the article on student assessments. Narratives for older students provide a richer understanding of the student. For younger students, we rely upon parent conferences rather than grades.

Student reports are just one kind of assessment we make in order to keep striving for excellence. In this issue, we take a look at both student and other assessments -- reflections from our new Head of School, Liza Ewen, after her first three months at MFS, and attempts to measure the impact of our Quaker and civic values.

We owe it to our students, our school families, our staff -- and importantly, our generous donors who provide scholarships and cover the costs of running our school -- to be look at both our merits and our challenges. Self-reflection is essential to providing high-quality, bilingual, education shaped by Quaker values. We hope what we share below demonstrates that commitment.

## A Perspective After Three Months

*We were delighted to welcome Liza Ewen, a Quaker with more than twenty years of teaching and administrative experience in Quaker schools, as our new Head of School this July.*

*We asked her to reflect on her first three months of getting to know MFS, and here's what struck her the most:*

**What stands out to you about Monteverde Friends School? What are its strengths?**

When I think about these early months, I'm struck by the dedication of the school community--staff, families, and students alike--to make school as "normal" as possible while enduring the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. MFS teachers and staff



members go above and beyond each day to bring students together while maintaining social distance guidelines--it's a tricky balancing act.

*Liza (center) with our colegio students at lunchtime*

Families have renewed their commitment to the school community through the creation of the new Communication Committee. While the pandemic drags on, the MFS community continues to adapt and grow to meet new challenges while preserving its core values. After three months, I continue to be humbled by our collective efforts and our shared commitment to the growth and education of our children.

### **What challenges is the school facing this year?**

The impacts of the pandemic continue to be the greatest challenge facing our community and the school. We have not returned to charging full tuition (75% tuition in 20-21 and 92% tuition this year) in recognition of the fact that many of our families continue to have less income, in large part because tourism continues to pale in comparison to pre-pandemic levels.

That said, in August, we returned to offer our full program, five full days a week. Running the school costs more under pandemic conditions--we need more people due to social distancing requirements, and more supplies to ensure everyone's health and safety. We're up against the reality that we need money to navigate the pandemic this year AND the funds for next year's scholarships. My challenges are to manage expenses and personnel while seeking the funding we need to continue. Through the dedication of our staff, families, and donors, I believe the school will meet these challenges head-on.

*We are delighted to have Liza leading us through these tricky times!*

**Please help us get through the remainder of this year with a full school but less than full tuition, and help us ensure that we have enough scholarships for next year.**

**Tax-deductible in the US, Canada and Costa Rica:**



### **Report Cards, MFS Style**

Report cards may be distributed at semester end, but student assessment is a full time job each day that classes are in session. Historically, report cards have tried to sum up the entire semester in a simple number or letter. At MFS, assessments take a more holistic approach.

There is so much more to assessing students. What is their learning style? Do they need to hear things? Read things? Or get a hands-on experience? What are their strengths and where do they need help? How does assessment, and in particular, specific grades, affect that student emotionally and behaviorally? And how best to inform parents regarding their child's achievements and needs?

In order to convey a full picture of each student, and to take care that grades do not affect them adversely, MFS relies more on narratives and face-to-face conversations with parents than on report cards with letter or percent

grades. All students and families receive a narrative report at the end of each semester. Only students in the 5th grade or above receive numeric grades for each class.

For all students, in-person parent conferences are held at the end of the first and third quarters.

At the end of each semester, teachers provide a written narrative report for each student. Such reports begin with a summary of what is covered in the class. The next, highly-individualized section describes the student's academic work, skills, accomplishments, strengths and weaknesses over the semester. The third section, again highly individualized, focuses on the student's social development and work habits, often including independence, motivation, cooperation, responsibility, respect for teachers and peers, effort, and behavior.

Only then, and only for grades 5 through 12, specific grades are presented.

As you might imagine, this is much more work for teachers than a simple letter or number, but we believe this is well worth it to support the whole child and to keep families closely involved in their child's education



*Recycling bins at MFS for metal, plastic, tetra-packs, cardboard, paper, glass and more are a fixture in the school*

### **How Can We Measure Whether We Are Practicing the Values We Hold?**

*"The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age." (Quaker John Woolman, 1772)*

*"Every person has the right to a healthy and ecologically balanced environment ... The State shall guarantee, defend and preserve that right. The Law shall establish the appropriate responsibilities and penalties." (Costa Rica Constitution, as amended by Article 1°, Law No. 7412, June 3, 1994.)*

One reason why our Quaker school fits so readily in Costa Rica is that the two share very similar values -- simplicity, peacemaking (e.g. there has been no Costa Rican military since 1949), integrity, family and community, equality and sustainability/stewardship. As educators, we feel that the transmission and reinforcement of those values is just as important as teaching subject matter. However, it is a lot harder to measure most of those values in our students than it is to test subject matter!

Perhaps the easiest to measure is sustainability, or our role as stewards of the earth and all it includes. Just being in Costa Rica gives us a good headstart on protecting the environment and the amazing plants and animals around us. Over 99% of the electricity in the country is generated using hydropower, geothermal, or wind, while many households and businesses add solar as well. It is rare to see disposable coffee cups or plates or plasticware. To-go boxes from restaurants are typically compostable, and most households and MFS compost.

MFS works to go to even greater lengths while making sustainability part of students' education. One way we do that starts with the big green recycling bins that are a fixture in MFS hallways. Students are accustomed to recycling everything from plastic to cardboard to glass to tetra-packs and beyond. But to go beyond that, our high school

science students typically take a monthly measure of the recycling for the month, along with the school's electric and water usage. Those measures are then tracked over time to measure progress or to identify problems if they emerge.

Sadly, we have had to suspend this practice while our high schoolers are at a separate campus due to social distancing. We are eager to resume these measures, along with having students measure and track water purity in a local stream and soil testing.

In the meantime, Laura Fonseca Brene as a few of her 11/12 classmates are test driving a program that measures a baseline of edible food waste, identifies strategies on how to reduce that waste, and measures the results with those strategies in place. The students will advise us on the program, and if they recommend it, we will work to implement the program throughout MFS.

Other values, such as community and equality, are harder to measure beyond some basic statistics. Sometimes, though, we have "aha" moments when we see students doing something that tells us they have internalized the values. Recently, we noticed some of our 5th/6th graders playing a ball game during recess. One of the students has a broken bone and had to keep his arm in a sling. Without any prompting from teachers, the group of students came up with a one-armed game where those without broken bones would hold one arm behind their backs so that the student with the sling would feel included.

Yes!!! Moments like that make all the hard work worthwhile.



*The one-arm game.*

