



Monteverde Friends School/Escuela de los Amigo, 2023

December 2023

www.mfschool.org

The first semester of our 2023-24 school year has already reached its end – though with more of a whimper than a bang. In recent weeks, Monteverde has seen a substantial increase in both respiratory illnesses and, sadly, more COVID-9 confirmed diagnoses and exposures than we have seen in much of the current year. With two teachers out and diagnosed with COVID, other teachers with suspicious respiratory symptoms, and many students absent, the decision was made to close the school on Wednesday, December 13th, two days before the expected close.

Classes, teachers and staff had already been practicing their performances for the last day of school, so it was disappointing without that traditional celebration and send-off, but there were few other options.

We hope that with almost four weeks of rest – and reduced exposure – all can return on January 10th to greet each other and to settle in for the new semester.



Staff member and parent of two MFS students Karen Alvarado Vega pitches in with other MFS families to prepare 600 tamales for sale along with the annual FERIA NATIVIDAD to raise money for financial aid.

With this break, students, teachers, and staff spend more time with their families. Focusing on our families is not only a priority for the holiday season but also a key Costa Rican value that is expressed year-round. We focus this issue of our newsletter on expressions of family values that we see at the Monteverde Friends School (MFS) – through celebrations of Grandparents/Grandfriends Day each year, in a family with 9 grandchildren attending MFS, and through the involvement of parents in our daily school activities.

We wish all of our readers both a wonderful holiday season and special time to spend with loved ones!

***Our deepest thanks to those who have already made a year-end donation!
There's still time to make a tax-deductible donation for 2023
either online or with a check dated and postmarked by December 31.
Just click on [DONATE](#) to see the best ways to donate from your country.***

An Example of Valuing Family: The Torres Family & MFS



The Torres family is a great example of the value that Costa Ricans place on families. They have owned a farm in Santa Elena, just a few kilometers from MFS, for generations.

Anibal Torres Leitón, a current school parent serving as a member of our School Committee (similar to a board of directors), grew up on that farm, one of five brothers, all of whom attended local schools. Those five brothers, their parents, and their wives and children now all live in separate houses but all located on the farm. Such sharing of family property is common here, especially because of Monteverde's heritage as a farming community.

Anibal's wife, Evelyn Rockwell also grew up in Monteverde though with a different heritage. She is the granddaughter of Howard Rockwell, who was among the first group of Quakers who came to Monteverde in 1951. Evelyn is an MFS alumna. Anibal and Evelyn first met when they were both working at the Monteverde Institute.

Anibal, Evelyn and their two children.



Grandparents Fermín & Elsida with 6 of their grandchildren who attend MFS at our 2022 Grandfriends Day. The 7th grandchild, in Pre-k last year, did not have school that day.

Evelyn and Anibal have enrolled their two children in MFS -- as have all of Anibal's siblings. Three students have graduated from MFS, and another six are current students in grades ranging from kindergarten to 7th grade.

They highlighted the bilingual curriculum and community values as basic reasons for selecting MFS, but also explained:

"Academically, the school is very personal." Anibal noted. "MFS students are really seen as individuals, in terms of their unique mix of skills and areas to develop. The school encourages individual creativity and exploration to expand on each student's gifts and abilities."

Evelyn notes that many MFS graduates feel drawn to return to Monteverde because of the sense of community they felt while at MFS. Anibal has been working along with MFS alums returning to Monteverde to get involved on projects that benefit the community.

With a smile, Evelyn says, "When I think about community, I think of MFS. The process of coming to consensus decisions can get messy, and take a long time, but in the end, it really values the views of individuals and brings us together in community."

We strive at MFS to recognize the value that Costa Ricans like the Torres family place on family, and to build in a sense of family in our school community.

Like the Torres family, our school families have entrusted us with their children's education.

We hope that like those families, you will feel you can trust MFS to invest your donation in quality, bilingual education for children from the Monteverde community.

