

Rooted  
Kindness

# Thriving

... after surviving

GOLESTAN  
MAGAZINE

JUNE 2021

Golestan's Pandemic Year-in-Review



Dearest Community,

What a year this has been for every single human being on our planet. As I left campus last March (2020), for what we thought would be a two-week closure, I scattered thousands of wildflower seeds all around our sad quiet garden so that when we all returned, our children would be welcomed back by a sea of beautiful blossoms.

Two weeks came and went. As did the poppies—with no one there to enjoy them.

One year ago this week, after three months of distance learning, we reopened our campus for our preschoolers and summer campers. While most of the poppies had withered away, a sea of sunflowers were standing at attention to welcome the children and my beloved colleagues home.

Never in my life have I witnessed so much uninhibited joy. That's when I knew that we owed it to our community, beyond the walls of our school, to help create safe spaces for teachers to be able to confidently return to teach children in person—because *that* is their passion (not doing handstands in order to engage a screen full of young faces).

To that end, through the Golestan Colab (our pro-bono consulting arm for educators), we started to organize tours and workshops to help inspire others to work through the obstacles for reopening in person, with an emphasis on outdoor classrooms. This work catapulted to an unimaginable scale that, in less than one year, impacted over 16,000 public and private school educators and over 150,000 children and youth nationwide. One day *The New York Times* was on campus, the next day BBC.

Meanwhile, we were hosting tours for families that would do anything to avoid distance learning. Our wait list grew, with classes at capacity with 16 kids, until the county guidelines suddenly reduced the maximum to 14 kids per stable pod. We had no choice but to quickly put together a new class to meet the guidelines; we went from two full classes to three that were under-enrolled. Our costs were growing exponentially because even though we doubled our elementary school student body from the previous year, we had to triple our teaching staff to accommodate them.

Then, just to keep us all on our toes, the fires hit. Then the rains. Then the wind storms. And through it all, our kids (and teachers) were outside comforted by the fact that they weren't stuck at home in front of a screen.

Fast forward to this June, when we wrapped up the most inspiring and magical year ever imaginable. The joy. The depth of engagement and learning. The incredible growth of our children and our entire staff. I've honestly never had as much professional and personal development as I have this past year.

I am thrilled to take all that we've learned this past year and to apply it to continue to provide a nurturing, dynamic, and magical environment for our children. I look forward to a more predictable and stable year ahead, where we can enjoy our outdoor classrooms when conditions allow for it, and we can move inside when they don't... not to mention hugs and big wide smiles!

Thank you, each and every one of you, for the role you've played in our continued growth and our ability to cultivate a spirit of generosity and a commitment to global wellbeing in each and every one of the children served by Golestan.

With deep gratitude,



**Yalda Modabber**  
Golestan Education  
Founding Parent + Executive Director

## June 2020

COVID protocol rolled out; All hands on deck to help with reopening & set up of outdoor classrooms; School-wide Return to Campus Town Hall; COVID testing for all staff at Carbon Health prior to return to campus; Reopened doors to Preschoolers & Summer Campers

## July 2020

Three new elementary teachers hired; COVID testing for Teen Summer Camp

## August 2020

Summer camp space transitioned to elementary outdoor classrooms; Yurts assembled; New Garden Teacher / Farm Manager / Office Assistant Manager hired; Unusually early fire season smoke days; Toddle IB platform launched

## September 2020

Among the first schools in California to be granted a waiver to reopen for in-person instruction; Increase from one to three elementary classes; First iteration of external Staff COVID testing program; Four new teaching staff welcomed: Carrie, Gretchen, Kira & Leura!

