

## Colegio Horizontes

### A New High School in Chajul, Guatemala

*“Colegio Horizontes is allowing girls like us, whose families don’t have money, to follow our dreams.” – Hermelinda, 9th grader at Colegio Horizontes*

In 2022, we witnessed a dream become reality together: *Colegio Horizontes*, our revolutionary middle school, opened its doors and began to reshape the educational landscape of rural Guatemala. Two-thirds of students are young indigenous women who are now thriving in this beacon of hope, fostering a **new era of female empowerment and leadership**. Under the **guidance of inspiring local Maya Ixil women**, *Colegio Horizontes* equips these remarkable future leaders with the tools they need to **become catalysts for positive change in their own lives and community**.

But our vision extends beyond this incredible start. The success of *Colegio Horizontes* has reinforced our passion and commitment to launching a high school that will continue to nurture the potential of Chajul’s young leaders. **With your partnership**, we can ensure that the students who have already experienced the transformative power of our middle school can seamlessly continue their educational journey with an equally life-changing high school experience.

#### Middle School Impact to Date:

- **Educating 3 thriving classes** of students in grades 7-9.
- **Our vibrant school community now includes 74 students.**
- **Dedication to learning:** We boast a stellar 95% attendance rate, far above other schools in the region.

Imagine the possibilities a high school will unlock for Chajul’s youth. This document delves into the transformative impact our high school will have on these young women, male allies, and their community. **We will create a pipeline of educated agents of change who will develop solutions to local challenges and who can bring economic security to their families without migrating to the U.S.** Our comprehensive approach will strengthen families, promote a culture of gender equality, and improve educational quality across the community, creating a positive ripple effect for generations to come.







## Planning, Design, & Budget

The high school will serve up to 50 high school students each year in 10th and 11th grade, and support graduates to attain university and/or professional opportunities. In parallel with construction and accreditation paperwork, we will hire and train high school teachers, with an emphasis on hiring Maya Ixil women from the community, to provide an **academic experience that is empowering, physically and emotionally safe, and specifically designed for girls**. The curriculum will be designed to eliminate gender bias and develop students' academic excellence; career awareness; critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, and communication skills; awareness of self, others, and community; and agency over their own futures.

One of our **strategic priorities with our high school expansion is to build the infrastructure for students to pursue professions in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) and apply their expertise to solve local challenges relating to agriculture, environmental science, healthcare, and more. To develop critical thinkers who are able to create solutions to address issues in their community, we will need to construct a high-quality science lab**. It will be fully equipped with microscopes, graduated cylinders, petri dishes, test tubes, and safety equipment.

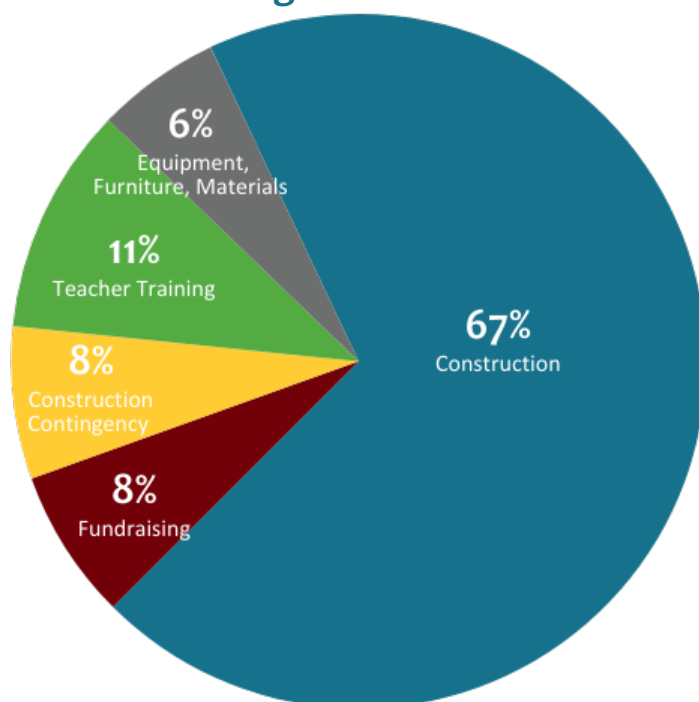
### The high school building will house\*:

- 2 classrooms
- 1 multipurpose room for parent meetings and workshops, school assemblies, and morning meetings
- 1 laboratory (the first high school science lab in in region!) for science, art and entrepreneurship courses
- 3 one-to-one mentorship meeting rooms, which will also be used for parent-teacher and family meetings
- 2 large storage closets
- 1 staff bathroom

*\*All Colegio Horizontes students will share the existing school computer lab and bathrooms.*

**Campaign Goal:** For high school construction, costs associated with school startup, and furnishings for the school and science laboratory, **we will need to raise \$780,000.**

### Budget Breakdown





## Creating Opportunities

The new high school will prepare students to **have choice, reach their highest potential, and create opportunity for others**. Graduates will pursue one of the following career options as well as use their **voice and agency to be civic leaders and advocates for change**. If they need a college degree or vocational training after high school to reach their dreams, we will support them in applying for admission and scholarships.

### Individual Career Options

#### Secure a job in Ixil region.

Jobs are available in education, healthcare, accounting, technology, business, and more. We expect most to choose this option.



#### Start a business in the Ixil region.



**Secure a job elsewhere in Guatemala.** Jobs are available in more fields, and may pay higher wages.



**Create community change from home.** Women may make an intentional decision to not work outside the home.



## Timeline

2021

- School planning, intensive professional development sessions for teachers
- Construction of middle school underway
- First Expanding Horizons prep class

2022

- Completed middle school construction
- First class of 24 7th graders

2023

- School grows to 49 students with the second class of 7th graders
- Expand mentorship program
- Design high school building, begin to develop curriculum

2024

- School grows to 74 students with the third class of 7th graders
- Obtain high school permit from the Ministry of Education
- Construct high school, hire and train first group of teachers, finish curriculum development

2025

- School grows to 100 students with fourth class of 7th graders
- Complete high school construction
- Open high school

2026

- School grows to full capacity with 125 students plus 30 middle schoolers in the Expanding Horizons prep classes for a total of 155 students

### Community Impact

- Strengthening local human capital pipeline to reduce the hiring of non-local applicants who currently have stronger skills
- Increase in female hiring and workplace diversity
- Reduction in hiring discrimination once graduates can hire others
- Strengthening and growing local businesses
- Reduction in income-motivated emigration from Chajul
- Growing local businesses that create jobs, address local needs, and build economic opportunity
- Reduction in income-motivated emigration from Chajul
- Sending funds home to support their families and community
- Sharing their career learning with youth in Chajul
- Reduction in income-motivated emigration from Guatemala
- Delayed marriage and childbirth, and smaller families
- Women contributing to household decision-making and budgeting
- Increased investment in education and health of children
- Empowered daughters; promotion of gender equality in the home
- Next generation of leaders strengthened through informed parenting choices



# The Challenge

**CONTEXT:** Chajul is located in the beautiful mountains of Quiché, Guatemala. It is one of the poorest regions of Guatemala, and was one of the hardest hit during the 36-year civil war. The **war amounted to genocide against the indigenous people**, who are still discriminated against today. With the majority of the population engaged in subsistence farming, **93% of Chajul's Maya Ixil population lives in poverty and 41% in extreme poverty**. The families we serve have an average monthly income of just \$77, far below the extreme poverty line. **Nearly half of parents are illiterate and only 24% completed elementary school.**

The recent spike in migration from Central America is reflected in Chajul, where people are desperate enough to leave everything to embark on a perilous journey in search of a brighter future. We are **working to ensure that people in Chajul have what they need to stay, thrive, and build the community and country they love and call home**, addressing a root cause of migration.



**LACK OF ACCESS:** While there are basic, under-resourced high schools in Chajul, the majority of students decide to study outside of Chajul for higher-quality education, **requiring them to travel between one and six hours each way to attend school**. While some students are able to secure an academic scholarship to study, any additional costs for room and board are incurred by their families, making a quality high school education inaccessible for most youth in Chajul.



