

Eagle College and Holland Christian:

Holland Christian has formed an exciting partnership with Eagle College, a Mexican school located in Miguel Alemán, a small town across the border from Roma, Texas. The school is located in an area known for drug-trafficking and poverty. A year ago, Jane VanderBeek, who teaches Spanish at HCHS, was asked by Bob Ebels (HC former board member and grandparent) if she could give a tour of the High School to two visiting Mexican pastors. Bob is part of a group of local West Michigan residents who have started Hope for Kids Mexico (www.hopeforkidsmexico.com), which wants to help Eagle College achieve their goal of offering Christian education to their community's children.

“For more than 20 years Pastors David Martínez and Ramón Solís and others in Miguel Alemán have been praying that they would be able to open a Christian school in their community,” says Jane. “Some folks from West Michigan met them and heard about their desire and their faithfulness over the years to continue to pray and not give up on their dream. The individuals from West Michigan started the Hope for Kids Mexico organization and want to partner with the pastors and their Templo Belén church to make the school a reality.” Eagle College started in August 2007 with 55 students from preschool through 6th grade. Today, the school has 136 students, and they had to turn away 30 more this year. It is growing each year by a grade so that this year they added 7th grade. Jane notes that parents are eager to send their kids to Eagle College because it provides a quality Christian education that focuses on English and the Bible.

Jane VanderBeek's introduction to the pastors and meeting with Bob Ebels led to a discussion of ways in which Holland Christian could partner with Eagle College. “To learn a little more about the school, four of us went down to visit in February 2009, including principal Troy Stahl and his wife Sara, fellow Spanish teacher Amanda Brouwer, and myself.” Following this trip, the team worked

on formulating plans for the future of the partnership between HC and Eagle College. According to Jane, “In the beginning stages we want to work at forming relationships and getting to know



each other. We had our visit in February, then seven people from Eagle College (pastors, wives, principal, secretary and a kindergarten teacher) came up to West Michigan at the end of the school year and got to meet more HC folks and tour buildings.

“We want this relationship to be a partnership/exchange where both sides contribute and receive; it may not always be ‘equal’ but there certainly are areas that both schools have strengths in and can make each other stronger by being in partnership with each other.” As an example of these different strengths, Jane notes that in our culture, would we really keep praying twenty years and keep trusting God to make something happen—such as providing the means for a Christian school in our community—or would we conclude after a few months or years that it must not be meant to be? An amazing lesson of perseverance can be learned from the people who started Eagle College, and both schools can learn a great deal from each other and their

personal experiences.

“Our Superintendent, Glenn Vos, often encourages us to make Holland Christian a school without walls, a school that is welcoming to the community and whose

teachers and students are positively impacting the community,” says Jane. “What struck me during our visit in February is that Templo Belén (the church that started Eagle College) is living out a ‘church without walls’ philosophy/lifestyle. The church members are very involved in the community. In addition to impacting the lives of the students at Eagle College, they go out and minister to neighborhoods with Kids’ Bible Club programs and on Saturday mornings they drive around the city picking up children for breakfast and Bible Club at church.” Although the EC staff don’t know exactly how the sister school relationship will look, they view Holland Christian as a school with a lot of experienced staff and feel that HC could really help them in staff development and training.

Even in its early stages, Eagle College is transforming its community through its children. Recently, a parent called the EC office asking if someone from the school could tell her more about prayer because she didn’t know anything about it but

Becoming Sister Schools

her child, who attends EC and prays at school with teachers, was asking her to pray at home with her.

Jane VanderBeek and Amanda Brouwer have come up activity ideas for elementary, middle, and high school students so they can interact with EC students.

Sister School Ideas for Elementary Students:

- **Prayer Pals:** students pray for each other weekly. FLES teachers can do this with students in Spanish; classroom teachers in English
- **Pen Pals:** students share correspondence through handwritten letters or class e-mail letters
- **School Supply Drive:** preK-2 students often need something tangible to understand what they're doing. They could buy stickers, crayons, pencils etc. Older students could donate money so Eagle College could purchase bulkier items like tissues, toilet paper, printer paper, etc.
- **Book Drive:** Eagle College is in the beginning stages of building its library and is especially in need of simple English, Spanish and/or bilingual books.
- **Birthday book donations:** Invite students to donate a library book on

their birthday to their Holland Christian building and/or to Eagle College's library.

- **FLES/Classroom Weather:** Once a week talk about the weather in Miguel Alemán instead of Holland.
- **Holiday Info Exchange:** HC students could write stories and send pictures of how we celebrate American holidays (Thanksgiving, 4th of July, Christmas, MLK day, etc.). EC students could share information about Mexican holidays (Children's Day, Three Kings Day, Independence Day, etc.).
- **Sharing class projects:** Teachers from both schools could share ideas and resources on the same unit (i.e. monarch butterflies).
- **Songspiration:** Each school could send a video (or post on website) of a class singing a favorite song. This could be done in English or Spanish.
- **State facts:** Students can share info about their home states of Michigan and Tamaulipas.
- **Art/book/poetry/project swap:** EC & HC classes could send each other art



projects, homemade books, writings etc., especially about curriculum themes shared by both schools.

- **Art exhibit:** Display artwork from EC and/or both schools. It would especially be great to display artwork of the same theme (Christmas, favorite foods, Independence Day) to highlight cultural similarities and differences or cultural themes.
- **Chapel exchange:** each school record a chapel and play it at the other school.
- **Skype:** Only one hour time difference... it's very possible!

Sister School Ideas: Middle and High School

- **Sharing through Technology:** students can share wikis, websites, blogs etc.
- **Forums:** students from both schools respond to a given topic or discussion question. At www.voicethread.com students could post pictures or videos and offer written or oral responses
- **E-pals:** Students could write in Spanish and English every other time they correspond.
- **World Cultures:** Projects could focus on border town issues, US-Mexico war on drugs, etc.
- **Spanish Club:** Raise awareness and/or money and supplies for EC; sell Mexican art/jewelry.
- **Teacher/Student trips:** Visit EC to build relationships, help with curriculum development, teacher training, construction, community outreach, volunteer at orphanage, etc.