## October 2020

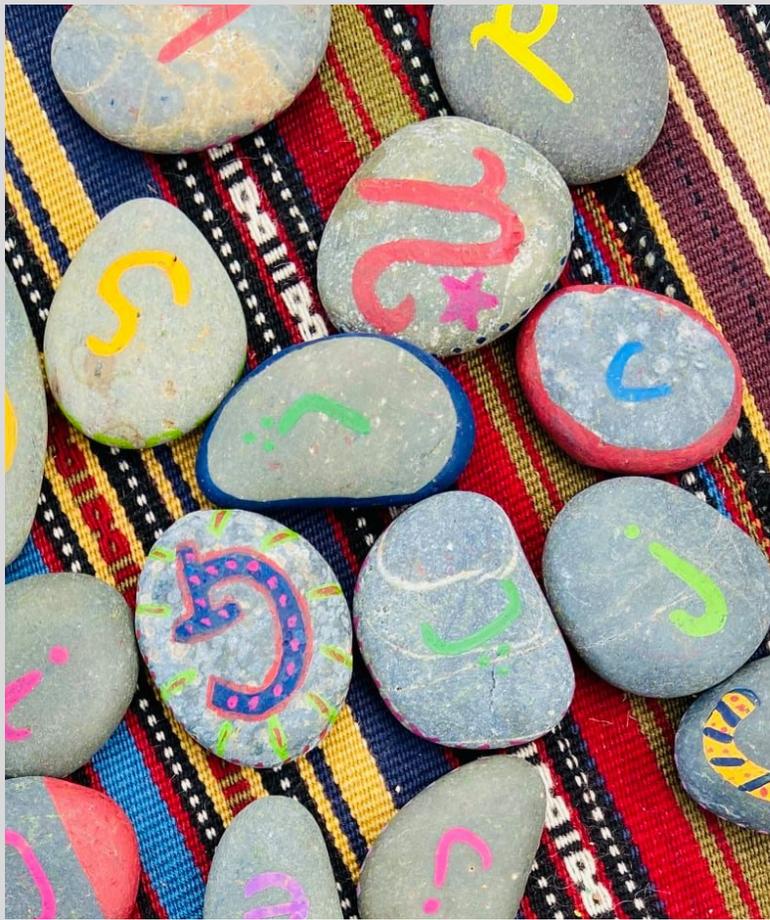
Stromberg Architecture wins AIA's People's Choice Award for Design Excellence; Golestan wins LaCantina's 2020 Best Commercial Design; Outdoor classroom community work day; Parent volunteers build tents; Started in-house Staff testing program twice a week (PMH).

## November 2020

Outdoor classroom community work day

## December 2020

'Pandemic Pajama Party' virtual benefit auction & fundraiser hosted by Maz Jobrani with special performances by Michael & Sara Franti, raises half of Annual Fund = \$100k!



# A Year of Milestones



## January 2021

Staff begins getting first round of vaccines; Large tents destroyed in windstorm, new tents built; Begin testing all families & household members (Curative) twice a week

## March 2021

Golestan wins 2021 Best of Berkeley Award for Non-Profit Organization; Chaahar Shambah Soori, kids & families jump over fire as they exit campus, our first celebration!

## April 2021

Golestan awarded LUXLife Magazine's Private Education Award for Most Nurturing Preschool & Elementary School, and Award for Excellence in Environmental Stewardship Education 2021; Spring Break volunteer work party with current & new families: New music teacher begins; New PYP coordinator hired to begin in July; Switched testing providers a 2nd time & moved to testing students only (halted after 1 week due to new government restrictions); First in-person gathering to celebrate staff being fully vaccinated!

## May 2021

Golestan wins 2021 Best of Berkeley Awards in the category of Consumer Services; Three high school interns from Branson School build aquaponic farm system with parent volunteer, Matt Abarbanel; Launch pilot of digital sign-in process; Welcome New Elementary Families Social gathering; Wild Life Assembly for Elementary School; Living Life Bazaar raises over \$500 for the Rainforest Action Network!

## June 2021

Flying Forward Ceremony for K-3: 'From Surviving to Thriving' benefit auction & fundraiser brings in \$11k for PPE, outdoor classroom maintenance & materials, additional staffing & cleaning; Bee Assembly for PreK & Summer Campers; Stromberg Architecture is a 2021 Architizer A+ Award Finalist

**"This school is unlike any other. An oasis of kindness committed to inclusion, community, cultural diversity and global competency."**

— Golestan Kindergarten Parent





*Learning about bees and pollinators*

## Golestan's Core Values

### **We are kind.**

Justice, Warmth, Compassion,  
Empathy, Generosity

### **We are mindful.**

Identity, Diversity, Stewardship,  
Engagement, Humility,  
Reflection

### **We are courageous.**

Action, Leadership, Service,  
Curiosity, Altruism, Inquiry,  
Cooperation, Collaboration,  
Persistence

# PRESCHOOL

**A rich and thoughtful curriculum that supports depth and breadth of learning while promoting the values that support the development of kind, mindful, and courageous change-makers of the future.**

The following are our Units of Inquiry, which integrate all subjects (arts, math, science & engineering, language, social sciences, social justice, and personal, social and physical education):

### **Who We Are**

What does it mean to be human? In this unit, we learned we are unique individuals with differences and similarities. We each have roles and responsibilities with our friends and families—at home and in school—and by choosing to care, communicate, and be a risk-taker, we are connected to each other as a community.