**LACK OF QUALITY, SAFETY, & EMPOWERMENT:** Our local team has witnessed over the years the extreme challenges of the education system in their region. **95% of high school graduates in Chajul failed the national exams in reading and 99% in math in 2016**. Chajul's teachers don't have access to the resources and training they need, and the community's schools lack proper bathroom facilities, clean water, and electricity. **Over 70% of children in Chajul experience childhood stunting due to malnutrition**, lacking the adequate nutrition at home in order to be able to focus on their studies. Safety is of particular concern for girls as nine out of ten teachers in local schools are male, and sexual and emotional abuse is far too common. Furthermore, indigenous girls in particular struggle to see themselves and their future in the standard curriculum. **In 2019, just 21% of youth graduated from middle school and 3.4% graduated from high school in Chajul, and less than 1% pursue post-secondary education.**

*Limitless Horizons Ixil has successfully increased access to education in Chajul for 20 years. With our new school, we are bringing high-quality, safe, and engaging high school education to Chajul for the first time. With holistic support, we help to ensure that students reach high school graduation and are prepared for a future of limitless opportunities.*





# Track Record & Capacity to Succeed

Limitless Horizons Ixil is uniquely positioned to build a successful school. Since our founding in 2004, our Youth Development Program has **made it possible for 226 youth to go to middle and high school** by providing them scholarships, wraparound support services for students and families, and access to our library.

**Two-thirds of Youth Development Program high school graduates are working or studying in university**, which is significant in a community where **less than 5% of households have a family member employed in the formal economy**. The program has helped to delay the childbearing age: **84% of our participants' mothers had children before age 23, compared with 19% of Youth Development Program alumnae**.



After launching *Colegio Horizontes* in 2022, we have seen **incredible changes in our students—from their improvements in Spanish language, critical thinking, and leadership skills to improved hygiene practices and confidence**—we are incredibly inspired by their progress. In our first year:

- **100%** of 7th graders continued on to 8th grade, unusually high retention for the region
- **100%** of students feel physically and emotionally safe at school
- **91%** of students mastered every single one of their classes, an unusual feat among area middle schoolers

Our new school is a community-driven initiative. **Maya Ixil women from Chajul are the majority of Limitless Horizons Ixil's staff and serve as role models and trusted voices in the community**. Our Chajulense staff members drive all of the organization's programs. It is this team that will lead project design and management with support from partners and international experts.



**We have established key partnerships to enable success.** We worked with Building Goodness Foundation and Design Develop LLC to design and build our middle school, and we will continue our partnership with them for our high school build as they are already familiar with the terrain and workforce dynamics.

Through our experience partnering with schools in and around Chajul, we are familiar with the limitations and opportunities within the local educational landscape. Our new high school will fill a critical gap in the community, helping youth gain access to high quality learning spaces. **Our school will prepare students for all careers, including STEM, with the region's first high school science lab, a fully equipped computer lab, a robust entrepreneurship course, and life and social skills through the mentoring program.** Additionally, all students will receive individual and group mentoring, family home visits, family workshops as well as two nutritious meals each school day so that they can fully focus on their studies.



# Hermelinda's Story

Hermelinda, currently in her final year of middle school, will be among the first students to attend our high school. Her father, Juan, is a farmer with just a primary school education and her mom, Ana, never attended school. Ana weaves and takes care of the home and their 8 children in a small house with a dirt floor and a wood cooking stove. They've always had **to weigh the cost-benefit of sending their children to school and for how long, unable to support all their kids to get an education.** Hermelinda and her parents dream that she could be the first in their family to finish high school. Like all families in Chajul, Hermelinda's was confronted with horrific challenges during Guatemala's 36-year civil war. After Hermelinda's dad's parents were killed when he was young, he was left orphaned, taken by the army and forced to work tirelessly for them until he ultimately escaped. **The war's trauma widely persists among our families to this day.**

When **Hermelinda found out that *Colegio Horizontes* was opening in 2022, she was eager to apply,** and thrilled to join the first *Expanding Horizons* prep classes. Upon entry, she had some of the **lowest levels of reading comprehension, writing, and speaking skills,** having studied in overcrowded, under-resourced public schools that were ill-equipped to provide her with high quality education. This challenge was compounded by nearly two years of pandemic that kept Hermelinda out of the classroom.

