



# MAASAI EDUCATION FOUNDATION

## WINTER 2025 NEWSLETTER NO. 12

### MEF Accomplishments and Updates, Theo Dillaha, Past MEF Board Chairperson:

- The 2024 year-end fundraiser was a success. Our generous donors donated \$42,390! We have another \$4,000 in pledges and \$10,000 in matching funds, for a total of \$56,390! In addition, we received \$9,350 in donations and pledges for secondary school sponsorships.
- In our last newsletter we mentioned that our 7<sup>th</sup> graders earned EEMPS an "A" grade with their performance on the national Primary School Leaving Exam (PSLE) exam. Our 2024 4<sup>th</sup> graders also earned EEMPS an "A" grade on their national Standard Four National Assessment (SNFA) exam. The 4<sup>th</sup> graders ranked 7<sup>th</sup> out of 89 Monduli District schools. Kudos to both classes and their teachers!
- MEF will soon have a new website thanks to [ACCESSU](#) of Roanoke, Virginia. ACCESSU is a creative/ad agency that specializes in websites, videos, and smart digital strategies who volunteered to give our website a total makeover. The new website should be operational within the next two or three months and the early drafts look great. Thank you ACCESSU!
- The EEMPS Boys' Dormitory was completed and is now used by all male boarding students. Thank you MEF donors!
- Construction of the Engaruka Community Initiative Organization (ENCO) Secondary School (ENCOSS) is underway, and classes have started for the inaugural ENCOSS 8<sup>th</sup> graders. ENCO, through its own fundraising and with a \$103,000 donation made through MEF by Crane family members and the Crane Family Foundation of Columbus, Ohio, is constructing the first two classroom buildings (each with two classrooms), a laboratory building with furnished biology and chemistry laboratories, and boys and girls washroom buildings.
- As the outgoing MEF Chairperson I would like to thank all those who have helped make MEF and EEMPS successful during my eight years as Board Chair. We could not have accomplished all that we did together without your support, great Board members, and our wonderful partners in Tanzania. Thank you!

### Message from Brian Benham, the new MEF Board Chairperson:



Greetings -- MEF had a busy February board meeting! In addition to my becoming the new Chairperson, we added three new Board members, Jarek Campbell, Isabella Munson, and Paula Stith, re-elected two members (Audrey Spielmann and Randy Stith), and our existing Board member Steve Conner became Treasurer, taking my place. We also formalized several committees to expand MEF's operational capacity and improve our operational redundancy. These committees are chaired by various MEF Board members. As a part of the MEF changes, Theo Dillaha stepped aside as Board Chairperson. Theo will continue to be intimately involved in all things MEF devoting most of his time to furthering MEF's fundraising and development efforts. As our school in Engaruka expands, the need for support (especially student sponsorships) also grows. On behalf of the entire MEF Board, thank you Theo for your vision and leadership since MEF's creation. The school in Engaruka and MEF would not be where they are today without Dr. Dillaha's dedication and energy. Thank you!

Thanks for taking a few minutes to read about all the accomplishments and good work going on at the school in Engaruka. What's happening there is truly inspirational! If you have questions or would like more details, please do not hesitate to contact me ([benhambl@gmail.com](mailto:benhambl@gmail.com)). And thank you again for your continued support, Brian.

