Jonathan Mijangos, age 12, is a thin, soft-spoken sixth grader in one of our partner schools. He wants to be an accountant and go on to college when he grows up, because he really likes school and math. Jonathan enjoys school more these days because of the changes brought about by our education promoters. His school is one of four participating in our School Partner Initiative.

“Before, my classmates were very disruptive,” says Jonathan. “But when [education promoter] Jorge did reading activities, he helped us with classroom rules: to be respectful, to raise our hands and wait our turn to participate. This is what helped my friends respect others, and it helped me too.”

Jonathan paints a good picture of the kinds of changes we’re bringing to schools.

Greater order in the classroom
Our education promoters are working with teachers and administrators to create greater order in the classroom. They are working on behavior modification and classroom management to lessen disruptions and create more time for learning. This includes incentivizing good behavior and attendance and establishing a classroom norm of taking turns with classroom participation.

As the teachers see success with the education promoters’ ideas, they have begun to replicate them. “It’s really...
Vilma, age 18, lives in a village outside of Antigua that is perched on a steep hillside. To get to school every day, she walks down a steep, winding trail to catch a bus to Antigua, then transfers to a bus that heads to Jocotenango, where her school is located. She has done this every weekday since grade school. All the while, she has made the trip with an aging and poorly fitting prosthetic leg.

“Most kids would probably just not go to school, because it was so hard to get there or because they would be embarrassed,” says Lidia Álvarez, “but Vilma is very committed to her studies.” For the past six years, Lidia has served as Vilma’s social worker and has witnessed first-hand how challenging the prosthesis has been.

Being different
Vilma was born with a congenital disorder that caused her left leg to never fully develop. She was diagnosed with the condition when she was two, and her leg was amputated so she could learn to walk with a prosthetic leg. Over the years, the prosthesis was adapted to Vilma’s growing body. But as she grew more quickly in adolescence, it became increasingly uncomfortable and began to show a lot of wear and tear.

The prosthesis was uncomfortable socially as well. Vilma felt like it made her stand out among her classmates, and she found socializing difficult. It was clearly affecting her self-esteem. But none of this was enough for Vilma to give up. “I find it very admirable that her physical challenges haven’t impeded all of her goals,” says Lidia, “that she has continued to dream about her future. It didn’t matter if it rained, if her trip to school was complicated—she made the trip every day to continue her studies.”

Last year, Vilma visited Common Hope’s Antigua clinic to see about renovating or replacing the prosthesis. Dr. Walter Estrada, clinic director, consulted with an orthopedic doctor in Guatemala City, and together they began the process of remodeling the prosthesis. “At the first consultation,” explains Dr. Estrada, “[the orthopedic specialist] asked her to describe what she wanted and hoped for from the prosthesis, so he could adapt it to her liking, and then he made this happen.”

Renewed confidence and hope
The new prosthesis renews Vilma’s confidence as she approaches graduation this fall. She hopes to begin a career in tourism and continue her studies at the university level. Vilma says she doesn’t know where she’d be without Common Hope; social worker Lidia imagines she could have been homebound, without all of her achievements to date.

It is hard to imagine where Vilma would be without her strength of spirit, too. “I think it takes a lot of guts to make the trip Vilma does every day,” says Lidia. “She is an example of how to persevere.”
great to walk into a classroom and see a teacher implementing one of our systems,” says Renato Westby, who heads up the School Partner Initiative. “They see it working, and they get it.”

Love for reading and books
Fátima Ramírez, pictured on the cover, is a bright, expressive 10-year-old studying in the fourth grade. She bubbles with enthusiasm when she talks about reading, which she likes because she discovers new things. She wants to be a designer when she grows up because she loves colors, clothes, and fashion.

Fátima gets to do more reading and art these days with the education promoters, who strive to make reading fun and engaging. They often bring an art project that interacts with the book’s subject matter, to the delight of students like Fátima.

