

A close-up photograph of two hands, one from a darker-skinned person and one from a lighter-skinned person, cupping a single white flower with a bright yellow center. The background is dark and out of focus.

# Cultivating Positive Change

Rooted  
Kindness

GOLESTAN  
MAGAZINE

FALL 2021

The Golestan Colab  
Stronger Together

Dear Community... Near & Far,

In 2005, I was in desperate need of quality childcare for my almost two-year-old son, and wanted to find someone to speak Persian to him because mine was rudimentary, at best. To my surprise, there wasn't a single Persian language immersion preschool in the country. So I posted in a local listserv, which turned into a playgroup, which turned into a parent co-op, which turned into the first Persian language immersion preschool in the country: Golestan. That's when we incorporated as a non-profit, with the mission of helping others start their own programs.

Our work quickly evolved as people began to hear about how different our school was—from our approach to teaching to our then-rare natural playscape. In our first year, we had visitors from all over Northern California. By our second year we started to see people come from other states, and in our third, we began to have international visitors.

Golestan's Colab began to take on a life of its own. The mission had shifted from a focus on language immersion to a highly intentional holistic approach to education. We were pushing the envelope on early childhood education and sharing all that we learned along the way with anyone and everyone. We hosted one-on-one trainings, small group workshops, and large symposiums. By 2018 we had flown to several locations worldwide, including Nepal to help open an after school program for orphaned children—among dozens of other incredible projects.

Every year, our Board would ask “How can we monetize this work?” After crunching some numbers, I expressed my conviction that charging for this work would be far from lucrative while minimizing our impact and reach. The people for whom this work is most beneficial are also the people least likely to pay for it. In my opinion, the cost of losing the opportunity to work with them grossly outweighed any nominal financial gains. Instead, I put my energy into fundraising, finding donors from all over the world to support our work. The symbiotic relationship between our school and the Colab began to mature and take shape.

The school became a model for the Colab and the Colab began to support the growth and richness of the school. Today, our [figurative] open-door policy applies to anyone interested in collaboration. Whether it's a visit for inquiry and inspiration, or the full package with strategic planning, hiring, training, and site & curriculum development. All for free, with only ONE condition: anyone that works with us must participate in the movement by paying it forward.

Then the pandemic took the Colab to a whole new level. Because we are small, nimble risk-takers, we were able to reopen quickly and safely in the wee months of the pandemic. While most of the world was in front of a screen, we opened our (out)doors to educators, public school districts, and hundreds of independent schools all over the country—all wanting to learn about how to reopen schools for in-person instruction. From emails and phone calls, to onsite workshops, we were Busy, with a capital B! Now, we look forward to continuing to grow our community of collaborators by sharing what we learned, creating lasting change, and establishing best practices in education... together.



**Yalda Modabber**

Golestan Education

Founding Parent & Executive Director

**Thank you for being a part of this movement.**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'y. modabber'.

**“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 reopen safely. That is the precise generosity of spirit and commitment to global wellbeing that underscores everything at Golestan.”**

– Golestan Parent



# THE GOLESTAN COLAB

## OUR MISSION & GOAL

Golestan School was developed, not only to create a rich natural and cultural learning environment, but also to serve as an incubator, model, and resource for new approaches in education through the **Golestan Colab**. The 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 curriculum. It researches best practices in **bilingualism & 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:

- The integration and application of hands-on and **experiential learning practices & approaches** with an emphasis on environmental stewardship
- Developing **natural playscapes & calm, beautiful learning environments**
- Setting up **COVID-safe schools & campuses**
- **Language immersion & cultural education**

**Please email [colabe@GolestanKids.com](mailto:colabe@GolestanKids.com)** if you'd like to learn more about how your school or district can work with the Golestan Colab.



## BEYOND OUR WALLS

### CONNECTING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

In the past year and a half, Golestan collaborated with and supported over **1,200 schools in several public school districts** (including Oakland Unified, Berkeley Unified, West Contra Costa Unified, Santa Monica Unified, and San Francisco Unified) in their efforts to set up outdoor classrooms to reopen safely. This work impacted **150,000+ students** and **6,000+ teachers in local public schools**.