**Message from Martha, EEMPS School Manager:** Dear MEF Donors, on behalf of Engaruka English Medium Primary School (EEMPS) and the entire ENCO team, I want to say thank you for all the support you have given us in 2024. Your help has made a big difference in the lives of many children, and we are truly grateful. Last year was a great year for EEMPS. We had our first-ever Grade 7 graduation, a special moment that showed how far we have come in providing education to the children of Engaruka. The boys' dormitory was completed and can now accommodate students, making it easier for them to stay in school and focus on their studies. We also made big progress on the ENCO Secondary School project, with two classrooms now 90% complete. This means our students will soon have a place to continue learning after finishing primary school. More parents are choosing to bring their children to EEMPS, and our student enrollment has grown, showing that our school is now well-known for providing a good education. This year EEMPS enrollment increased from 276 students to 344 students; a total of 32 students (20 girls and 12 boys) joined ENCO secondary school, 27 of which came from our 2024 EEMPS graduating class. An additional five students have been rescued from early marriage. In 2025, our focus is on expanding our facilities, including the construction of two more new secondary classrooms, two fully equipped science labs, and improved sanitation facilities for both boys and girls. Furthermore, we intend to actively raise funds to establish dormitories for boys and girls at ENCO Secondary School to enhance student accommodation and access to education. Thank you for believing in us and for standing with us. Your support is helping change lives, giving hope to children, and creating a brighter future for Engaruka. We look forward to doing even more in 2025 with your continued support. With thanks, Martha Mereso Sengeruan, School Manager.



**Giving Tuesday/End-of-Year Fundraiser Results:** Our Giving Tuesday/End-of-Year fundraiser was a huge success thanks to our generous donors! Our goal for the fundraiser was \$40,000, 25% of Engaruka English Medium Primary School's (EEMPS) 2025 operating costs. With your help we raised \$42,390 in donations, \$4,000 in pledges, and \$10,000 in matching funds for a total of \$56,390! In addition, we received \$9,350 in donations and pledges for ENCO Secondary School sponsorships.

**New Officers/Board Members:** At the first Board meeting of 2025 (Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>), MEF elected three new Board members, Jarek Campell, Isabella Munson, and Paula Stith (see below); re-elected two long-time Board members, Randy Stith and Audrey Spielmann; and confirmed our new officers, Brian Benham (Chairperson), Steve Conner (Treasurer), and Randy Stith (Secretary). MEF also formalized several committees (e.g., Development, Social Media, Sponsorships) that are chaired by various MEF Board members. These committees will expand MEF's operational capacity and improve our operational redundancy, allowing MEF to keep pace with the ever-evolving changes at the school in Engaruka.



**Isabella Munson** joined the MEF Board in 2025 and is the chair of our Social Media Committee. Isa, who completed her M.Eng. and B.S. degrees in Biological Systems Engineering at Virginia Tech, works as a water resources engineer for transportation at Whitman, Requardt & Associates. While at Tech, Isa was involved in Service Without Borders (SWB), traveling to Tanzania twice and serving as the club's Tanzania fundraising chair, secretary, Tanzania project lead, and president. She was involved in many projects at EEMPS including expanding the computer lab, developing the school garden and orchard, and constructing the boys' dormitory. She also established and expanded efforts to keep SWB students in communication with project partners during the school year, including weekly reading sessions and a pen pal program. SWB is the Virginia Tech student organization that has supported EEMPS

since 2017.

**Jarek Campbell** joined the MEF Board in 2025 and serves as the Sponsorship Committee Chair. Jarek works as the Assistant Director of Recruitment for Virginia Tech's College of Natural Resources and Environment, where he received his B.A. and M.S. in Geography. Jarek is also involved in Service Without Borders. As a student Jarek first traveled to Tanzania in 2017. Since graduating, Jarek has become an SWB advisor and traveled to EEMPS on service-learning trips four times. Jarek loves teaching and teaches at the local community college in addition to his day job. His areas of expertise are human-environment interactions, GIS and Cartography, and Cultural Geography. He incorporates his experiences and knowledge from his travels to Engaruka into his classes and looks forward to returning to EEMPS as often as possible.



**Paula Stith** joined the MEF Board in 2025. Paula recently retired from Virginia Tech after 36 years of service. Paula has experience in developing departmental budgets, analyzing and reconciling spending along with a range of other administrative duties that included preparing interview itineraries for faculty and staff and onboarding new hires. Paula traveled to EEMPS in 2023 and is passionate about the children there. She enjoys quilting, walking, hiking, and traveling with her husband Randy (also a Board member). Getting together with family and friends brings joy to her life, especially her four grandchildren.