Since starting at *Colegio Horizontes*, **Hermelinda's motivation and desire to succeed has truly shined through.** Teachers note that while she was shy and behind when she began, her strong interest in what she's learning motivates her to persevere and master course content even when the material is challenging. Hermelinda says that in addition to math and language skills, one of the best lessons she's learning is creating action plans for how to achieve her goals. Despite her humble upbringing, Hermelinda is **not afraid to dream big. She wants to be a bilingual Spanish-Ixil doctor for her community, but prior to completing medical school, she dreams of singing professionally.** She could also see herself opening a business in Chajul, using what she's learning in entrepreneurship class to bring resources to her community.

**Hermelinda's mom, Ana, sees the impact that *Colegio Horizontes* is having.** She reflects on how much more advanced her daughter and her classmates are than students in other schools, attributing this to the full day of school with passionate staff, which doesn't exist elsewhere in the region. She is seeing the *Colegio Horizontes* students' change in mindset, the care teachers show for the youth and their learning, and the scholars' improved skills in both Spanish and their native Maya Ixil.

While only time will tell where Hermelinda's future will take her, we are confident that the support she is receiving from her mentors and teachers at *Colegio Horizontes* is setting her up for a bright future! While coming from humble beginnings, Hermelinda will give her little sisters and her community a strong example of what success, resilience, and leadership can do. **We can't wait until the day that Hermelinda's parents and siblings gather at *Colegio Horizontes* to celebrate her success and the family's first high school graduation ceremony.**





# Typical High School Day

Hermelinda will arrive at school at 8:00 and participate in a morning meeting with her classmates and teachers where students learn competencies, life skills, and reflect together. She will join her 24 classmates for a day of rigorous and engaging learning. Hermelinda will receive **two nutritious, well-balanced meals every school day, made with protein and vegetables grown in the school garden**, helping her focus on her classes for a full day of learning. By high school, Hermelinda has grown accustomed to being **in school for a full-day** and enjoys the extra attention from her teachers in a smaller class size.

Hermelinda will feel safe confiding in her mentors and classmates as she goes through adolescent changes. Her mentor will help her to **navigate challenging situations at home, to develop her social-emotional skills and self-awareness, and to guide her in career planning and leadership development**. At 4:30, she will go home to a family that is informed, involved, and an active part of her education.

Hermelinda feels **hopeful, motivated, and strong**. Through their involvement in our family services, Hermelinda's parents have gained tools to help all of their children and have become community advocates for girls' education. Hermelinda wants to pursue a university education in medicine, which she can use to make a difference in Chajul.

**RIPPLE EFFECT:** In the long term, our school will be well-positioned to catalyze **educational improvements across Chajul**, and will offer opportunities for other local schools to learn from and with our staff. The building will house safe and productive student and teacher learning for the community for generations to come. Over time, graduates of our teacher training pipeline will work in several of Chajul's schools, train other indigenous women to teach effectively, and inspire indigenous youth to become teachers and school leaders in their own community.



**Gender equality will benefit girls across Chajul and catalyze progress for the whole community**, as women become leaders and wage earners in the community and guide the next generation to health and stability. Students' academic and health outcomes will improve, enabling them to persist and thrive in school and their careers, and to become role models and strong, engaged parents. The school will **prepare Chajul's youth to attain careers which bring economic security** and sustainable development to their families and community, alleviating the need to migrate to seek economic opportunity in the U.S.

*Hermelinda is working hard to persevere in her studies so she can become the first in her family to graduate from middle and high school, prepared for university and a professional career as a bilingual Spanish-Ixil doctor in her community. Join us in creating new pathways through education.*