### **How We Express Ourselves**

In this unit, we explored how people express themselves in different situations and cultures, through storytelling about the Silk Road. We discovered different cultures and countries along in China, India, Iran and Egypt. We listened and danced to their music, tasted their food, and made art and books about what we learned in this unit.

### **Sharing the Planet**

In this unit, we learned how humans change the face of the planet by our daily actions and how that affects other living beings' lives—and is therefore our responsibility. We studied similarities between insect and human communities and how they live together, their roles in their community, and their life-cycle. We came to understand that all living things on the planet have evolved to coexist and to support each other in this web of life.

# KINDERGARTEN AND FIRST GRADE

**The same principles as the Preschool, with a greater emphasis on literacy, math, and social sciences. In these years, Colestan kids learn to be positive citizens in the classroom community and beyond.**

The following are our Units of Inquiry, which integrate all subjects (arts, math, science & engineering, language, social sciences, social justice, and personal, social and physical education):

## **Who We Are**

In this unit, we developed an understanding of ourselves and our environments as we embarked on self-awareness within the classroom community. We discovered that we indeed can change our environments by the choices we make, and that making principled and caring choices creates a positive change.

## **How We Express Ourselves**

In this unit, we explored holidays, celebrations, and how so many people around the world are both different and the same from us. We discovered that people explore and make sense of the world through the stories, celebrations, and expressions they create. We learned that being a reflective communicator is an excellent way to engage with the world.



*Learning about trees, leaves, and habitats in the rainforest*

## **How the World Works**

In this unit, we embarked upon explorations with air, weather, the sun, and the moon. We learned how changes and patterns in the weather, air, and what we see in the sky inform how we live. We explored the Engineering Design Process and solved problems that weather can create. By doing this with the attitude of inquiry, we had a chance to gain knowledge well beyond the scope of our small community and into the world.

## **Sharing the Planet**

In this unit, students learned about habitats. We explored the idea that the specific conditions of food, water, and shelter are critical for survival. We examined the tropical rainforest and the concept of biodiversity and deforestation. We discovered the importance of responsible choices and that sharing opinions with powerful decision-makers can create a big impact.

# SECOND AND THIRD GRADES

**The same principles as the Preschool, Kindergarten, and First Grades, but with a deeper emphasis on social and environmental responsibility.**

## How We Organize Ourselves

In this unit, we explored our classroom as an organization, identifying our class values, classroom jobs and problem-solving strategies. Then we learned about organizations in our community, their values, and different roles people have in those organizations.

## Who We Are

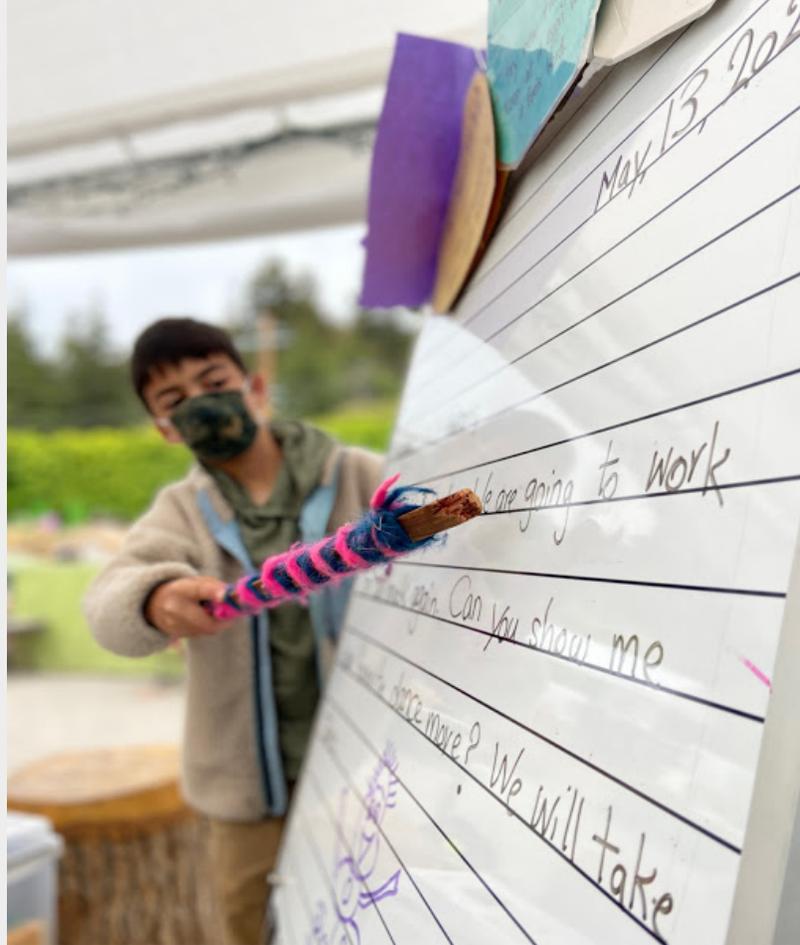
In this unit, we learned about different role models and how they embodied our class values of being principled, caring, and risk-taking.