Meet the rest of the MEF officers and board on our website at <https://maasaieducationfoundation.org/key-individuals/>.

**2024 Standard Four National Assessment (SFNA) Results:** In Tanzania, primary school 4<sup>th</sup> graders take the Standard Four National Assessment (SNFA) exam each October to provide feedback that teachers, students, and other educational stakeholders can use to improve teaching and learning and to determine if students can progress to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Our EEMPS 4<sup>th</sup> graders received an overall grade of "A." Of the 89 public and private primary schools in the Monduli District, EEMPS ranked 7th or in the 92<sup>nd</sup> percentile. **What a FANTASTIC accomplishment!** Congratulations to the students and their teachers! The table below compares the results of EEMPS with the two public schools in Engaruka. EEMPS graduates are much better prepared for secondary school than their local public-school peers.

PROFICIENCY GROUP	2024 National Standard Four National Exam (SNFA) for Engaruka Schools					
	Engaruka English Medium PS (private, 33 students)		Engaruka Chini PS (public, 141 students)		Engaruka Juu PS (public, 167 students)	
	SCORE (/50)	SCHOOL GRADE	SCORE (/50)	SCHOOL GRADE	SCORE (/50)	SCHOOL GRADE
Swahili Language	45.0	A	14.2	D	23.0	C
English Language	45.5	A	10.4	D	14.1	D
Social Knowledge	39.7	B	13.4	D	18.5	D
Mathematics	34.9	B	10.2	D	17.0	D
Science and Technology	36.5	B	14.0	D	23.1	C
Citizenship and Ethics	41.5	A	18.7	D	23.8	D
Overall School Score	243.1	A	80.9	D	119.4	D

**Maasai Education Society Update:** As noted in our last newsletter, EEMPS now has a Canadian charity partner. The Maasai Education Society (MES) is registered with the Canada Revenue Agency as a Private Foundation with Charitable Registration Number 761502731 RR0002. Click on one of the following links to visit the MES [website](#) or [Facebook page](#).

Tax-deductible donations for Canadian citizens can be made online at <https://maasaieducationsociety.com/donate/> or checks can be mailed to Maasai Education Society, 2341 Ottawa Avenue, West Vancouver, BC V7V 2S8, Canada. Contact [audrey Spielmann@gmail.com](mailto:audrey Spielmann@gmail.com) for more information.

**MEF Reorganization:** At our February MEF Board meeting, the Board decided to distribute tasks that had previously been largely done by Theo Dillaha to other Board members. Consequently, going forward you may be contacted by someone other than Theo regarding your child sponsorships and other MEF matters. Here's a list of the new MEF committees and their chairs:

- Development Committee: Theo Dillaha – Coordinates MEF fundraising activities, particularly annual fundraisers.
- Social Media Committee: Isabella Munson – Coordinating MEF's social media including its website, Facebook, YouTube channel, Instagram, and LinkedIn presence; serve as MEF's quarterly newsletter editor; assist the MEF secretary in generating an annual report; and developing and distributing emails to disseminate MEF information.
- Nominating Committee: Rebecca Caldwell – Identifies and nominates potential members for the Board and Officers.
- Audit Committee: Margie Lee –Coordinate an annual audit of the Foundation's finances.
- Proposal Review Committee: Steve Conner – organize ad hoc assessments/reviews for proposals made to MEF by ENCO/EEMPS/ENCOSS and provide funding recommendations to the MEF Board.
- Sponsorship Committee: Jarek Campbell – Act as the MEF liaison between sponsors and sponsored children, assis potential sponsors in selecting children to sponsor, facilitate sponsor/sponsored child interactions, and recruit new sponsors.
- Tanzania Liaison: Martha Mereso Sengeruan – Principal liaison between MEF and our partners in Tanzania. Ex-Officio Board member.
- MEF Construction Liaison: Tom Neils – Work with ENCO to develop proposals for funding by MEF and act as MEF liaison to ENCO during construction projects to ensure that construction is in compliance with agreed upon specifications and costs.
- Maasai Education Society Liaison: Audrey Spielmann – Keep the MEF Board informed of MES activities so that MEF and MES can complement each other's activities.

