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Mayan Families' Student-Sponsor Correspondence

Shortly after Mayan Families established its Student Sponsorship Program, students began to write notes of thanks to their sponsors. Mayan Families translated the letters and mailed them to sponsors on behalf of the students. Sponsors were so very pleased to receive the note that many asked if they could respond to the student and if Mayan Families would be willing to translate and deliver the letter. Mayan Families began to provide that service.

Over the years, as the program grew, the cost of translating and mailing the physical letters increased and became more logistically complicated. Rather than send the student thank you letters via mail, the letters were scanned and emailed. Many sponsors then asked if Mayan Families would be willing to translate and deliver their email responses, too.

Because the majority of our sponsored students do not have access to a computer or smartphone, students were called to the office to both write and collect letters to and from their sponsors. Since most students live outside of Panajachel, this poses a burden to the student and family, who often have to miss school or work in order to visit the office during business hours. In most cases, it also involves what can be a significant transportation expense.

The foundational goal of the Mayan Families' sponsorship program is to support students by defraying the cost of their schooling so that they can achieve the highest level of education possible. While we ask our students to comply with some basic requirements (including satisfactory school attendance), we wish to keep the mandatory visits to the office to a minimum so that the student and his or her family can focus on studies and the demands of life and work, while still supporting meaningful and special communication between students and donors.

When can I expect to hear from my sponsored student?

Students will write to their sponsors at three points during the January to October school year.

1. Beginning of each school year excitement in January/February
2. Mid-year progress update in June/July
3. End of year results in November/December

These dates were chosen as they correspond with specific required office visits when students collect their school supplies, review their progress and attendance reports, and submit their final report cards. With this timeline in place, sponsors will regularly hear from their students during these milestone moments, and the additional cost to the families (transportation, missed school/work) will be noticeably reduced. Of course we are making sure that these changes are also communicated to all beneficiaries to ensure that they know the new processes and when they will receive correspondence from their sponsors.

Why is this process changing?

Mayan Families is delighted to provide sponsors with the opportunity to connect with and motivate students with their kind words of encouragement. The most important goal of the Mayan Families Sponsorship Program is to support our wonderful students in their education and have them focus on their schoolwork as much as possible, and we believe these procedures will reduce the financial burden of extra trips to the office and help staff to translate and deliver all correspondence effectively, while still supporting the communication and the relationships that make Mayan Families sponsorships special.

What does this mean for me as a sponsor?



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For you as a sponsor, the new process has several advantages. You will hear from your sponsored family at set times throughout the year to learn more about their achievements in school, lives and long-term goals. These specific times were chosen during the year as they mark important milestones in our students' schooling. They will be able to provide more details on how their studies are progressing, or share the joy of starting the school year and receiving their grades with you more directly. This new form of connecting with and learning about your student increasingly focuses on supporting the students in the best way possible as well as improving the experience we provide to you as our much appreciated donors.

How will I receive my student's letters?

You will be able to access pictures of your sponsored student's letters (including the translation) through the link to your sponsored student's personal SmugMug gallery. We will be notifying you when the pictures have been uploaded to your student's profile. Please keep in mind that we have roughly 2,000 students enrolled in the Sponsorship Program, so it may take us some time to upload all pictures, but we will be working hard to facilitate this process. Your patience is truly appreciated!

What if I send additional donations to my sponsored student?

We feel blessed to count on so many dedicated donors who go above and beyond to support their sponsored students not only through a school sponsorship, but also through additional donations like food support, or much needed items which will improve the livelihood of our beneficiaries. These donations mean so much to our sponsored students and their families! To share the families' joy of receiving this support, we will upload pictures of the delivery of your donations to the SmugMug gallery. The families will also have the opportunity to acknowledge donations they have received in one of the three letters scheduled during the calendar year.

Can I still write to my sponsored student?

Exchanging letters is a great opportunity to learn more about each other's family, culture and traditions. You can write up to two letters a year by simply sending it to studentletters@mayanfamilies.org. Please reference "Student Correspondence, *Student Name*, *Student ID*" in the subject field. We warmly invite you to write these letters in the interim periods between your students' updates in order to further a positive and meaningful exchange. We feel that two letters a year provide a great opportunity for engagement between sponsors and their sponsored students, while balancing the staff and logistic resources needed to translate and deliver letters. Before reaching out to your student, please make sure to [read our letter guidelines](#) to ensure the best experience and communication between you and your student. This process will make sure that your letter will boost the confidence of your student, motivating them to continue doing their best in their studies and making the most of the amazing opportunity you provide to them!

When will these changes be implemented?

These new guidelines take effect on June 15th, when students will start bringing in their second report card. Any letters you have sent to your sponsored student before this date and for which you have not yet received an answer, will be delivered to the student with the first upcoming time for the students to write letters (June/July 2019).

We hope you will find these answers to the most frequent questions helpful and informative. In case you still have questions that have not been addressed, please reach out to studentletters@mayanfamilies.org. Thank you for your continued support of our sponsored students!