## How We Express Ourselves

In this unit, we learned about the writing process and drafted many stories from our imaginations. We each chose one of our ideas to develop into a published book. During the unit, we practiced setting goals for both the revision and editing of our book, as well as the illustrations and composition of the final product.

## Where We Are In Place and Time

In this unit, we explored both the indigenous groups that lived in the East Bay (Ohlone/Bay Miwok), as well as our own ancestors, and how these cultures have been passed down to the current inhabitants of this land (Ohlone and ourselves). We used the children's questions to explore values, time, language, food, and herbs.



*Learning about how we share the planet with other humans*

## How The World Works

In this unit, we closely observed rocks, sand, silt, and clay and how weathering and erosion create different geological features on the Earth's surface. We compared landforms across the globe, and also used our five senses to observe, sort, and describe river rocks and volcanic rocks in our classroom. We also explored how different types of soil are composed of humus with pebbles, sand, silt and clay.

## Sharing the Planet

During this unit, the children pulled together all that we had learned during the year to reflect on the idea of privilege and responsibility and how we can use the resources that we have to advocate for others. The children designed a fundraiser to support Black, Latinx, and Indigenous communities in the East Bay.

**"We can't think of a more nurturing, dynamic, gorgeous, and magical place to be able to offer children."**

– Golestan Parent



# WHAT IS THE GOLESTAN COLAB?

**The Golestan Colab is a pro-bono consultancy that supports and collaborates with communities across North America—and around the world.** It empowers and supports educators, parents, and community leaders to create their ideal learning environment for children.

**The Colab produces teaching materials modeled after Golestan's own program curriculum.** It researches best practices in bilingualism and child development and offers pro-bono consulting to individuals and schools either wanting to enhance their current programs or develop experiential programs for children **in the following areas:**

1. The integration and application of hands-on and experiential learning practices & approaches
2. Language immersion and cultural education
3. Developing natural playscapes & calm, beautiful learning environments
4. Setting up COVID-safe schools & campuses

**In 2020/2021 alone, Golestan has collaborated with and supported over 1,200 schools in several districts** (including Oakland Unified, Berkeley Unified, West Contra Costa Unified, and SF Unified) **in their efforts to set up outdoor classrooms to reopen safely.**



**In 2020-2021,  
the Golestan Colab  
worked directly with:**

**6 PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS  
320+ SCHOOLS**

**impacting**

**150,000+ STUDENTS  
6,000+ TEACHERS**

**the Colab also  
indirectly impacted**

**10,000 EDUCATORS  
NATIONWIDE**

**through talks, panel  
discussions & active  
working groups.**



## SUPPORTING BERKELEY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT



*One of three onsite working sessions at Golestan with BUSD staff, Board members, and City Council members which marked the beginning of an ongoing collaboration on outdoor classrooms and long term planning*

**"Golestan has supported Berkeley Unified School District's efforts to assess and set up outdoor classrooms in response to Covid-19 precautions. They have played a critical role in our community working group and participate in ideating materials, placement of outdoor stations, and joined all of our site tours with Principals. They share invaluable insight during our working group bi-weekly meetings and facilitated and hosted site tours on several occasions with staff and Board members, sharing their work establishing creative outdoor classroom stations."**

– BUSD Program Supervisor



**"Golestan is an oasis of kindness, beauty, expansion, and friendship. We have long had deep respect for Golestan's science-based best practices, curriculum, and commitment to global cultures and environmental stewardship reflected in their leadership as an Ashoka Changemaker school and an active member of the National Covid-19 Outdoor Classroom Initiative."**

– Golestan Parent



**"This school saved my family. [Golestan] was able to put together a 100% in-person learning environment with indoor/outdoor classrooms, HEPA air filters, and weekly COVID testing for the entire staff and parents."**

