

Engaged Educators, Engaged Students:

Transforming Rural Costa Rican Schools

School Spotlights| Sarapiquí District, Sarapiquí Region, Costa Rica | 2021 - 2022

The first step towards high-quality education for students begins with teachers. However, due to obstacles like geographic isolation and constrained budgets, schools in rural communities have reduced access to the one tool that reliably improves student outcomes: high-quality teacher training. COVID has only exacerbated these inequities. As a result, rural schools worldwide are facing a crisis, with lower primary and secondary completion rates and university attendance rates than other regions. This trend hinders students' future opportunities.



TeachUNITED bridges those gaps by combining community-based teacher coaching with evidence-based pedagogical training in a scalable package that allows local education leaders to own, co-design, and adapt context-specific strategies to increase academic achievement.

In the time since TeachUNITED started working in Sarapiquí, they have reached 1,012 educators in 85 schools, who in turn have served 61,796 students.

While there has been a concerted effort to expand school access and enrollment in Sarapiquí recently, the region still struggles with improving student outcomes due to considerable barriers to learning: Repeated and significant disruptions of school cycles; New forms of educational exclusion; Ineffective teaching practices.

We highlight several special schools from the Sarapiquí region making great strides to improve teaching practices and student outcomes.

LICEO DE RÍO FRÍO



25

Teacher Participants

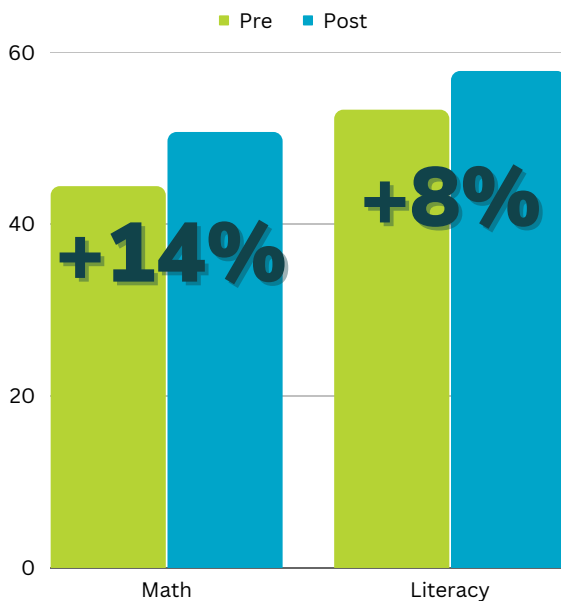


1,143

Students

Liceo de Río Frío is a secondary school in Sarapiquí. It is one of the largest schools in the Sarapiquí region. The community population is mostly poor or lower-middle class which may impact how students view their opportunities for success. TeachUNITED began working with Liceo de Río Frío in 2021 to help them find ways to improve that mindset in not just their students, but teachers and leaders as well.

Sustained collective efficacy from educators, and students seeing postsecondary career success, offers a form of systemic transformation. Teachers see how the whole school and community are starting to buy into this vision of success. That vision of success is translating directly to improved scores in both math and literacy.



Alexander Vega Núñez, Science Teacher

Teachers are finding ways to bring joy, play, and gamification into their work. Science teacher at Liceo de Río Frío, Alex Nunez, uses game-show style “Wild Cards” or “Phone a Friend” options during experiments, so students are engaged and willing to experiment more.

“Here in Costa Rica, we have very important people in the field of science, technology, commerce, and industry. It is hard for us in small towns to believe that someone from a small school, from a small school in a rural community can achieve success. That they can believe that it is possible, that in Sarapiquí the potential exists. That is my vision.”

- Alexander Vega Núñez, Science Teacher, Liceo de Río Frío



Contact Us: partnerships@teachunited.org

LA TIGRA



8

Teacher Participants



130

Students

La Tigra is a primary school that is located near the northern border of the region. The community has few resources, little schooling, and a large immigrant population. That can cause challenges for the school, as it is a constant flow of children arriving, enrolling, and then many times moving on shortly after enrollment. TeachUNITED began working with La Tigra in 2021 to help support teachers in engaging students so they are enticed to continue in school.

In Maria Vivan Lopez Matarrita's preschool special education classroom, the students use gross motor play to practice important independence and life skills. Though they have vastly different needs, the same joy and curiosity pervade within her classroom.



Maria Vivan Lopez Matarrita, Special Education

"When students enter, enter and observe, they are like 'Wow, something changed in the classroom', there is no longer that cold, empty, simple classroom. That affected the children a lot when they came to school. They didn't show the enthusiasm that they show now."

ESTERO GRANDE



6

Teacher Participants



114

Students

Estero Grande primary school has many students that come from families who are working on the local fruit plantations, creating complications for teachers looking for more parental support for their students. TeachUNITED began working with teachers and leaders here to show them strategies and tools to reach individual student needs.

"When we apply the program and put what we learn into practice, then we are going to create kids who are going to work harder for themselves and who are going to investigate, create knowledge instead of just being there listening. They are going to work in a group, do collaborative learning."

- Carolina Flores Aguero, Teacher,
Estero Grande

Using student-centered strategies learned in the TeachUNITED program increased student ownership of learning and improved curiosity, in turn, improving student outcomes dramatically. Estero Grande celebrated huge increases in their Grade 5 literacy assessments, with a 75 percent difference from pre- to post-assessment in 2022.

