



Monteverde Friends School/Escuela de los Amigo

April 2024

www.mfschool.org

Supporting the Whole Student



Caminata 2024: Help school parents raise the funds for a part-time psychologist to support students in need. You can still give, [just click here!](#)

“We educate the whole person, nurturing each student’s spiritual, intellectual, physical, and creative potential. We endeavor to transform the lives of young people, that they may seek truth with curiosity and awe, and care for and honor all people and the earth.”

That brave statement comes from the Monteverde Friends School Vision and Mission Statement (see more at <https://mfschool.org/about-us/>). We are challenged on a day-to-day basis to make that a reality for each of our students.

This is largely an effort that goes well beyond what is found in text books and academic lessons. It starts with recognizing both the individuality of each student and the diversity of our school community, with its multiple languages, cultures, and geographic origins. And then there's the range of ages – from 3 years to eighteen years – and developmental levels that increase the challenges we face.

To address these challenges, we provide a range of support services and programs. Read on to hear about special education, tutoring, and psychological care. In addition, our school parents support these services by offering an annual Caminata that helps pay for our part-time psychologist.

For those students who can express themselves better in art than in words, we also take on projects such as a beautiful mural our 11/12 class created to cover graffiti on a structure for the Monteverde electrical utility.



Our 2024 Caminata: Help us provide a part-time school psychologist!

Our whole school community is involved in providing support services. Most recently, our school parents organized our annual Caminata (Walkathon) with proceeds paying for our part-time psychologist.

This past Saturday, over 188 participants walked, ran, or biked a more than 13-kilometer (8 miles) route over area roads, including a very steep hill to reach the crest at the Vista Verde Lodge. The incredible views there, with the Arenal Volcano in the distance, are a great award for those who make it all the way.

You can [still donate](#) to make sure these services will be available.



Support Services to Meet a Range of Needs



That's Paul Angell, our Special Ed staff for the primary grades on the left, Mela Rojas Rodriguez, our part-time psychologist. (For confidentiality reasons, we will not include pictures of Special Ed students)

Like all schools, MFS has a need to offer special help to students who have difficulty learning, whether challenged by a condition (e.g. dyslexia) or emotions. In addition, as an immersion-style bilingual school, we need to offer help with the student's progress in a second language, most often their efforts to learn English. Currently close to a quarter of our students need such extra help.

It truly takes a team to serve that group of students. Paul Angell, longtime volunteer at MFS with a career in special education, has returned as our special education teacher for our primary students. Taylor Bobowski, a biologist with experience as a teaching assistant at the graduate level, works with colegio students in need. Melania Rojas provides psychological services for those students with emotional needs.

That team is supplemented this year with two volunteers who have assisted with evaluation methods. Kathy Githens, a retired school psychologist, joined us from January through March this year and conducted evaluations in English. Pam Holschuh, a former teacher at both MFS and the nearby Cloud Forest School, is with us for April and May and administering the same tests in Spanish.

To provide appropriate, needed services, we work in three major areas:

Kathy Githens, a retired school psychologist, escaped the cold winter in Maine to spend January through March with us.

Identification and Evaluation: For starters, our challenge is not only to identify students who need extra support, but also to identify just what the need is and what we can best do to help the student develop needed skills. That identification usually

starts with the classroom teacher, who identifies students based on issues that arise in daily lessons.

Referrals go to our Comité de Apoyo (Support Committee). That committee, which meets monthly during the school year, is made up of a mix of administrators, teachers at both primary and colegio levels, and our Special Education and Psychologist staff. The committee considers recommendations from teachers, outlines plans for service, and refers students in need to the appropriate support person.

This year, thanks to two well qualified volunteers, we are also administering the DIBEL test (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills) to further evaluate needs. The results will help guide our teachers and support providers. In addition, they provide an important baseline for the future.

Academic Assistance: A major portion of special education time is focused in strengthening academic skills. In some cases, this means helping the student develop techniques to address special needs such as dyslexia. In other cases, it means offering extra teaching time and student practice on skills that need bolstering.

Like schools around the world, we are currently seeing a need to increase reading skills, as these skills fell behind during the years of the pandemic and virtual education. We have responded with extra reading practice, sometimes in class and other times paired with older student "siblings" or volunteers. When the student needs more than just practice in reading, our Special Education staff members provide more specialized sessions.

Psychological Support: Sometimes an emotional and psychological need is the main force affecting poor academic performance. That is where school psychologist Mela Rojas comes in. She often provides individual sessions with students to provide emotional support. She also works with full classes at times to teach things like relaxation and stress reducing practices like yoga moves or quiet reflection.

In her school position, Mela does not provide ongoing psychological sessions. When a student has greater needs, Mela works with the family to refer the student to ongoing community services. Through the donations of a generous family, we have available a special fund meant to help financially when an area student needs this sort of extra help.

As you can likely see by now, meeting the needs of all of our students is a very large task. This important team works hard every day to address student needs. Our work with these students is often rewarded over time by seeing students grow in both their academic skills and their emotional health.

Helping the Community: A Response to Grafitti



Pam Holschuh previously taught at MFS and the Cloud Forest School but took some time out to earn a Masters Degree in bilingual education.





On Wednesday mornings, our entire school gathers for silent worship (Meeting for Worship) in the manner of Quakers from 9:00 to 9:45. Before that, each homeroom class has what we call Pre-Meeting. That may be a time to help rambunctious kids quiet down, or it may be a time for a story or reflection to set the tone for the worship. Or it may be something that embodies our Quaker values, such as contributing to our overall community in Monteverde.

Recently, our 11/12 class did such a community project. On the edge of our Friends Meeting and School property, there is a structure from the local electric utility that includes a couple of electric meters. That structure, made of cement, had been disfigured with graffiti – a relatively rare sight in Monteverde.

We had heard that replacing graffiti with a well-done mural prevents further graffiti, so our oldest students set about a project to make the structure into an artistic creation. The class got together and designed and applied a beautiful mural to the structure, as pictured here. It sits next to our main road, so we are hopeful that for years to come, these soon-to-be alums will be able to admire their handiwork as they go by.

We hope you and our Monteverde community enjoy these their work!