— Golestan 1st Grade Parent

**"Yalda Modabber, the head of school at Golestan, who has an immunology background from Harvard Medical School, generously offered a scientist's point of view on safely working outside to our faculty, and allowed a core group of our teachers to take a field trip to their campus. We got a chance to see up close and personal what was possible and what we could do with a larger footprint. That's when the idea of some tree stumps in a circle bloomed to 23 outdoor spaces!"**

— Angela Taylor: Head of Park Day School





"We fell in love with the school's philosophies about raising kind, caring, global citizens, the focus on nature and community, the natural and healthy food they provide, and the warmth and kindness that came from the teachers and staff. It was clear upon entering that everyone was genuinely happy to be there, from the teachers to the kids."

— Golestan Parent

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO THRIVE?

## **For teachers it means feeling safe in the classroom and protected by the school administration.**

It means feeling valued for the impact we have on our students' and family's lives.

It means being respected for our knowledge and expertise.

It means being included in decision-making.

It means being supported so that we can focus on our students' needs.

## **For staff it means feeling safe at work.**

It means having the resources to do what teachers, students, and parents expect of us.

It means being acknowledged and appreciated for the work we do.

It means being valued as individuals as well as an integral part of our school community.

## **For students it means coming to a nurturing environment where we are loved and cared for by teachers and staff, where we are protected from the anxieties of the world.**

It means having teachers who see us for who we are.

It means having extra attention and support when we need it.

It means having the best materials and curricula.

It means having a safe space to play, experience wonder, create, explore, and problem-solve.

It means building the skills that will help us thrive later in life -- learning skills, time management skills, self-regulation skills, and social emotional skills that will help us build lasting friendships.

It means acquiring the tools to be a leader, to help others, to begin to think about what our place is in the world and how we want to shape it as we grow up.

## **Thriving requires collaboration and teamwork.**

It requires devoting extra time and resources to fundraising every year.

It means raising as much money as possible so we can do better for our families, our students, and our staff.

It means asking for help when it's not easy.

It means doing more with less, trying harder, and setting new goals all the time.

It means aspiring to be a leader as a school, to be more collaborative, more compassionate, more rigorous, and more innovative.

It means growing our community while honoring all the differences between us—whether it be differences in our backgrounds, our values, or visions of our children's education.

## **That is what thriving means to Golestan.**

## **It is what we work towards everyday.**

**We can't do it without you.**



## SUPPORT THE GOLESTAN COMMUNITY

**Together we survived this last year. Now, we can work together to thrive.**

Help us cover the ongoing costs associated with the pandemic, including PPE, outdoor classroom maintenance and materials (canopies, furniture, supplies), and additional staffing arising from smaller class sizes and additional cleaning requirements. Funds raised will also allow Golestan to continue our important work through the Colab of assisting other schools to reopen safely. Your contribution will also allow us to purchase much-needed supplies and equipment for 2021/22—including furniture and materials for two new [indoor!] classrooms, musical instruments, and storage for our new outdoor Maker and Science labs. Here's how you can help us every day become a better school, to be a leader among schools:

- **Text-to-Give.** There is an easy and convenient way to support Golestan. Just **text DONATE or GIVE to (510)439-9851.**
- **Shop From Golestan's Wish Lists.** From our maker lab, to our music room, to computers for our teachers, please help us build the best possible programs for our kids. **Click here** to shop on Amazon, or **here** to shop at KodoKids.
- **Choose Golestan on Amazon Smile When you Shop.** A percentage of your purchase will go to Golestan. **Click here** to smile while you shop.
- **Volunteer with us over the summer.** Whether working in the garden, helping build our new outdoor maker lab, or simply just supporting our staff, your skills and energy are what fuel Golestan. **Click here** to volunteer.