In addition, the Colab indirectly impacted over **10,000 educators nationwide** through talks, panel discussions, and active working groups.

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# 260%

Led **18 group site visits** at Golestan for educators and school administrators—a **260% increase** from pre-pandemic

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# 350%

Hosted **122 pro-bono events** and trainings—a **350% increase** from pre-pandemic

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# 825%

Increased the number of hours dedicated to pro-bono site visits, tours, workshops, one-on-one trainings, and off-site or phone consultations by **825%**—spending over **388 hours** providing direct personal support to other schools

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# 2050%

Provided **22 pro-bono off-site consultations** to educators—a **2050% increase** from pre-pandemic

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# 4500%

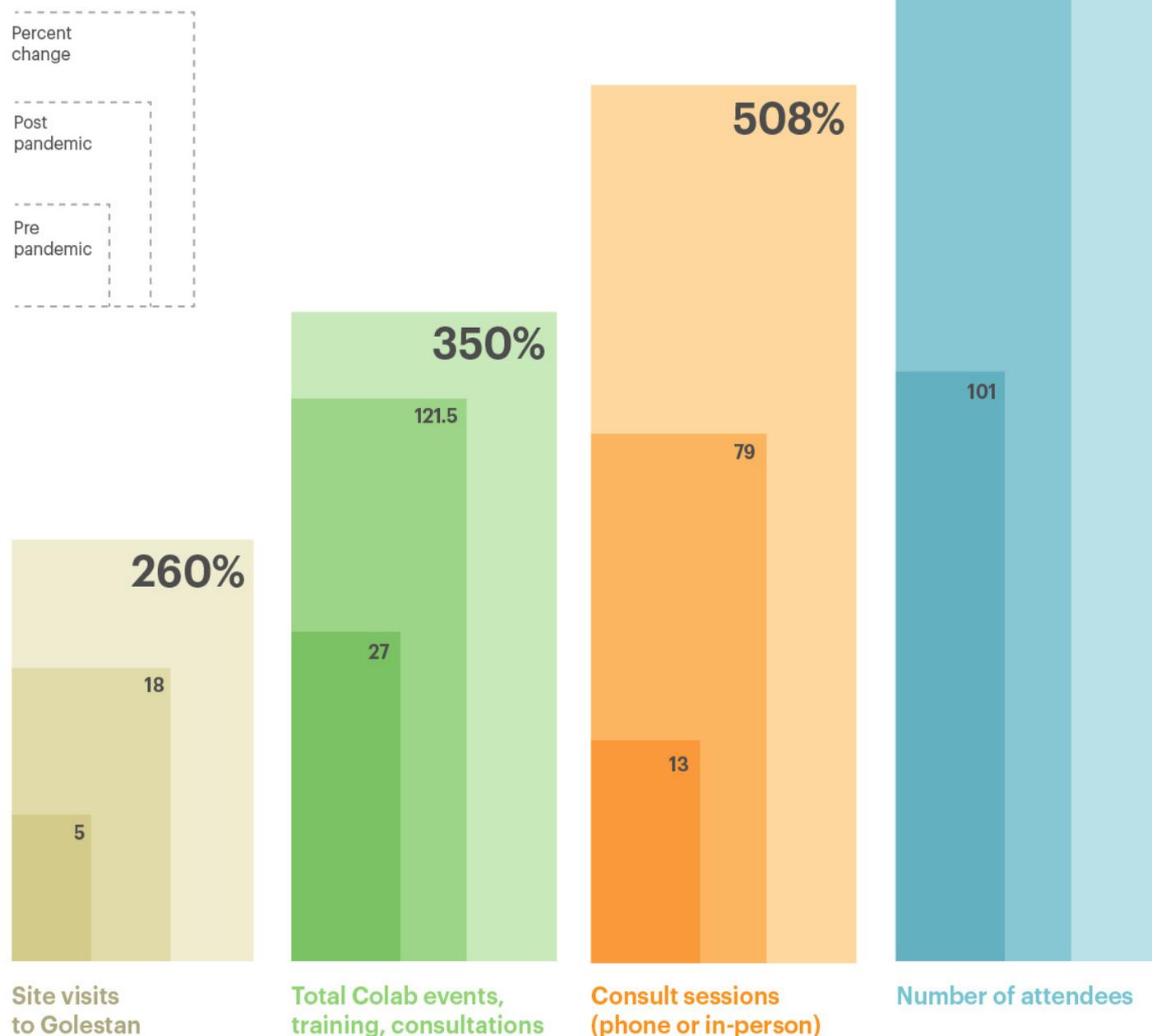
Supported **4,646 individuals** through Colab programming—a **4500% increase** from pre-pandemic