We are deeply thankful to those who have already made a year-end donation!

If you haven't donated recently, we hope you'll make a year-end donation to help us provide financial aid to local students for the 2024-25 academic year.

Visit www.mfschool.org/donate to make tax-deductible donations in Canada, the US and Costa Rica

Both online donations made by December 31 and checks dated and postmarked before December 31 provide tax deductions for 2023.



The Role Parents Play in the MFS Community



A scene from our recent Christmas Fair organized by MFS parents.

At some schools – often those with higher tuition – parents of students are mainly relied upon for tuition that covers all expenses.

At MFS, we do not ask parents solely for financial support. Instead, families are full-fledged participants in our school community. In part, we believe students learn better when they have closely involved parents. Other practicalities, such as what working Costa Ricans can afford, lead us to rely on them to supply skills we would otherwise have to pay for and to raise funds to meet special needs in the school.

We are in frequent communication with parents, with weekly announcement sheets, WhatsApp groups, and communications with teachers about individual students and classes. In addition, we offer parent conferences mid-semester, at the end of the first and third terms, to make sure parents are informed of their children's progress and any special needs in their classes. The Family Association, which meets 6 times a year, is an important opportunity for parents to express concerns or initiatives.

While we rely heavily on donors to provide financial aid for our MFS students, our school parents contribute financially in two ways: by raising funds through special events and by offering their expertise on a volunteer basis. There are two events that school families put together each year to raise funds for special projects – the Christmas Fair/Feria de Navidad and the Caminata. Through these events, the parent group funds special purchases or initiatives for the school – anything from buying a refrigerator to funding music programs and psychological services.

The Christmas Fair, such as the recent one on December 10th, brings together local vendors to sell their goods, while many activities such as zip-lining and trampolines entertain children. Parents raise funds for MFS by charging vendors to participate and charging admission for the event. The Caminata held each spring is a 13 kilometer walkathon that ends with lunch and entertainment thanks to a local hotel with incredible views.

In other ways, parents from our school community often provide their expertise and service to the school on a volunteer basis. School parents often share their career experiences on Career Days for our older students. One parent helps manage the MFS web page. Others offer help with school maintenance or, recently, by selecting playground equipment to better suit our youngest students. Not having to pay for these services keeps MFS more affordable for the local community that we serve.

Starting with the application process, we make clear to parents that they are expected to be an integral part of the school community. This is a key part of what makes MFS the thriving school community it is.

Grandparents & Grandfriends Day 2023



The morning gathering for a light breakfast.



Grandparents share in classes.

MFS has a long tradition of celebrating older generations of family and friends through our annual celebration of Grandparents/Grandfriends Day. Understanding that not all of our students have grandparents geographically nearby, we've added "grandfriends" – older adults that a student chooses to invite to be with them for the day. This year, more than 60 older adults attended the celebration.

The day starts with a light breakfast for the grandparents/grandfriends at the school. Over that breakfast, our Head of School has the chance to address the group, emphasizing the strong role they play in the lives of our students and providing an overview for the visit. Typically, this day is scheduled for a Wednesday, when the entire school gathers for Midweek Worship to start the day. Students sit with their grandparents or older friends while we follow the Quaker practice of centering in silence, with occasional spiritual messages. While these Wednesday gatherings with 120 students, from kindergarten to 12th grade, are often rather wiggly by church standards, the grandparents get the chance to see how amazingly 120 young students can gather in quiet reflection.

For the rest of the morning, the guests get the chance to attend classes along with their grandchildren to get an idea of what the children see daily. They get to observe teacher's styles of presentation and perhaps offer something about their family that helps teachers and students connect.

We are delighted to have this time to spend with these older family members and friends who are often a major influence on our students and look forward to these sessions in future year that show the progression of both the students' education and the way that they learn from older generations.



Each grandparent applied a red thumbprint symbolizing their role as the root of the family.



Students added leaves in orange, symbolizing their outgrowth from grandparents.

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