

Putting My Back To The Plow

By Mary Anne O'Connor
Director of Instructional Programs



The fall is traditionally the time of harvest in many parts of the world, when the waiting time has ended resulting in what is hopefully a rich and bountiful harvest. During these beginning weeks in this new position, I reflect on how I am fortunate to be harvesting the fruits of others' planting and pruning. I stand on the shoulders of several people who have served in this role as Director of Instructional Programs, especially my immediate predecessor, Dr. Julie Villand, whose administrative systems and mentoring have guided me during these initial days. My hope is to continue the sowing and tending, so that future harvests will continue to flourish in the rich earth of our ASFG learning community.

It is clear to me how critical it is to work in collaboration and communication with others. I have so appreciated the positive comments from teachers, administrators, and parents and their willingness to allow me the necessary time to understand the many aspects of this new role. I realize, more than ever, that none of these jobs are ones that we do alone. Together we participate in and make real our ASFG vision to inspire, educate and act to better our world. Going it alone can never serve to bring about this harvest of an ideal world. It is made manifest when we collaborate in making our world more just, more accepting, more loving. Not a bad reason to put one's back to the plow!

Behind That Giant, Yellow Slab of Concrete

By Pat Micelli
Director of Academic Assessment

On the first day of school, my son sauntered into my new Director of Assessment office, looked around approvingly, and said, "Nice office." Then he plopped himself into the chair in front of my desk and added, "So. What do you do here all day?"

To be totally honest, when I was a 7th grade teacher standing on the balcony outside of my classroom in the midst of between-class hallway chaos, looking out at the pale yellow cement structure that we strangely call the Pink Palace and thinking about all those administrators working behind all those tiny windows, I wondered the same thing: If your time isn't filled with teaching over 90 students... what do you do all day?

Now that I'm one of those administrators looking out from one of those tiny windows onto the 7th grade balcony, I have a new perspective. I can see the mountains of painfully detailed work that is hidden from view by that giant slab of yellow concrete; work that is invisible, but that allows the school to run smoothly so that teachers can do what they love and are good at: teach.

I can see all the things, from minor to daunting, that have to happen outside of the classroom to make the learning that takes place inside even possible. And even though I miss the direct contact with students and the satisfaction of watching them grow and learn, I've developed a new appreciation for what goes on behind the scenes and how it all contributes to student achievement. Now my satisfaction comes from seeing how we are all working together towards that common goal.

El Planeta Tu Casa

Por Lorena Contreras
PA Green Representative

Con todo lo que está ocurriendo, ¿será momento de detenernos, preguntándonos qué está pasando realmente en nuestro planeta?, ¿será que se nos está invitando a reflexionar sobre una nueva perspectiva en cuanto a nuestra relación con él?, ¿te has preguntado si todavía podemos hacer algo?, ¿está en mis manos?

La respuesta es "Sí". Te invitamos a ser parte de esta concientización, iniciando ahora para contrarrestar el desequilibrio ambiental, en el que nuestro planeta muestra claramente que estamos tomando más de los recursos que la naturaleza nos ofrece, recordando que estos recursos también le pertenecen a otras especies y a nuestras generaciones futuras.

El American School, a través de ASFG Green, está trabajando y logrando cambios en nuestra institución. Nuestros hijos son criados para ser pensadores críticos y analíticos para que desde su individualidad puedan crear conductas colectivas que generen este cambio, al que estamos invitando, para crear una nueva cultura ambiental. Pero, ¿es suficiente sólo capacitar a las siguientes generaciones?

SÚMATE a esa búsqueda del equilibrio ambiental.
Preguntas al 333-952-0940



Parent Green Team, como parte de ASFG Green, trabaja para llevar estos conocimientos a los padres de familia, a través del proyecto de Green Voice. Te invitamos a estar pendiente, cada mes, de las sugerencias prácticas y sencillas que compartimos y así sumarte a esta búsqueda del equilibrio ambiental. También recibirás invitaciones a las pláticas mensuales de la Comunidad Educativa Ambiental sobre temas vinculados al medio ambiente.

Nuestro planeta está claramente expresando que está siendo afectado con los hábitos y actos del hombre. ¿Será que nos invita a crear más congruencia entre la educación institucional y nuestros hogares?

