

December 2021

Dear Friends,

The good news is that, after only minimal study last year, we have finally managed to complete an entire school term. Two weeks ago, our students took their term exams. Parents came to pick up their children's grades and talk to their teachers last week.



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Exam hall. We mix the classes up so it's harder to cheat.



Most of our students in grades 3-8 are just a bit behind where they would normally be at this time of year. (Our school opening was delayed by two months this year due to Covid 19.) Our younger students suffered more due to the lockdowns. Not being able to study much last year plus a 3.5 month delay in starting this year will have effects going into their next grade. Their current level is about a full term behind where it should be. If we can continue to stay open, we will be able to make this up over time.



Our kindergartners were finally allowed to resume study in October.

Since I last wrote, we've had two art related activities. One has been an extended period of painting cabinets that were built to house our new technology (laptop, document camera, and projector in each classroom). I printed a box pattern so that the kids could create designs. Then, each class selected their favorite design. In spare afternoons these days, I have been supervising small groups of kids as they slowly paint their cabinets. All of the primer and background color layers have been painted.

A few cabinets are now complete; a few still have the final design work to finish.



The day before the Diwali holiday, classes planned and painted colorful geometric designs. Short days (limitations due to covid restrictions) have reduced the amount of art included in our kids' school days, but we are finding some ways to encourage creativity.



Our progress so far



Last Monday, in a late celebration of Children's Day, we took 2 busses full of students to see our new land. Of course, they've been curious about where the new school will be built. We enjoyed a lovely warm winter day with time for free play, taking selfies, organized games and prizes, and a yummy snack of puffed rice and a sweet dish made of carrots and nuts.



Walking from the bus toward our new site



Students playing cricket on our new property



Picnic fun!



Kindergartners race!



3rd graders, with a balloon between their knees, hop toward the finish line



Some older girls pose with their math teacher (center)

You must be wondering about the progress of the new school building. After pushing quite hard to get things off the ground in November, I finally realized that it would be better to preserve my sanity by stepping back and proceeding at a normal (rather than rushed) rate. It took much more time than I expected just to get bids from a few contractors. I could just imagine how stressful it would be at every step of construction to be pushing for completion by a certain date with every delay making it less and less likely for us to open by next July. I've come to the conclusion that it would be better to start as soon as possible, but to get the work done properly, ready to open in a completed building in June 2023. Hopefully it won't be too much longer before I can send photos of the start of construction. We did get our borewell dug. We struck good, clean water at 320 feet. If you have a minute, you might want to watch the attached video of that. Shot at sunrise, there is a peaceful start before the water begins to gush out of the newly dug hole.

To those of you who have purchased goat calendars this year, thank you! The last I heard, these sales have already generated \$9000 for our school! And to all of you who have sent other donations this year, a big thank you to you, too. I am so grateful that we have received enough gifts this year to pay our teachers and purchase supplies, with enough left over to celebrate a joyous picnic! Thank you very much for enabling our work among the poor in Varanasi.

With this letter, I'm sending heartfelt wishes for a warm and satisfying holiday season!

love,
Connie