Enthusiasm for reading is a big change we envision for the communities we work with, and our existing partner schools are a great example of this. Says Marco Tulio Margarín, assistant school director at the elementary school in Santa Catarina, “We want to emphasize reading—we believe that is where the deficiency is in our country.” Aura Hernández, a first grade teacher in Santa Catarina, observes, “The children are always excited about the reading hour, they are waiting for it. This program is very motivating for them.”

Teachers have seen the success of the reading hours, and they have begun to lead their own reading activities.

Stronger partnerships with families
Common Hope has always recognized that the whole family has a role in helping students succeed, and our social workers will continue partnering with sponsored families to make this happen. Our school partners recognize the need for family involvement, too. “The teachers and supporters, like Common Hope, can’t do it alone,” says Mr. Margarín, assistant school director. “So we are looking for ways for parents to participate in our goal which is to improve the quality of education in our school.”

Common Hope has years of experience in encouraging the active participation of families. With the support of our partner schools, we will be able to reinforce and increase this involvement.

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Changed attitudes, communities
Some changes will come quickly. "What we’re doing in the partner schools is nothing complex—it’s very simple," says Renato Westby. “One of the things I think we can do in a very short period of time,” Renato continues, “is to change attitudes about education—that school can be fun, and that everyone needs to value its importance for a better future.” Some changes may take longer, but all of our partners have strengths, which we are helping to reinforce and grow.

"The School Partner Initiative is a program that believes in the public education system," says Eva Alonzo, education promoter. Eva speaks for all of us at Common Hope—we believe in the schools and the families we partner with. With a bit of coaching and new resources, they are making great changes. And as each is transformed, we can bring change to new communities.

Watch a short film about our School Partner Initiative at commonhope.org/media/videos

WHAT YOU CAN DO

A gift of $100 can provide a week of supplies for the after-school activities of 115 students.

Jonathan, age 12, wants to be an accountant when he grows up. He enjoys school more these days because of the changes brought about by our education promoters.
After-school group in San Rafael builds creativity and makes learning fun

Lesbia Marroquin, San Rafael program coordinator for Common Hope, shared a great story about a recent Wednesday afternoon group activity. The students and education promoters have an activity they call “the magic bag,” where kids pull imaginary items out of the bag and describe them. (What color is it, what does it feel like, is it big or small, etc.)

Luis, a very bright first grader, pulled an imaginary soccer ball out of the bag and after he described it, he “kicked” it at Marvin, one of the education promoters. Luis described how he didn't have good aim and the ball hit Marvin in the eye.

At which point, Marvin started pretending that he really had been hit in the eye with the ball. Lots of laughter all around, although Luis did make sure to apologize to Marvin for hitting him.

Lesbia says that the kids are really starting to blossom in the group, becoming more open with the teachers, and smiling and laughing more.

Renovations enhance reading and youth programs

Renovations are underway at the Antigua site to enhance our reading and youth programs. The improvements will raise the prominence of the library and will create more space for children and families to spend time in a safe, peaceful environment.

A culture of reading
The biggest change will be a more prominent entrance and patio for the library, to encourage families to utilize the library more and create more space to sit and enjoy a good book.

An inspiration to students
We are also building a new brick walkway, which will wind its way to the library and recreation area. The bricks will be engraved with the names of high school graduates, as a way to honor their achievement and inspire all those still working toward graduation.

Lessons in leadership
Next year, we hope to secure funds for a new playground and multipurpose recreation area for our youth programs, so that they are better able to facilitate the development of leadership skills, team work, and socialization.

Finishing touches of the new entrance and walkway will be completed in September, at which time construction of the surrounding gardens will begin. All renovations will be completed in time for our high school graduation celebration, which will occur in mid-November.

To see more pictures of the construction, visit our website.

Common Hope is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation founded in 1986 and is audited annually. Contributions are 100% tax deductible as allowed by law.