El inicio del final

Por Daniela Sandoval,
Estudiante de Prepa

Nunca he estado muy involucrada en el espíritu de generación: el clásico cántico "dosmil dieciocho", asistir a las reuniones o inclusive hablar cuando no fuese apropiado. Pero eso era antes, cuando aún sentía que la "vida real" estaba muy lejos, en un futuro incomprensible. Desde mi primer día de Senior Year he sentido una responsabilidad por conectar más (si no es que completamente) con las otras ochenta y un personas que terminarán conmigo los últimos quince años de mi vida. Dramáticamente hablando, el inicio del final.

Fue cuando una compañera sutilmente comenzó a hablar con pasión acerca de la química—una de sus materias favoritas—que sería aplicable a su futura carrera de medicina, que comencé a poner atención. Más tarde, ese día, me di cuenta de la habilidad innata de unos cuantos compañeros en la clase de "Derecho Mexicano". En el transcurso de las siguientes semanas, me percaté más y más acerca de lo que hablaban las personas de mi generación, con tanto deseo sus gustos y aspiraciones para cuando se gradúen del ASFG. Está el que se emociona acerca de las matemáticas y quiere ser ingeniero, la que dibuja increíble y quiere ser animadora, el que sabe del mundo y no le da pena debatir ideas en clase y quiere ser político, los que realmente no saben qué harán cuando se acabe el año escolar pero saben que se van a reinventar y un sinnúmero de posibilidades.

Tristemente, nunca me había dado cuenta de la profundidad que tenían las personas que se sentaban junto a mí en el salón. O que caminaban a mi lado en el benemérito Senior Hall. Viniendo de alguien que ha pasado la mayor parte de su vida con muchas de estas personas, puedo decir, que la generación 2018 es más que sólo escandalosa o indiferente; al contrario, son gente apasionada por un futuro que ellos van a liderar.



El Hogar Que Quiero Construir



Por Alondra Velasco
Directora de Programa Mexicano

Este ciclo escolar es muy especial: este año, inicio nuevo sendero como directora del departamento de programa mexicano y me estreno como mamá. Sin duda, unir estas dos facetas es un gran reto... Uno demasiado lindo para resguardar.

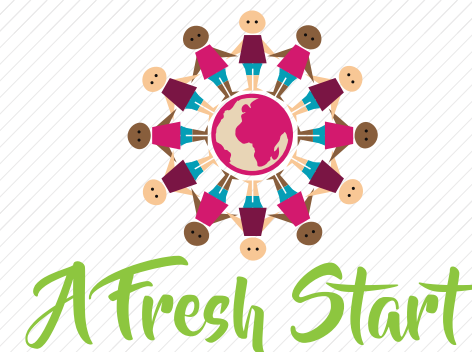
Hace 11 años pisé el American School por primera vez y ahora sueño con ver a mi hija correr por los rincones. Antes, mi labor como maestra de preescolar estaba llena de amor, pasión y esmero. Hoy, se han agregado a estos sentimientos el compromiso de apoyar a mis compañeros docentes y el deseo de ser un buen ejemplo para mi hija.

Siento que en cada alumno veo a mi pequeña y pienso en lo afortunado que es cada miembro del colegio de formar parte de esta maravillosa comunidad que cuida y aboga por el bien de las familias.

Debo reconocer que en ocasiones no es fácil. El cansancio está a punto de vencerme y la preocupación me embarga. Entonces recuerdo las frases que me enseñó mi madre, esas que me hacen sentir mejor y que todos los días enseño a mi hija para que aprenda a vivir con un balance entre fortaleza y vulnerabilidad.

Espero que algún día Tori, mi primogénita, pueda platicar de las hazañas de su madre y a través de ellas pueda sentir que todo lo puede y que en su cabeza y manos está el transformar su casa, su escuela, su país.

Cada mañana, después de besarla y abrazarla, abro las puertas de mi oficina con la energía descomunal que solo su amor me puede dar y que yo deseo compartir con todos ustedes.



A Fresh Start

By Stuti Patel,
high school student

My world was quite small — my family, six friends, and 31 classmates — until it got way bigger when I moved to Guadalajara. I was beyond impressed when I saw the school, and after waiting for weeks I was finally ready for my first day at school.