# RESPONSIVE GROWTH

## IDENTIFYING AND MEETING COMMUNITY NEEDS

After over a decade of slow incremental positive impact both locally and abroad, the pandemic and the global shift from in-person meetings to remote conferencing catapulted the Golestan Colab. Our work to support the design and development of outdoor classrooms and pedagogical practices that support stewardship of our planet exploded to a scale that we could never have predicted.

The graph below compares pre-pandemic collaborations in 2019 - 2020 and post-pandemic March 2020 - Sept 2021.



# COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

## ANGELA TAYLOR



**Golestan's Executive Director, Yalda, spoke with inspiring leader, Angela Taylor, Head of School at Park Day School in Oakland, CA about her first year at Park Day. They talked about how Angela transitioned to a new community and how she gained their trust during a global pandemic.**

### How long have you been an educator?

I'm coming up on my 30th year of being an educator. I started as a Pre-K teacher in Atlanta, Georgia, where I got my undergrad and credential. I taught pre-K for a year and then transitioned to 4th and 5th grade in a progressive school, then 6th & 7th grade math & science in Oakland, CA, where I moved in 1997 when I married my husband. In 1998, I moved to Boston and got my Masters in School Administration from UMass Boston, and then returned to Oakland in 2000. That year, I got my first administrative job in San Francisco as the Head of Lower School at Stuart Hall for Boys, which is part of the schools of Sacred Heart San Francisco, which is really four schools in one. So I went from being Lower School Head for boys for 12 years to head of a K-8 girls division for 8 years—spending 20 years in same-sex education. I was hired at Park Day School (PDS) in October 2019, pre-COVID, but wasn't supposed to start until July 2020. March 12 happens and the schools shut down. By March 20, PDS was calling me, so I was working two jobs—still running a 400 student K-8 school working through COVID with them, and also attending all Board meetings and scenario-planning meetings with PDS to ensure a seamless transition. It was actually fortuitous, because what PDS was struggling with at the time was distance learning. The progressive educational philosophy does not translate well to Zoom without a lot of intentionality, and we were still in crisis mode. I was coming from a more traditional school where it could actually work, where there was synchronous learning for six hours a day, even for kindergarten. PDS was having two 30 minute chunks a day, which was not working for most parents. I was able to use my experience and build a bridge for PDS.



**Tell us about your experience as a first year Head of School in the middle of a global pandemic. Are there challenges of which we may not be aware that you had to face?**

I think the challenges as a first year Head of School in the middle of a pandemic were all of the COVID things—making sure that our community was safe—but I think the hard part was also holding all the fear, worry, and anxiety of the community. As time went on, there was a level of confidence that came because we were doing so well, but day-to-day, there's wear and tear on your teachers. Parents and families were having their own struggles that they would share with me, and I felt more like a pastor of a congregation or a church, as much as I felt like a Head of School. I was holding a lot of emotional space for people and helping them be OK. And everything was amplified. So I think what was hard was figuring out how to keep myself replenished, because I felt like I was caring for and giving out emotionally to so many. I think I attended a lot to my physical tiredness. I slept a lot, I ate well, I tried to exercise, but I guess I wasn't attending to the mental, emotional, and spiritual fatigue. I'm still figuring out how to do that by doing things that I love, like reading quietly, or walking with one friend—because I'm an introvert who pretends to be an extrovert. I need to go in to recharge and need to give myself permission to do that.