**Completion of Boys' Dormitory:** Another major accomplishment in 2024 was the completion of the boys' dormitory, which was funded by MEF. Three wings, each with a washroom, are now complete and are housing almost 170 boys! ENCO plans to build a fourth wing and patron's quarter when funds are available. This is a major accomplishment for EEMPS that freed up classroom space (previously used as boys' dormitories) and provides room for additional students.



**Linking Lives visit to EEMPS, by Samantha Sciortino:** I was a student in the Lugano [Linking Lives Program](#) in the fall of 2024 at EEMPS. As a part of this program, I had the incredible opportunity to spend three weeks volunteering with 11 other Linking Lives students at the Engaruka English Medium Primary School (EEMPS), a program run by the NGO ENCO. During my time in Tanzania, I experienced all its natural beauty, from the wildlife and landscapes to the welcoming and lively Maasai culture. Our daily activities revolved around lesson planning and helping EEMPS students prepare for their end-of-year exams. We focused on interactive learning methods to keep the students engaged and excited about

their studies. Additionally, we took part in ENCO conservation projects by assisting with their nursery and community clean-up programs. Interacting with the students and staff at EEMPS and the community of Engaruka taught me more than I could give in return. They taught me how to appreciate my community, education, and the environment, they taught me how to dance, play football, and find joy in learning. I am beyond grateful to have had the opportunity to go on this trip and for the lifelong friends I made at the school. *Note: Since returning to the US, the Linking Lives students and their families have provided sponsorships for six EEMPS students. Thank you!*



**Student Spotlight:** Niahorwa and Lasoi are two bright and hard working girls. Two years ago, they sought asylum at EEMPS to escape early arranged marriages and to go to school. They were admitted to EEMPS, where they started learning with great excitement. Now, Niahorwa and Lasoi are in grade three. They love studying and always listen carefully to their teachers. Their teachers say they perform very well in class. They enjoy reading, writing, and solving math problems. Even though they are doing well in school, Niahorwa and Lasoi need support to continue their education. They are looking for sponsors who can help them achieve their dreams. With education, they will not only build a better future for themselves but also help break the bad cultural practice of early marriage. They hope to inspire other girls in their community to stay in school and follow their dreams. The cost to support Niahorwa or Lasoi for the 2025 school year as a boarding student is \$700 USD. Email [maasaieducationfoundation@gmail.com](mailto:maasaieducationfoundation@gmail.com) if you are interested in supporting Niahorwa, Lasoi, or another EEMPS student. Please visit the ENCO website at <https://encointiative.org/category/student-needing-sponsors/> for photos of students needing support.

## ENCO Secondary School Update and Crane Family Support:



There has been a lot of progress at the ENCO Secondary School (ENCOSS) over the last few months. The first two classrooms have reached 90% completion, which allowed the first class to begin their studies in January. Thirty-three students (21 girls and 12 boys) are now pursuing secondary education at ENCOSS, 27 of which came from EEMPS's first graduating class that graduated in December of 2024. Additional classrooms, science laboratories, and sanitation facilities are in the works for the next year to improve access to secondary education in Engaruka.

MEF, ENCO, and the children attending the ENCOSS express our gratitude to the Crane Family Foundation of Columbus, Ohio and other Crane Family members that provided \$103,000 for the construction and furnishing of the Biology and Chemistry Laboratories and the girls' and boys' washrooms at ENCOSS. These donations were unsolicited. Without them, however, ENCOSS could not have started operations in January 2025. We expect the laboratory and washroom buildings to be completed and in use by June 2025.

**Culture Corner:** The Maasai are an indigenous community of Tanzania and Kenya, embodying a vibrant culture that has withstood the tests of time. As pastoralists, they embrace their environment by herding cattle—a central aspect of their identity. Known as formidable warriors, they protect their land and livestock while cultivating a rich cultural tradition that endures to this day.