My mind was running in a hundred directions asking, "How can I possibly make any friends with the language barrier? How will I adjust to this new environment?" These doubts vanished in an instant when people I had met during the math support week indulged me in conversations, introduced me to new people, and guided me about where to go and what to do. I am still getting used to this new environment, but I am sure that the process will transform me into a better individual.

I get this question a lot: What are some differences between my school in India and ASFG? Well, almost everything. ASFG gives its students much more freedom. It focuses on learning rather than on memorizing. Another reason I admire this school is because everyone addresses me by my name, people have the time to converse with me during breaks, and they greet me whenever they see me. It might not be a big deal for you, but trust me, for a new student like me, it is the biggest present that you can give someone.

I have learned a lot during these few weeks with all of you. I have learned to be organized, to be friendly, to be inquisitive, to be creative, to voice my opinion, to accept people despite their differences, and honestly, the list is never-ending. Each one of you is a unique individual who is not afraid of others' opinions about you. I am glad to have met all of you and I look forward to getting to know you, your culture, and your thoughts better.

Thank you for everything.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

By Mary Morris,
elementary school teacher

I wasn't lost because of the cloud of dust in my eyes, I was just totally, completely lost. As I walked past the construction site, I thought about how I had no idea where I was. Cars passing splashed muddy puddle water onto my feet. Mud and dust aside, my sense of direction, usually very strong, was completely off kilter. I clutched my phone, following the blue dot until I got to the front door of ASFG.

Back in Oakland, I could do the drive to school with my eyes closed. Here I had to squint to figure out where I was going. In my hometown, I knew exactly which exit to take on the freeway to avoid traffic and still have time to stop at my favorite coffee shop. The Guadalajara Me wasn't even sure how to correctly order a coffee.

From other big changes in my life, I knew the unknown would soon become second nature. I was sure I'd anticipate every tree root coming through the sidewalk, and eventually those few blocks would feel like home. Soon I wouldn't need to follow the blue dot on my phone anymore because I'd know exactly where I was and where I was going, but it would take time.

I see the construction site a little bit differently now. Just like I'm constructing my life here, as the structure goes up, I can see it becoming something. It's taking form. I know how to maneuver around it and avoid getting splashed by passing cars after a rainstorm. I realize that building something takes time. And while there's still dust, dust settles.



You Can Do It

By Patrick O'Donnell,
middle school teacher

It's Book Madness! Imagine college basketball's March Madness tournament, but with a bracket of sixteen Young Adult books going head-to-head in a literary competition to determine 7th graders' favorite book.

After studying genres and "speed-dating" with potential page turners, students identified the books they'll read in our Independent Reading Program and then voted the top sixteen to compete in Book Madness. Will Ms. Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children sweep its Fantasy competitors? Can Chasing Lincoln's Killer upset the popular The Fault in Our Stars? I can't wait to find out.

I'm three weeks into teaching 7th Grade English and I'm loving every second. I've spent my career in education, starting out as a middle school English teacher; however, teaching at ASFG marks my return to the classroom after twelve years in roles outside the classroom. Teaching is new again. Fortunately, this time I get to take all I've learned from the hundreds of incredible educators I've worked with over the years and all that I'm learning from my new ASFG colleagues and bring it to my awesome 7th graders.

I finished reading my first Young Adult novel this year, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (which tragically didn't make it into the bracket!). It's both hilarious and profound. One passage currently inspires my days with my 7th graders. Following a conversation with his basketball coach, Arnold Spirit, the narrator, reflects:

"Do you understand how amazing it is to hear that from an adult? It's one of the simplest sentences in the world, just four words, but they're the four hugest words in the world when they're put together.

You can do it."

How amazing that I get to be a new teacher at ASFG working every day with incredible young people. I'm looking forward to so many "you can do it" moments and lots of book madness.