**“Build a community around yourself... of other educators who are in the same boat, because the collective wisdom is so powerful.”**

**There's a lot of grace that goes with reaching out, being resourceful, and collaborating with others. Can you tell us about your process for being so outward, and what leads to that level of grace and resourcefulness?**

I knew I couldn't do it by myself because there was no playbook to fall back on. There was no experience that I had that aligned. As hokey as it sounds, it felt like we were all in this together. I needed a community to do this. I loved being on educator Zoom calls, even if there were pages and pages of heads of school. Sometimes I would scroll through the pages and private message people who I had met at a conference and say “Hello! I hope you're doing well!” I'm a person who needs community and this was another way for me to seek community and expertise in areas where I didn't have it.

# SHIFTING THE PARADIGM

## COLLABORATION & TRANSFORMATION

Through tours, workshops, one-on-one-trainings, site visits, and consultations, we've had a front-row look at the innovation that schools everywhere have used to push the envelope and meet their communities' needs. Golestan had the privilege of hosting three onsite working sessions for **Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD)** staff, Board members, and City Council members which marked the beginning of an ongoing collaboration on outdoor classrooms and long term planning.

In our effort to create long-lasting change, Golestan will be hosting a **National Educators' Summit in early 2022** to develop and share new best practices based on what we've learned in the past year and a half. Stay tuned to learn more or **email [colab@golestankids.com](mailto:colab@golestankids.com) for more information.**

