

# International Support: The Miguel Angel Asturias Academy



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We met Jorge several years ago while studying Spanish in Quetzaltenango, a beautiful town nestled in the mountains. We were so impressed with his vision and the reality of the school. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, painted in huge letters on one of the school walls, shouts to the kids each day their right to freedom of thought, to a free education, to an adequate standard of living, to take part in the government of the country. Indigenous and non-indigenous kids learn side by side thus side stepping the barriers to interaction in the culture. Teachers tap into students' curiosity helping them identify social issues they can act

upon. A recent partnership with a local technical institute enables students to acquire computer skills. Another partnership with the Stone Church of the Brethren and the Spanish Department of Juniata College in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania generates funds and has connected Ryan Richards as an intern to help develop a website, database, and donor communications for the school.



Jorge's long term vision is to replicate his educational model throughout Guatemala. One unanticipated way this is already happening is through the teacher training he provides. Government school teachers are brought in for professional development training and then use their new skills in their schools.

Kris Herbst and Jackie McMakin nominated Jorge for an [Ashoka Fellowship](#) which he won, becoming the first Guatemalan to be so honored as a "successful social entrepreneur." Jorge continually expresses gratitude for his connection with Seekers and appreciates our most recent financial gift which is being used to raise teacher salaries. Ryan closed his recent sermon with an invitation to visit the school. In a recent article for [NEED Magazine](#), Ryan describes what his time at the school has meant to him: "I have come to appreciate the importance of local knowledge in change-making, and have forged relationships that are deeply valuable to me. The experience has affirmed...my commitment to promoting human development, and also made me cynical to outside-initiated international development projects. A good first step for us as foreigners wanting to help is to 'be with' instead of 'do for'. Bit by bit, the community will reveal to us the nuanced cultural landscape in which we we are operating...A good second step is identify local people doing good work and

ask them how we can support their efforts.” We have asked Jorge this. His reply: “Help us finish the school building, keep raising teacher salaries, and then help us with our next school!”

[The Miguel Angel Asturias Academy web site](#)

