

Rooted Kindness

GOLESTAN
MAGAZINE

SPRING 2022



It's a New Day!

Dear Community Near and Far,

I know I'm not alone in relishing this moment in time when we can **catch our breath and enjoy the moment**. For now, at least, we have some respite from the pandemic.

Gone are the days of sanitizing groceries and having to quarantine for two weeks just in case we were exposed to the coronavirus, with no access to tests to detect infection. Gone are the days of strict six foot distancing... outside. Gone are the days of hoping a vaccine will come out within the next year (or two!).

Oh how our lives changed soon after people in our part of the world gained easy access to vaccines. **We know our relationship with COVID is likely to be long-term.** By all indications, we're just catching a break. It's not over. But our hope is that future strains will be less virulent and more innocuous than past ones so that we can co-exist without disrupting our entire planet.

Now our challenge is to plan thoughtfully so that we are prepared for any scenario that may come our way. **In this issue of our magazine, we'll learn about the incredible impact the National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative has had on the reopening of schools in the United States these past two years.**

After three months of fear and isolation, then 18 months of operating in person during the pandemic (some of which was before testing and vaccines were widely available), people are now gathering. Masks are coming off. It's a New Day. **Even if only for the time being, it's a New Day and we're going to relish it.**

For the first time in two years, **our Colab work is moving away from a focus on in-person instruction and the pandemic**, to working with an organization that supports children on the autism spectrum, a project with Make a Wish Foundation, various farm to school initiatives in California, and even an indigenous Mam/Mayan language immersion program and cultural center in Oakland!

Whether you celebrate Purim, Holi, Nowruz ("New Day"), Passover, Easter, or simply the blossoms and fruits associated with spring and Equinox, **may the coming months bring peace and health** to you, your families, and all of humanity.

With infinite gratitude,



Yalda Modabber
Golestan Education
Founding Parent + Executive Director



"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."