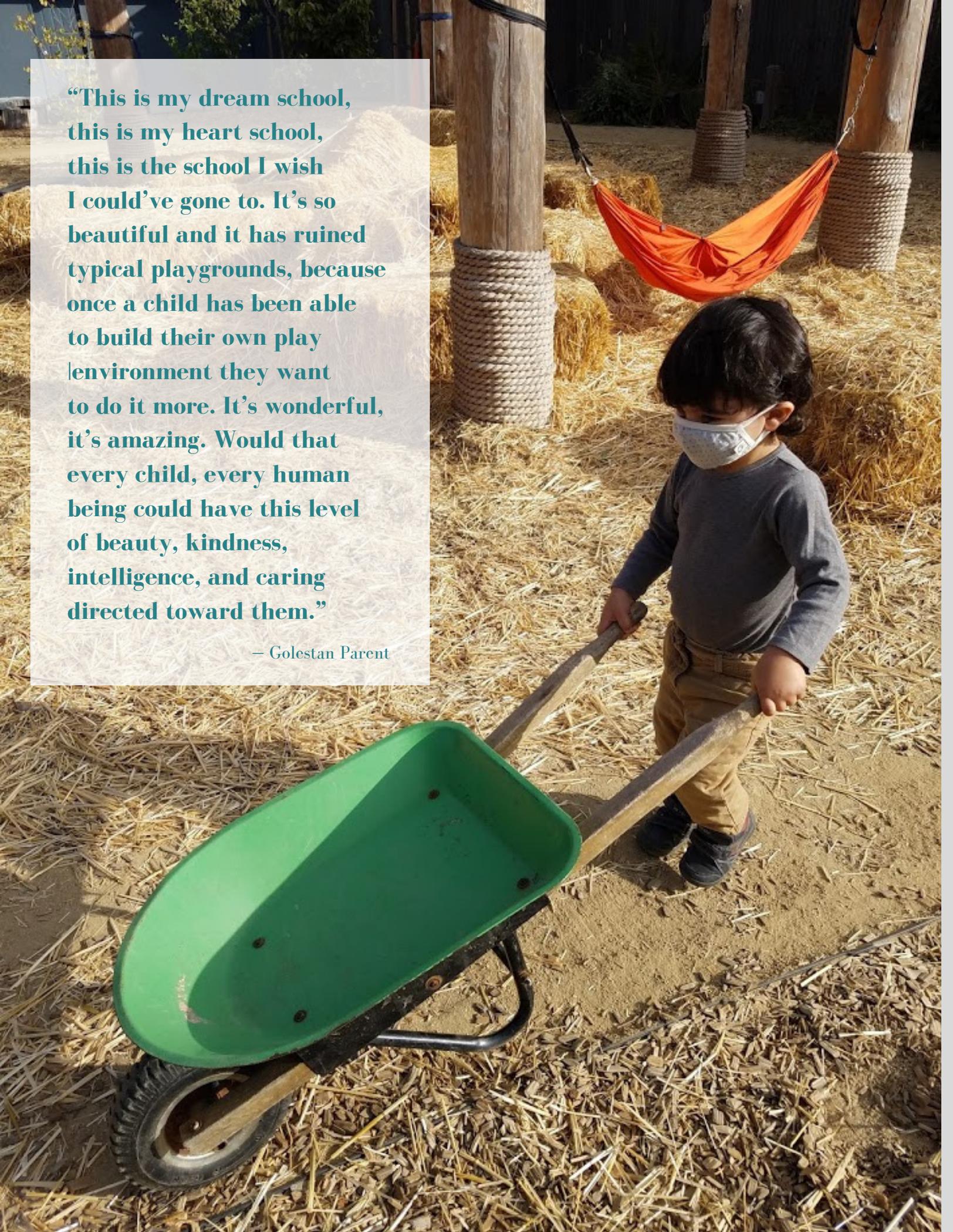


**“Golestan has supported Berkeley Unified School District’s efforts to assess and set up outdoor classrooms in response to COVID-19 precautions. They have played a critical role in our community working group and participate in ideating materials, placement of outdoor stations, and joined all of our 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

**“This is my dream school,  
this is my heart school,  
this is the school I wish  
I could’ve gone to. It’s so  
beautiful and it has ruined  
typical playgrounds, because  
once a child has been able  
to build their own play  
environment they want  
to do it more. It’s wonderful,  
it’s amazing. Would that  
every child, every human  
being could have this level  
of beauty, kindness,  
intelligence, and caring  
directed toward them.”**

— Golestan Parent



# GOLESTAN'S PEDAGOGY

## JOINING THE COMMON GROUND COLLABORATIVE (CGC)

When we expanded into an elementary school three years ago, we were accepted as an International Baccalaureate (IB) candidate school with the intention of providing an inquiry-based, constructivist framework for our teachers to apply in the classroom. While we were fully aligned with the richness and depth of the IB framework, our teachers found the language and structure of the program to be cumbersome and restrictive, as was the cost of membership and the bureaucracy of the organization. After months of research and exploration, we came to the conclusion that despite our pedagogical alignment with the IB, **there was a better fit for our organization.**

**The CGC** was developed in 2014 by one of the founders of the IB Primary Years Program in response to the same challenges we faced with the IB. **Kevin Bartlett** was a principal designer of the IB framework for the primary years. After he left IB, he launched the CGC with a framework that is simpler and more evolved than IB—one that allows our teachers to continue to do what they do best, without restrictive infrastructure and language. The CGC framework is not only philosophically and pedagogically aligned with IB and Golestan, but they have developed an open-sourced framework that is simpler and provides infinitely more support and resources for our teachers. It is also much more accessible and intuitive for parents! As an open-source network, this also makes our partnerships through the **Golestan Colab** much richer and less restricted. It gives us great pleasure to announce that we have just completed our first two months of transition to the CGC, and we could not be happier. Our teachers were simply giddy and grateful to receive all the benefits of IB without the costs and restrictions.



# OUR CURRICULUM

## A FRAMEWORK FOR POSITIVE CHANGE



We spoke with **Monica Hasan, Golestan's Director of Curriculum & Instruction** about Golestan's pedagogy and recent shift to the **Common Ground Collaborative (CGC)**. Her passion for inquiry-based teaching and learning is what brought her to Golestan after a decade as a teacher, IB Coordinator, and Harvard GSE Project Zero Classroom Fellow.

