



Student Service Program Frequently Asked Questions

About School the World

School the World is an international education non-profit organization committed to solving extreme poverty through the power of education. In the past fifteen years, we have built 160+ schools throughout Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama by partnering with the local government and rural community leaders. Aside from building schools, we train teachers, empower parents through bi-monthly meetings and sustainably stock classroom libraries through a matching program. In 2016, we began introducing an initiative around PLAY to our strategy. Play is proven to increase students' mental and physical health, learning skills, gender equality and life skills. We committed to building play spaces to facilitate free play, organized recess games, and eventually an inter-school soccer league and have built 70+ playgrounds at our existing schools.

Who?

Any high school student can apply to participate! Students under the age of 14 are welcome to apply, but require a parent to travel with them as a chaperone.

Where?

Our global citizenship program operates in the rural northern region of Panama, (the Veraguas province) working with the indigenous people of the Ngäbe-Buglé comarca, the Western Highlands of Guatemala, and the Southern region of Honduras.

When?

Our student service trips coincide with typical spring and summer school vacation weeks.

Winter/Spring 2026

February 14th – 21st (Panama)

March 14th – 21st (Panama)

April 18th – 25th (Guatemala)

Summer 2026

July dates TBA

How much does it cost?

Students commit to contributing \$3,950 to fund a primary school building and/or a playground. Funds can be paid in full or students can choose to fundraise in the months leading up to departure date. A nonrefundable deposit of \$750 is required with each application and will go toward the total trip cost.

What Will Students Do?

Students raise the funds to build a primary school building and/or a playground for students living in poverty. At the end of the week in the community, everyone (including the entire community and local Mayor) will participate in a Dedication Ceremony to celebrate the completion of the project. Among other things, student travelers can expect to mix cement, install play equipment and paint. Students will also have time within the classrooms to help teach lessons, as well as complete a home visit to understand daily life within the community.

While raising funds in the months leading up to the trip, the students will learn about successful fundraising tactics, as well as attend educational seminars to learn about the region's history and culture. These pre-trip meetings also discuss global literacy and what it means to be a global citizen.

Is It Safe?

Safety is our top priority. We personally investigate and inspect medical facilities, housing and food preparation. We evaluate each building project for any potential safety concerns. We use only known drivers and vehicles, requiring certificates of insurance and maintenance. We carefully vet all of our communities and spend considerable time in them before beginning any build. There also will be at least two STW leaders (one U.S., one local) in addition to adult chaperones with each group. STW's minimum chaperone to student ratio is 1:6.

We purchase insurance for each student to cover medical risks, emergency medical evacuation and cancellations due to death, illness and similar situations. Families have the option to purchase additional "Cancel for any Reason" insurance should they choose to. Reach out to a member of our staff to discuss as needed.

We have been working in Guatemala since 2009. We have a strong local team and relationships with prominent business leaders and families in Guatemala. We also work in two of the safest departments in Guatemala: Quiché and Totonicapán.

In Panama, we have strong local teams on the ground who are in regular communication with the local government and communities your students will be partnering with. The region we travel to in Panama is very safe and not listed by The U.S. Department of State as a region of concern.

In 2019, we expanded into Southern Honduras (specifically the department of Valle) and have since built 15+ schools with more in the pipeline. The region of Valle is very safe and has a significantly lower crime index than the rest of the country.

A safety marker used by other student exchange groups is the presence of the Peace Corps, who are highly present in the region. We monitor any change in this activity prior to and during all trips.

What are the requirements?

- Complete and submit an application with a 250-300 word essay
- Submit a deposit of \$750 by the application deadline and raise or contribute (or a combination thereof) an additional \$3,200 at deadlines TBA. (Fundraising training and support is provided to all students).
- Complete and submit all required waivers of liability signed both by the student and a legal guardian to be distributed at a later date via SchoolDoc, an online management system.
- Submit an accurate health history and a certification of good health from a physician, including a statement that the student does not have any physical, psychological or medical condition that would inhibit participation in the mission.
- Visit travel clinic with preliminary itinerary to obtain any recommended vaccinations at least three weeks prior to trip.
- Participate in pre-trip seminars to review trip preparation and general history/culture of Panama, Guatemala, or Honduras.
- Complete and send thank you letters to all donors within two weeks of donation/travel and provide STW with spreadsheet of all donors (we will provide templates).
- Mandatory parent/guardian participation in final pre-trip team meeting.
- A passport valid for at least 6 months after trip return date.
- Cooperation with all pre- and post-trip student responsibilities, such as community follow up and submitting your photos to our online account.

Can I be a chaperone?

We accept applications for parent chaperones! The chaperone trip fee of \$2,600 covers all travel/room and board expenses. If teachers are interested in forming a group or joining students from their school, please reach out to us for discussion. If a group of 12-15 students is formed from a school, we will sponsor a teacher to travel.

How Will Students Raise the Funds?

STW will provide the students with a “Fundraising Toolkit” and guide the students through letter-writing, online campaigns, a list of suggestions for independent group event and will facilitate at least one group fundraising event, proceeds of which will be split among those who participate. Every student will have the opportunity to create their own individual online fundraising page through our peer-to-peer online platform.

What If Students Do Not Meet the Fundraising Deadlines?

If students do not meet the fundraising deadlines, we require parents to make up the difference between the amounts due and the amount raised. Non-compliance will result in removal from the program. If you would like to discuss special circumstances please contact Megan Gilman at meg.gilman@schooltheworld.org.

Are There Refunds?

Please see our full refund policy:

<https://info.schooltheworld.org/hubfs/Cancellation%20&%20Refund%20Policy%202024.pdf>

Are There Any Other Costs?

There will be no other required STW costs. Students may choose to tip any hospitality vendor, and/or bring additional spending money for souvenirs. Students should bring their own money for meals during travel in airports, as well as for any checked baggage fees.

Where does STW general funding come from?

One of our past funders was USAID, a division of the US State Department. We also receive substantial support from many generous individuals, corporations and foundations, such as The Harbourton Foundation, the General Electric Company, the GE Foundation, Cigna and Dole.

Will there be any cultural activities?

Yes, there will be afternoon cultural activities varying per trip. In Guatemala, students will spend a day on one end of the trip in Antigua. In Honduras, the students will enjoy a beach day. In Panama, students will visit the Panama Canal and tour Casco Viejo, the old quarter in Panama City.

For more information about our programs, our leadership and our Board of Directors visit our website: schooltheworld.org. For any questions, please contact Megan Gilman (meg.gilman@schooltheworld.org).