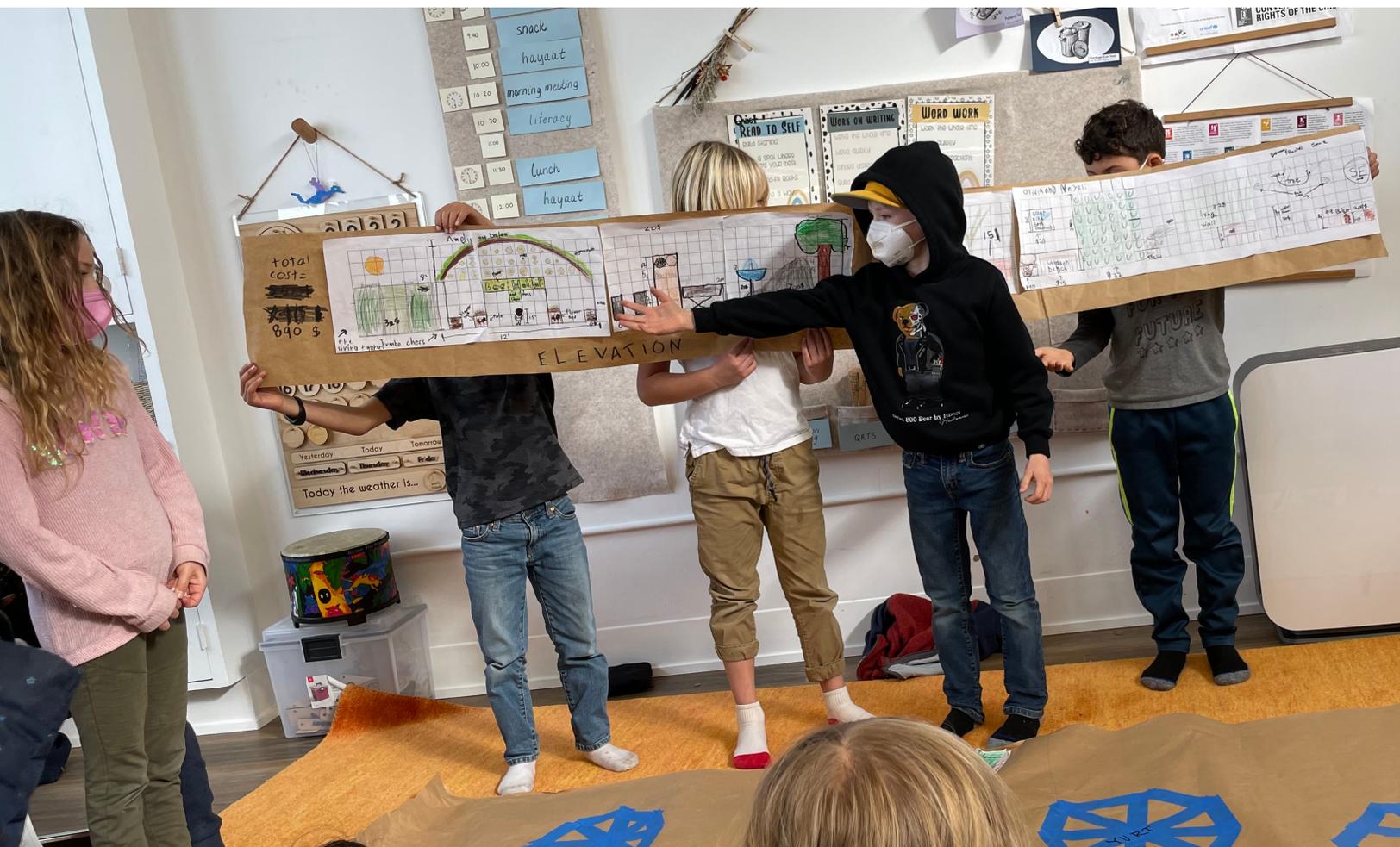
THE GOLESTAN COLAB

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 program 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**
- **Language immersion & cultural education**
- Developing **natural playscapes & calm, beautiful learning environments**
- Setting up **COVID-safe schools & campuses**



BUILDING A 'NEW NORMAL' TOGETHER



In the past two years, schools across the world had to change course to develop new best practices in response to the pandemic.

The Golestan Colab had the privilege of consulting and collaborating with many of these independent and public schools in order to support children and educators in safely returning to in-person instruction. This work was done both independently and through our participation in the National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative that is featured in this issue of *Rooted Kindness*.

The Golestan Colab collaborated with and supported over 1,200 schools, impacting 150,000+ students, 6,000+ teachers in local public schools—and over 10,000 educators nationwide.

The transformations schools underwent through the work of the National Initiative demonstrated an unparalleled dedication to the needs of children, teachers, support staff, and families. At the national level, this transformation is in large part because of the work of our collaborators at the National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative.

Read on to learn more about their incredible impact on children in our country.

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

SHARON DANKS



Golestan's Amy Kisch spoke with **Sharon Danks, CEO & Founder of Green Schoolyards America** about the **National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative**, which was co-founded by Green Schoolyards America; the Lawrence Hall of Science at the University of California, Berkeley; San Mateo County Office of Education; and Ten Strands. For more information on how to join the initiative or to access infinite resources available for educators, [click here](#).

AK: For the National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative, four organizations came together to develop and share a life-saving educational paradigm to respond to the pandemic. First, thank you for the impact you've had in this, and the opportunity for Golestan's Colab to collaborate with you. How did this initiative come about and why was this work important to you?

SD: The initiative kicked off in April 2020 to provide schools and districts support to use outdoor spaces as resources for public and mental health in response to the pandemic. We'd always known outdoor learning was important, but it was also a great way to respond to a crisis. For example, during the 1918 influenza pandemic, the solution was to take classes outside, so we had models of how to do this.

The challenge was that many schools didn't have outdoor capacity. We pushed hard to move education outdoors, rather than advocating for remote digital learning, because many children still do not have access to a computer, the internet, an adult at home that can assist them with digital learning, nor an environment at home in which to concentrate.

"Equity was a primary driver to return kids to campus, as was mental health. Many children still do not have access to a computer or the internet."



To find solutions for the limitations schools were facing, over 300 people—doctors, public health experts, educators, parents, architects, designers, city planners, policy-makers, and more—immediately volunteered their expertise and time, comprising 10 working groups focused on different response areas. We had emergency schoolyard design volunteers, with 200 architects and designers offering site visits, site planning, designs, and materials to schools in need. Golestan offered big support to the initiative around health, drawn from the expertise of the COVID Taskforce they had assembled.



AK: Can you tell us more about the resources that were developed and are available?