The Seven Habits of a Principal

By Julie Villand
High School Principal

1,2,3,4,5,6,7

This year marks a new role for me as High School Principal. Colleagues, parents, and students have offered support and advice to navigate the year ahead. In the same vein, Stephen Covey's book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, explains habits I normally share with students when discussing strategies for success in our High School. These habits are mutually beneficial for a teen and a high school principal. One of my goals this year is to practice these habits alongside the students I counsel to make this the best year possible for everyone. That said, I make a commitment to the following. I promise to:

1. Be Proactive. I will focus on important high school priorities that are within my control. I will not let the issues that I cannot control wear me down and waste my energy.
2. Begin with the End in Mind. I will work to have a clear understanding of what is needed for each student to successfully prepare for their life beyond ASFG.
3. Put Things First. I will set priorities and put my attention towards topics that are important to student learning and student well-being.
4. Think Win Win. I will be supportive of every student. I will avoid comparisons and rivalries among students. I will work towards creating a collaborative attitude that encourages every student to find academic and personal growth.
5. Seek First to Understand, and Then be Understood. I will practice my active listening skills. I will listen with my eyes, heart, and ears. I will express myself with clear, thoughtful, constructive language.
6. Synergize. I will work with the entire teacher, parent, and student community.
7. Sharpen the Saw. I will live healthy. I will care for my brain, heart, and soul. I will read, listen, express myself, build relationships, exercise regularly, and breathe deeply.

Working with students and watching them grow and succeed is something I look forward to this year. With Covey by my side, I believe we are already off to a great start. I would like to thank everyone who has supported me in this new role! Here is to a great year!

Por Ana Gaby González
ExAlumni Generacion 2009

Beginning a new year has always been a ritual for me. Buying new notebooks, new pens. It's a fresh start every single time. As a working adult, you don't have as many chances to start again. You start again when you get a new job, for example. I always get a new notebook when I'm starting a new job. It makes me feel like there's a new story to write.

I am actually starting a new job and it feels like starting a new year. I'm working with an NGO that fights for women's reproductive rights. In addition to getting a new notebook, I'm also cleaning up my laptop and organizing new files in a folder. I'm pretty excited because I will be learning new things as well as contributing to a cause that I feel close to.

The wonderful thing about starting a new year are all the opportunities. You get new teachers and new classmates that you can learn from. In my case, I got new bosses and coworkers. It's super interesting to get to learn from new people. As with any new team, the first rule of team work is to listen to everybody. I am constantly reminded that I have a privileged life, since I had access to education, so I try to put my education to a good use, working for causes that I really believe in. Starting fresh gets harder and harder as you grow up, so take advantage of the clean slates you get while you're in school.

Por Elena Contreras
Coordinadora de Ex Alumnos

Mi nombre es Elena Contreras Palomar y soy de la generación ASFG 2009. Después de terminar mis estudios, carrera en Savannah y maestría en Nueva York, decidí que ya era hora de regresar a mi hogar. Estoy muy emocionada de poder volver a ser parte de la escuela que me dio todo para poder irme a estudiar fuera.

Lo que más me ha gustado ver en la asociación, es que se está volviendo a formar esta comunidad de ex alumnos. Compañeros y maestros que tanto queríamos hace años y de alguna manera siguen estando presentes. Cada pasillo, salón, banca, cancha de basket, me hacen creer que no ha pasado el tiempo. Esta escuela es como mi segunda casa y sé que muchos la recuerdan así. Es por esto que siempre están invitados a venir a visitar la escuela. Si no has sacado tu credencial, estás más que invitado a venir para que te la hagan. Queremos que vengan a los eventos de la escuela, ya sean los Alumni Talks, conferencias que dan los Ex Alumnos de la escuela, International Family Day, Halloween, Navidad, entre otros. Más que nada, el fin de este grupo es reconectar a ex alumnos y maestros. Que recuerden que siempre serán parte de la familia del ASFG.

Si tienen fotos o videos que podamos compartir en nuestras redes sociales, por favor mandalas a mi correo: elena.contreras@asfg.edu.mx

ASFG

By David C. McGrath
Director General

Each summer, ASFG invests in campus improvement projects ranging from classroom remodeling to important infrastructure upgrades. The summers of 2016 and 2017 saw a number of campus improvements that contribute nicely to the theme of this Connexion, new perspectives.

We focused our facility improvements on accessibility through 3 general principles – handicapped usability, privacy and pedestrian traffic. At face value, auditing our campus for its accessibility may seem straightforward, but a closer look sheds light on the inherent complexity of an effective needs assessment – the deliberate assumption of multiple perspectives from our diverse community.