Though they have historically lived in areas with abundant wildlife, Maasai respect and do not kill wildlife for food. Unfortunately, over time most of their land has been converted to parks, conservation areas, and other development purposes, and today most remaining Maasai land is severely overgrazed and degraded. Maasai culture is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of indigenous traditions. As they navigate the challenges of the modern world, the Maasai continue to preserve their rich heritage, offering invaluable insights into the importance of cultural diversity and respect for indigenous knowledge. Their story is a powerful reminder of the enduring strength found in community, tradition, and identity.

MEF respects the Maasai and their culture; it is not our goal to impose our cultural values on the Maasai. We share our opinions and advice when asked, but ultimately, our partners and the Maasai community decide how the Engaruka English Medium Primary School will be run.

For a more detailed description of Maasai culture and its challenges, click [HERE](#).

## How can you help the Engaruka English Medium Primary School or the ENCO Secondary School?

- Student Sponsorships:** A student sponsorship is \$700 per year and covers a child's tuition, fees, clothing, room and board, medical care, etc. You can also provide partial support for a child. Sponsors receive updates on their child.
- Donations:** General donations go towards school operating costs or facilities construction. The remaining construction needs include staff housing so that we can attract the best teachers, a water treatment system and guest housing for visitors. To donate via credit card, click [HERE](https://www.paypal.com/us/fundraiser/charity/2457198) (<https://www.paypal.com/us/fundraiser/charity/2457198>).
- Corporate Match:** Many corporations match the donations of their employees to charities. We receive over \$15,000 in corporate matching funds annually from corporations such as Altria, Apple, GE, IBM, and Verizon. Thousands of companies participate. Please check and see if your donations are eligible for a corporate match at the following website: <https://www.charitynavigator.org/donor-basics/giving-101/employee-match-programs/>.
- Kroger Community Rewards:** The Kroger family of companies (Kroger, Ralphs, Dillons, Smith's, King Soopers, Fry's, QFC, City Market, Owen's, Jay C, Pay Less, Baker's, Gerbes, Harris Teeter, Pick 'n Save, Metro Market, Mariano's) and some other merchants donate a percentage of your purchases to a charity if you specify them as your

preferred charity. Sign up at: <https://www.kroger.com/i/community/community-rewards>.

- **Vehicle and Boat Donations:** Supporters have donated two cars to us in the past that they no longer use. It is incredibly easy. Just click on the following link <https://careeasy.org/nonprofit/Maasai-Education-Foundation>, fill out a one-page form, the service picks up the car and sells it at auction, and you get credit for a charitable donation.
- **eBay Sales:** Did you know that you can designate all or a portion of eBay sales to charity? When you do so, eBay waives the percentage of the fees that you donate. For example, if you sell something for \$20 and designate all the funds for a charity, eBay will waive all your transaction fees. If 50% is designated for charity, 50% of fees are waived.
- **Maasai Education Foundation Amazon Wish List:** Items for the school will be delivered on our next trip. Donated items are charitable donations and tax deductible. <https://www.amazon.com/hz/wishlist/ls/6ADPF403U0A2>
- **Donate to the Canadian Maasai Education Society:** Click <https://maasaieducationsociety.com/>.
- For more information on any of the above, please email [maasaieducationfoundation@gmail.com](mailto:maasaieducationfoundation@gmail.com).

## HOW TO DONATE

**BY CHECK:** Send checks payable to the Maasai Education Foundation, 345 Woods Lane, Newport, VA 24128.

**BY CREDIT CARD (no fees) click on the following:**

<https://www.paypal.com/us/fundraiser/charity/2457198>



**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON MEF, PLEASE VISIT**

<https://maasaieducationfoundation.org> or

<https://www.facebook.com/MaasaiEducationFoundation/>

Email: [maasaieducationfoundation@gmail.com](mailto:maasaieducationfoundation@gmail.com)

Text: 540-230-7763



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