# GOLESTAN IN THE NEWS

**This past year, our work has made the news and we've been honored to contribute our voice to a variety of important conversations. Click the links below to see & hear more.**

- 06.18.21 Architizer:** Stromberg Architecture is a 2021 Architizer A+ Award Finalist (Kindergarten category for Golestan School)
- 05.22.21 Archinect:** Schools Turn to Architects as the Pandemic Mandates Collaboration With Long-Term Impacts
- 05.09.21 L'interlude Podcast** with Great Teacher Steve (18 Episodes)
- 04.30.21 Green Schools Catalyst Quarterly:** Overcoming 'Green Fears' - Strategies for Safe and Joyful Learning in Outdoor Classrooms
- 03.22.21 Best of Berkeley: Golestan School Selected as Best Non-Profit in 2021**
- 03.20.21 NPR/KQED:** Celebrating Persian New Year Amid A Pandemic
- 03.14.21 CBS News:** Schools without walls: Lessons in outdoor education
- 12.16.20 La Cantina:** Featured Projects - Golestan School
- 12.08.20 NPR/KQED:** Korean, Swedish and Persian Dishes for Winter Solstice
- 11.17.20 Teach For America:** Three Schools Re-Imagining What a School Building Can Be
- 11.12.20 American Institute of Architects:** Golestan School wins the People's Choice Award for Design Excellence. Selected as top three finalist: Design Excellence in Change and Resources
- 10.28.20 Architizer:** Competition Winners Announced! Best Commercial Project: Golestan School by Stromberg Architecture
- 10.21.20 Berkeleyside:** Enrollment is down 5% at Berkeley Unified as some parents make other plans
- 09.17.20 ABC News:** El Cerrito school serves as a model for outdoor learning amid COVID-19
- 09.07.20 BBC News Brasil:** Outdoor schools that inspire returning to school in the pandemic
- 09.04.20 Patch:** 10 Contra Costa Schools Cleared To Open
- 08.29.20 ANTV Vietnam Television Report (Reuters):** Learning solutions during the pandemic in the US: Outdoor classrooms (written in Vietnamese)
- 08.28.20 Governing:** Will the Outdoors Become the New Classroom of the COVID Era?
- 08.25.20 Bean in Nature:** Outdoor learning is safe.
- 08.19.20 ABC News:** Social Dilemma: Is outdoor learning practical?
- 08.18.20 CNN:** Outdoor classes are safer. How can teachers make it happen?
- 07.30.20 The Daily Californian:** Berkeley parents advocate for sending children back to school this fall
- 07.25.20 Fast Company:** Inside the quest to reopen schools—by moving classes outside
- 07.03.20 Childhood By Nature:** Resources for Outdoor Learning During COVID-19
- 02.06.20 Shift Frequency:** The Importance of Teaching Empathy to Children
- 02.06.20 The Field:** Green Schoolyards. Our Cities' Opportunities to Create Thriving Public Land Where Children and their Communities Benefit
- 01.16.20 Best of Berkeley: Golestan School Selected as Best Preschool in 2020**



**"Not only do we breathe easy knowing that the absolute best scientific practices are in place to keep our children safe, but we are moved by the school's ongoing pro-bono consulting across the globe through the Golestan Colab, to help public and private schools also reopen safely. That is the precise generosity of spirit and commitment to global wellbeing that underscores everything at Golestan."**

— Golestan Parent

# OUR YEAR IN PICTURES

Click on the image links below to see what each of our incredible classes was up to this year! Also, click [here](#) to hear an all-school rendition of "This Pretty Planet," led by our incredible music teacher Sonya Harway.



**JOOJEH**  
(2-3 YRS)



**SHINING STARS**  
(K/1)



**LOONEH**  
(3-5 YRS)



**LIVING LIFE**  
(K/1)



**PEELEH**  
(3-5 YRS)



**WILD FALCONS**  
(K-3 COVID POD)



**"I feel so lucky that my family is a part of this community. Golestan has made me a firm believer that you can teach any child multiple languages at a young age through immersion. In addition to Persian, they are introduced to other languages to continue expanding their understanding of different cultures and the world."**

— Golestan Parent



## WITH OUR DEEPEST GRATITUDE

**We all know that even in the best of times, it takes a village to sustain and nurture us. This has been all the more true this past year.**

We are deeply grateful for the ongoing efforts and energies of **Golestan's Teachers & Staff**; our **COVID Task Force**; **Golestan's Board**; the **Golestan Community Association (GCA)**; our generous **Donors, Corporate & Community Partners**; our tireless **Volunteers**; **Class Room Parents**; and our incredible **families & children**.

**It is because of your rooted kindness that we can continue to blossom. Thank you!**



**"As a culture, it might just be the most hospitable and altruistic I've ever encountered."**

– Golestan Parent



**"I don't have enough great things to say about Golestan. Golestan's instructional philosophy is multifaceted, covering all aspects of enriching young minds to explore, achieve, and be part of a global community. Through its Colab and scholarship program, they extend their reach to children of different backgrounds, socioeconomic levels, and geographic location."**

– Refugee Transitions Board member