### **What are the benefits of Common Ground Collaborative versus other frameworks with which you've worked?**

I've worked extensively within the International Baccalaureate (IB) framework, both as an educator and as an administrator, and observed it to be a bit rigid, cumbersome, jargon-heavy—particularly for teachers—and bureaucratic, making it hard to successfully implement if a school hasn't seen it done well elsewhere, or hasn't received solid training—which can be prohibitively expensive for many schools. CGC is committed to hands-on support around implementation, offering 16 hours of training catered specifically to a school. When evaluating the Common Ground Collaborative Framework (CGC), we immediately found it fit organically with our teaching philosophy. Not only was it easy to understand—particularly in a bilingual school, where for many teachers English is not their first language—but it can be utilized around any area of study. CGC is an evolution of IB, utilizing the lenses of Human Commonalities (Purpose & Balance, Imagination & Creativity, Sustainability & Systems, Patterns & Principles, Stories & Signals, Individuals & Groups). However, CGC language is very action-oriented, supporting teachers to plan and develop units to help kids make cognitive leaps between what they know and how they can take action—honoring their responsibilities as a global citizen.

### **How does Common Ground Collaborative fit into Golestan's Colab?**

Since the heart of the Golestan Colab is open-sourcing and collaborating to develop rich pedagogy, it is essential that our educational framework is philosophically aligned with that. Unfortunately within IB, everything is very proprietary. You can't offer, share, or obtain access to many of its tools until you have become a candidate school (which is a huge administrative lift and cost-prohibitive for many of the schools with whom we work), making Golestan's goal of open-sourcing our curriculum difficult. The CGC framework truly operates as an invitation to be part of a pedagogical thought community, offering examples of units that have been written by other schools, and allowing you to share your own. Alleviating educational poverty is one of CGC's and Golestan's goals, by providing schools and teachers with the best inquiry-based practices.

# OUR AUTUMN IN PICTURES

We've been lucky enough to capture moments of our Fall unfolding at Golestan. [Click the images below to see more.](#)



**JOOJEH**  
(PRE-K 2-3 YRS)



**RAINBOW HEARTS**  
(GRADES K+1)



**LOONEH**  
(PRE-K 3-5 YRS)



**LOVE BUGS**  
(GRADES K+1)



**PEELEH**  
(PRE-K 3-5 YRS)



**MOON DRAGONS**  
(GRADES 2+3)

# GOLESTAN IN THE NEWS

We're been honored that our work has been recognized and part of a variety of important conversations. [Click the links below to see & hear more.](#)