For example, although we are proud of the improvements made in the past few years increasing wheelchair accessibility, it wasn't until we conducted a point to point mobility audit with the ADA Accessible Design manual in hand that we gained the perspective that there continue to be areas difficult to traverse that have relatively simple design solutions.

It was in this spirit of improving accessibility through multiple perspectives that we determined the need to improve the following areas of campus before, during and immediately following the 16-17 school year:

Neighborhood sidewalks – We repaired 445 m² of crumbled sidewalks on Filadelfia, Managua and Colomos. We also installed a pedestrian crosswalk atop a speedbump on Colomos and widened the sidewalk around the eucalyptus tree. These improvements facilitate wheelchair and pedestrian travel to and from our school.

Bathrooms and Locker Rooms – We redesigned three bathrooms on campus to include individual toilet rooms with floor to ceiling walls and doors and at least one family sized room in each with a changing table and wheelchair accessibility fixtures. These improvements provide users more privacy to reduce bullying and a gender neutral environment where, for example, a father can help his daughter use the bathroom. View this heartwarming commercial to appreciate the sometimes problematic bathroom experience for fathers and daughters (<https://goo.gl/jESfmW>).

Ramps and elevators – to improve mobility and access for our handicapped and injured community members as well as material carts, we have invested in 7 ramps on campus, 3 on neighborhood streets and one elevator in high school.

New Perspectives indeed! We continue to value diversity and inclusion at the American School and while there are definitely more areas to improve on this almost 70 year old campus, we will always strive to garner perspective from all our community to make the learning environment stronger and more accessible by everyone.

School Year vs. Ciclo Escolar

Matt Bosarge
Director of Libraries

I love using the Spanish term for school year, ciclo escolar. It reminds me that working in education is indeed cyclical. Each year, in the fall, we get the opportunity to reinvent ourselves, review our methods and practices, and have another chance to improve ourselves for the benefit of our students.

This year, for example, is the completion of an even longer cycle here in our libraries. I have once again become Director of Libraries, a position I held about twelve years ago. Back then, I helped train a new librarian named Juliet Evans, who eventually became the Director herself, and held that position for many years. Now, she has passed that torch back to me after all this time. It feels as though one cycle has been completed, and another is beginning. I am excited to be back in the Upper School library this year, with the chance to improve and build upon all the great things that came before.

Another new cycle is beginning in our Lower School library, with the addition of our new librarian, Kat Zadlo. Kat comes to us from Chicago, and has already shown herself to be capable, knowledgeable, a strong advocate for literacy, while at the same time fostering enthusiasm and fun with the students. In effect, Juliet passed a torch to Kat, also beginning a new cycle of renewal and change in the LS library, as Kat brings her fresh ideas and inspirations to the younger students of our school.

Both Kat and I, and all of our staff, are excited to begin this new ciclo escolar!

HOW I'VE LEARNED FROM PLAY

By Jess Garcia,
early childhood teacher

When you walk through the ASFG Early Childhood gates, you enter a special world. One where lavender springs from the benches, a rock wall begs to be climbed, and a jacaranda tree is wrapped in its own knitted sweater. At any given time, children are riding their trikes around a racetrack, constructing towers with blocks, sharing books with their friends in a reading corner, or making playdough cakes.

In short, the children spend their days playing.

This isn't to say that our students aren't learning. They're learning cooperation and effective communication, higher order questions, and developing spatial awareness. They are engaging in scientific inquiry and employing art tools and supplies in their creations. Our EC students are even learning how to read, write, and think mathematically. But the system in which this learning takes place differs widely from the academic environment I was used to, and as a new teacher at ASFG, I find it a refreshing deviation from teaching to the test, rote memorization and drills, and the removal of play in an attempt to improve math, reading, and writing scores.

What is perhaps even more welcome is the respect and love shown to each child. Their feelings, learning processes, and developmental needs are all treated with so much care and attention, because they are individuals who matter, and who will go out into the world and make a difference.

In Early Childhood, children are encouraged to navigate their world through imagination, curiosity, and wonder. And they will carry what they learn with them, because, as an old Finnish saying goes, "Those things you learn without joy you will forget easily."