SD: The first webinar we offered in June 2020, had over 1,000 registrations—a significant jump from our standard 30–80 registrants. We made that recording and extensive other resources publicly available in our **National Outdoor Learning Library** written by hundreds of subject matter experts from around the country, from many different fields, who volunteered thousands of hours to create guidance for education stakeholders as they considered options for safely returning students to in-person schooling. There are now 150 sections with 30 videos available. The initial webinar developed into a weekly (and now bi-weekly) community forum, where we share best practices in developing outdoor learning environments, and where people can connect to offer one another help. These meetings, and all our resources, are open and free to the public. We are just about to have our 36th convening, and will begin transitioning from COVID-response to long-term enrichment and use of grounds. Our goal is to reframe outdoor learning as a Plan A, with the backup (as a response to public health or environmental crises such as fires) to go inside.

AK: What were your challenges—and those you observed in the schools and districts you supported—and how did you overcome those challenges? What was the outcome?

SD: When we first formed the initiative, there was no budget nor funding available. We jumped in and did this public work as an emergency community response until September 2020, when we finally received support around the costs of infrastructure and administrative labor. Our volunteers—from all professional fields—and 25 or so partners were our lifeline. They did everything—from co-leading working groups, organizing, tracking the work, writing and editing materials, and more.

A challenge we noticed for larger districts was that it was harder to manage the logistics for outdoor learning when adapting for scale. New York City's Public schools worked closely with the Mayor to determine that over 700 schools wanted to be outside. In many cases, they closed public streets so classes could be held outdoors on city blocks. The challenge however was matching the tactical needs with the desire: they might be able to set up the streets, and obtain enough tents for the outdoor learning spaces, but then not have enough people to set them up.



One of the general trends we observed was that smaller institutions had the ability to move faster, and enlist community volunteers to actualize them. The earliest adapters were those that had done it before, even if their outdoor curriculum only consisted of having school lunches outdoors. The challenge here was shifting the curriculum, and the tools being used, to suit being outside. Shaded areas needed to be built to prevent glare for electronics being used. Outdoor clothing needed to be considered as a piece of outdoor infrastructure. Students can't focus if they aren't warm and dry.

We've now seen many states—including Maine, New Mexico, Colorado, Texas, and Arkansas, among others—investing in the long-term infrastructure required to prioritize outdoor learning. There is currently enormous federal funding around mental health, learning loss, closing learning gaps, and virus transmission for public schools—at a once in every two generations-levels—that can be used to prioritize outdoor education.

AK: Where are more resources needed?

SD: The main barriers to facilitating long-term change are teacher training, lack of design conversations and education, and scaling for maintenance. First, we need more pre-service teacher training and teacher training to help educators feel comfortable outside and to connect their curriculum to the outdoors. There also needs to be more of a focus in the landscape architecture field on children's needs. So much of it is centered on adults, designing spaces with hard clean edges that are magazine cover-worthy. This is not the aesthetic of nature nor children, which requires a level of mess. Third, donors want to cut the ribbon, but not mow the grass. In other words, both private and public schools are used to small maintenance budgets, but green space requires maintenance. Districts need help thinking through the life-cycle costs of outdoor spaces. If your grounds are your textbook, then you need to spend money on them. Overall, schools need to be plugged back into land use and ecological system plans. The U.S. has 130,00 acres of public school land on which 6.2 million children come everyday—more people on a daily basis than the number that goes to Yosemite in an entire year.



AK: What advice do you have to offer educators?

SD: Use what you have. It can be as small as bringing stadium cushions from home to sit outside comfortably, or walking to a park if you don't have green space available at your school. Lunch is the most important piece of the day to be outdoors, since masks come off to eat. Even if it's not possible for other curricula to be outside, use funding to facilitate eating outdoors. Know that there are financial and thought-partner resources out there to support you. We offer an augmented reality app for phones or computers that you can hold up at your school, which will project different outdoor space models, so you can build an environment at whatever scale works for you.



“Creativity is inventing, experimenting, growing, taking risks, breaking rules, making mistakes, and having fun.”

– Mary Lou Cook

JOIN THE MOVEMENT!

TOGETHER, LET'S SET A NEW STANDARD FOR EDUCATION

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

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



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

THE SEASON IN PICTURES

Throughout the cold months, our joy and connection have kept us warm. [Click the images below to see how we have continued to thrive at Golestan.](#)



JOOJEH
(2-3 YRS)



RAINBOW HEARTS
(GRADES K/1)



LOONEH
(3-5 YRS)



LOVE BUGS
(GRADES K/1)



PEELEH
(3-5 YRS)



MOON DRAGONS
(GRADES 2/3)

GOLESTAN IN THE NEWS

We are thrilled that our work continues to be recognized as 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



WITH GRATITUDE

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.

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 expand our school while creating positive change in the greater community. Thank you!



We are Kind
We are Thoughtful
We are Courageous