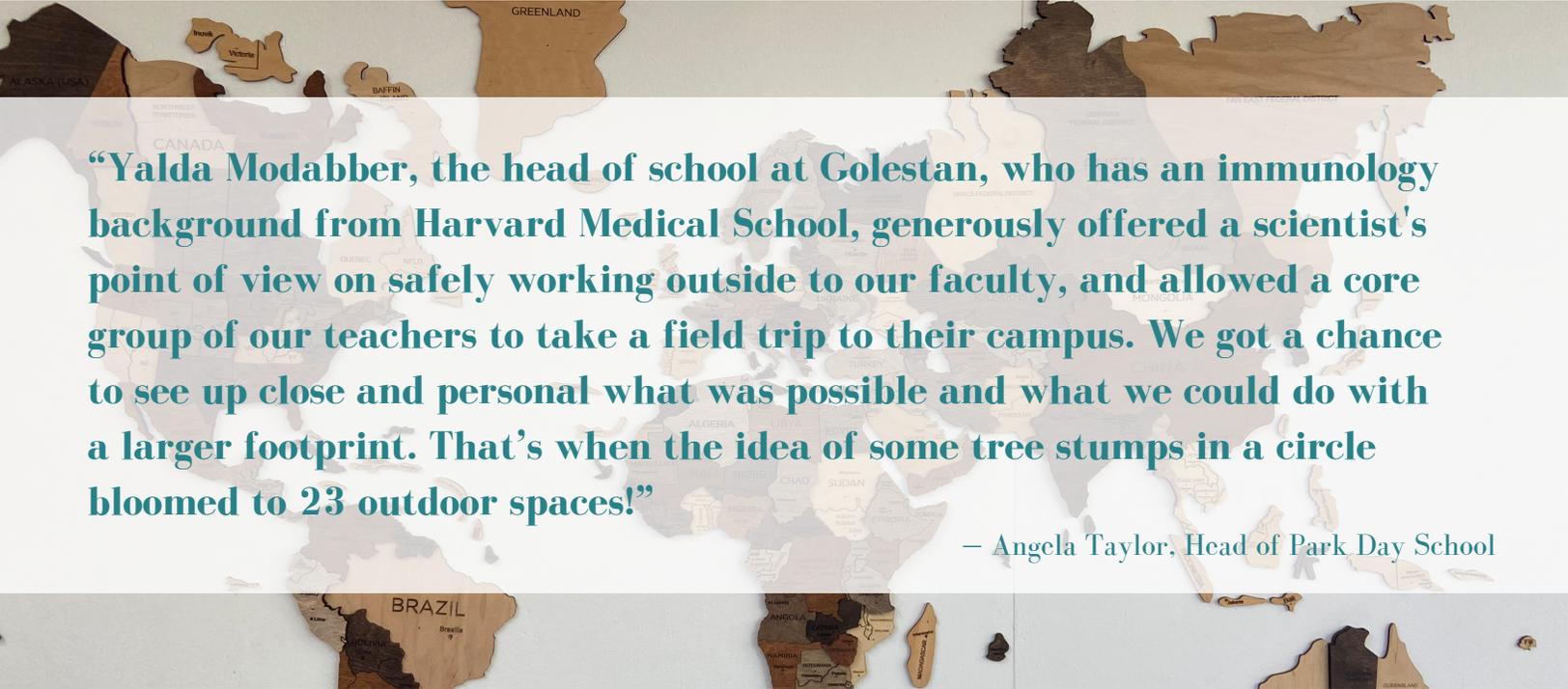
- 09.24.21 Knowable Magazine:** Delta: Rethinking Risks for Kids and Schools
- 06.18.21 Architizer:** Stromberg Architecture is a 2021 Architizer A+ Award Finalist (Kindergarten Category for Golestan School)
- 05.22.21 Archinect:** Schools Turn to Architects as the Pandemic Mandates Collaboration With 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 Reimagining What a School Building Can Be
- 11.12.20 American Institute of Architects:** 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

# COME JOIN THE MOVEMENT

## OPPORTUNITIES & GIVING

The Golestan Colab offers pro-bono support to educators in the form of workshops and one-on-one consultations in these areas:

- **Long-term Planning & Visioning**
- **Financial Modeling**
- **Transformation of Space: Indoors & Outdoors**
- **Teacher Training**
  - How to integrate nature and environmental stewardship into curriculum
  - Hands-on, transdisciplinary, and heuristic approaches to learning
  - How to develop and transition into a holistic approach to teaching
  - Language and cultural immersion.



“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

You can play a role in the continued growth of Golestan and the communities it supports by clicking [here](#). We welcome your contributions to:

- **Golestan's Annual Fund:** this supports the school so that the model we use for the Colab is sustainable and of the highest quality
- **Tuition Assistance Fund:** help make Golestan School accessible to children of all backgrounds, resources, and privilege
- **The Golestan Colab:** Supporting the Colab enables us to continue this work near and far

# GIVING THANKS



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**; **Room Parents**; and all our incredible **families & children**.

To find out about volunteer opportunities, **click here**. To learn about many ways to support Golestan's School & Colab—including providing items from our wishlist or sponsoring students—**click here**.

**It is because of your rooted kindness that we can continue to grow our reach and impact beyond the walls of our school. Thank you!**



**We are Kind**  
**We are Thoughtful**  
**We are Courageous**