



Monteverde Friends School/Escuela de los Amigos

March, 2023

www.mfschool.org/donate



Midweek Meeting for Worship outdoors, in closer touch with the natural beauty that surrounds our school.

If you read these monthly newsletters, or follow the Monteverde Friends School on Facebook, we hope you get the sense that we try to teach and enrich our students by offering many different approaches. Sometimes it is various guests who visit the school, such as choirs, traveling theaters, and authors. Other times we take our worship outside.

Such events provide variety and fun that keeps our students involved. We always work to engage every student, recognizing that students learn in many different ways.

In this issue we want to highlight three of those ongoing efforts to better serve our students -- Physical Education classes on tree climbing throughout our third quarter, and year-round academic support and counseling resources.

We hope you will join us in appreciating the hard work of our teachers and staff in reaching out to every student.

A warm thank you to all who have helped us meet the \$15,000 challenge offered by some of our donors!

Your donations have helped us offer financial aid to many of our students so that they can continue their education with MFS.



Meeting Needs for Emotional Support



It is no secret that the pandemic had a significant impact on children and youth around the world. The effects are the strongest in regions where schools had to remain closed. Even with the online and hybrid approaches that kept MFS accessible throughout the pandemic, there was still a lack of socialization and person-to-person emotional support for our students.

Parents are quite aware of the effect this had on their children. Each year, our school families organizer fundraising events such as our Caminata/walkathon. (Hint: this year's is coming up on April 22nd and you have the chance to support it!) Families then come to agreement on projects that the proceeds will support. The decision for this year was to support a school counselor/psychologist to help support students following the pandemic.

Early in our 2022-23 school year, MFS contracted Melania (she goes by Mela) Rojas Rodriguez to offer such services two days a week. Mela started with a business degree in 2015. She worked in the apparel industry, including as a co-founder of Girasol (Sunflower) swimwear and was part of the NGO The Art of Living. She returned to school in 2021 to gain her degree in Psychology.

She has also trained in numerous approaches for emotional health, such as art therapy, breathing techniques and meditation, neuro linguistic programming, and is currently studying a virtual specialization in clinical hypnosis for children and adolescents in Mexico. She brings these and other skills to her work at MFS.

Sometimes, students need someone to truly listen to them. Mela supplies a lot of such active listening but often goes beyond that. Her goal is not just to calm a student in the moment -- it is to give them the tools for different purposes: self-knowledge to discover healthy coping skills that work for each student and skills they can use throughout their lives to grow mentally health and happier. When additional services are needed, Mela provides recommendations for families to follow.

That's where all of those approaches she trained in come in handy. Perhaps a student who gets easily upset can learn to react with a bit of deep breathing. Maybe a child needs to learn how to set boundaries and respect the boundaries of others. Or the student may best express themselves with a paintbrush, so art therapy helps them.

In general, Mela finds that primary students need healthy mechanisms to handle strong emotions. High anxiety is more common in older students as they work to grow more independent of their families, handle interpersonal feelings, and develop their own identity.

For others, such as our 5th/6th grade class, Mela recently did a workshop with on the five keys to happiness. One key it to give your all and release the results. This is an excellent lesson for perfectionists and for everyone. It leads to an understand that giving their all and making their best effort without attachment to the results can strengthen resilience while providing a happier present.

We are deeply grateful to Mela for helping our students with all this!



Help MFS keep its School Psychologist!

The MFS Caminata (Walkathon) fundraiser has been an annual event for decades (except during the COVID years). Each year, Caminata participants walk 13 kilometers, mostly uphill, beginning at the Monteverde Friends School and ending at the Vista Verde Mirador. This is one of two annual fundraisers organized by school families to raise funds for needed school supplies and services.

Support our [GoFundMe campaign](#) for the upcoming Caminata (Walkathon)!

Any **donation** will help make an impact. Thanks in advance for your contribution!

Meeting Individual Academic Needs

Even in a school as small as ours, we see a full range of learning needs. The reasons are many: differences, emotional and behavioral influences, or simply a need for extra attention.

That's why MFS has long included an academic support teacher on our staff. Some of our students' learning needs mean they need additional support outside of their classroom.

That's where Lauren Snyder comes in. As our Academic Support teacher, she works 1:1 with students or with small groups of students to help our teachers better meet every student's needs. This is Lauren's second year sharing her calm approach and experience with our students. Lauren graduated from the University of Maryland in 2004 and completed a Masters in The Art of Teaching in 2011.

Sometimes the responses needed are simple. Some students just need to be guided to a quieter environment so that they can concentrate. Others who have difficulty sounding out words as they read find that it makes a huge difference if they just tap their finger on the desk as they read each syllable. Some just need to recognize a "snowballing" of issues, and take breaks when things are piling up for them.

As Lauren puts it, "For the most part, time and attention and listening without judgment are what students need."

While math and reading are the areas most often needing support and tutoring, for some students the primary issues are social or emotional. Lauren and our MFS counselor work closely together to determine how best we can support each student.

For Lauren, rewards for her work come when a student says "I did it" or "I feel good about it." She loves seeing students who previously struggled gain more confidence in themselves as learners.



Our Values Expressed in Tree Climbing



Before any climbing, each class decided on the values to share in the exercise.



Our younger students really took to the climbing!

This quarter, the founders of Palo Vivo—all of whom are also MFS graduates—have offered tree climbing to all students in grades 1-12. Grace Kennedy, Ismael Moore, and Rafi Vargas founded Palo Vivo to help their community strengthen its relationship with the natural world. Through tree climbing, reforestation, and working with young people, they are helping communities better understand and care for forests.

We asked Grace, Izzy, and Rafi to reflect on how their time as students at MFS connects to the work they do today. They shared that the school nourished the creativity and courage required to make their idea of Palo Vivo a reality. “MFS helped us foster a deep love and respect for the Monteverde community and the forest of Monteverde, as well as a sense of courage and responsibility to take care of these gifts.”

They noted that they learned many tools required for such a project while they were students here, including teamwork, creative problem-solving skills, and mutual respect for one another and the environment. They have enjoyed being back at MFS this quarter and witnessing the growth of students as individuals and their collective relationship with the trees.

Bethany Elmore, our PE teacher, expressed her gratitude for the group’s work at a recent staff meeting: “To see our graduates teaching like this and putting the values we’ve taught them to work is inspiring.” We are genuinely proud of the founders of Palo Vivo and deeply grateful to them, not only for the gift of tree climbing but also for sharing what they learned at MFS with a new generation of young people.

(Liza Ewen, author, in our MFS weekly notices that went out to school parents on March 6, 2023)

(Note: the ficus "trees" used for the classes are actually ficus vines that surround and eventually replace a tree, often leaving space inside the vines. These were selected for the classes because they offer many surfaces to be gripped.)



Students were urged to pause and take in the view from different heights and perspectives.



As safety measures, each student wore a harness attached to ropes that were managed by staff to prevent falls.

