



# Rooted Kindness

GOLESTAN  
MAGAZINE

FALL 2022



## From Farm to School

November 21, 2022

Dear community,

As the leaves have changed color and dropped to the ground, those of us who spend our days in schools are settling into our new scholastic year. Meanwhile, the rest of the world is busy wrapping up the year and preparing to welcome a new one.

Earlier this summer, we applied for a \$500,000 Farm to School grant to build a Farm Lab through the state of California. We secured official partnerships with eight partners, including West Contra Costa County Unified School District which serves 54 public schools with 27,274 students in El Cerrito, Richmond, and beyond.

Unfortunately, we were not awarded the grant this year, but our conviction to build a Farm to School Lab to support these partnerships has not waned in the least. If anything, we are grounded in our conviction to create a space where we can collaborate with public school districts (and others) to create meaningful change for how much access children have to healthy foods and green spaces while at school.

In the latest issue of Rooted Kindness, you will learn about one of our Colab partners (Pasture Raised Kids) that did receive a Farm to School grant this year. We are so excited for this incredible organization that packs a lot of punch for its small frame. It is truly an honor to continue our collaboration with them.

And while it was a disappointment not to be awarded the \$500,000 grant from the state this year - especially in light of the challenges of fundraising in the current economic climate - the state's timeline was very aggressive and would have put undue pressure on our operations. But rest assured that just because we didn't receive the grant for the Farm Lab, it doesn't mean that we won't be actively working toward fulfilling this vision.

I hope you enjoy this next issue of Rooted Kindness, and if what we do resonates with you, please consider supporting our work.

Thank you and happy holidays!

With gratitude,

Yalda



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



**Kind hearts are the gardens. Kind thoughts are the roots.  
Kind words are the blossoms. Kind deeds are the fruits.**

– Kirpal Singh

# 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**



# OUTDOOR LEARNING AND THE FARM TO SCHOOL MOVEMENT



The **Golestan Colab** has supported independent and public schools across the nation in creating outdoor learning spaces. This was a hugely valuable resource during the pandemic, but the benefits of outdoor learning and connection with the food system go far beyond the health of individuals – they also improve the health of our communities.

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.

At our model school, we only serve whole foods. All our delicious meals and snacks are prepared in-house by our kitchen team. We even bake our own crackers and bread. All produce and meats are sourced from local farms (with the exception of bananas). All ingredients, without exception, are organic. We have a large edible natural playspace, a separate teaching garden, and an outdoor aquaponic system with a giant fish tank for growing lettuce and herbs. All of our elementary students have access to the edible schoolyard at least twice a day and work in the teaching garden at least twice a week. We also engage our local community to participate in tending to the garden.

Every child deserves to have the opportunity to learn where their food comes from and to have access to delicious and healthy nutritious meals. This is why we do this work.

**We don't have to engage in grand, heroic actions to participate in the process of change. Small acts, when multiplied by millions of people, can transform the world.**

— Howard Zinn



# LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

## NIKI HARRIS



Golestan's Emma Parandvash spoke with **Niki Harris, Executive Director & Founder of Pasture Raised Kids** about building an outdoor school centered in kindness and rooted in their farm and community in Siskiyou County, California. For more information on their programs, [click here](#).

**EP: Tell me about pasture raised kids - how did it start, and how it has grown to where you are today?**

**NH:** I am a parent of four children, and never ever in my life did it occur to me that we would do something different than a traditional public school path. But as my oldest child got closer to his fifth birthday, I began learning more about what a traditional public school education looks like today, and how that's really changed since we were all in school ourselves, particularly in these early years. We put our oldest into TK, instead of kindergarten. And as we entered that space, it didn't feel right. There was nothing wrong, but it did not feel right. And it opened up a conversation about how we could do this differently.

We live in Siskiyou County, California, which is in the mountains at the top of the state, it's very rural, it's very agriculture centered. And we have the fortunate blessing of having a beautiful farm, and our kids are so connected with the outdoors. I didn't feel that homeschooling was right for us, but since we're in a rural area, our options were very limited. In a more urban area, you'd have different options, whether that's private school, or a different public school, but we just don't have that here. The choice was home school, or public school, and neither of those fit for us personally. And since we have a pretty serious entrepreneurial spirit in our family, we said "let's just do it ourselves, and make it what we want to make it." That began a visioning process, where we looped in other families, and we found that there was a real need in our community for a different type of school experience, one centered in community, peer learning, and a connection with the outdoors.

We started out as a parent-led co-op, meeting once a week during that first year. But one thing led to another and we ended up hiring a teacher. And in 2019, we launched the full time program, Farm School. And now we are operating with 25 students, and we have two full time teachers and a full time chef, and I serve as the director. And eventually we started a non-profit, Pasture Raised Kids, and Farm School is one of our programs. So we've moved forward quickly, and it's been really fun and a lot of learning. But it all started out of this intuitive desire to have our own kids be connected with their education in a really different way.

**EP: When you were setting up the program, what were your goals and vision, and how have you worked to make that a reality?**

**NH:** When we look back at when we started, it's easy for me to identify that we had some pillars that we felt pretty firm in: connection with food and the outdoors, and community and peer learning. We wanted an environment that felt like family, centered in kindness and rooted in love, as opposed to one that felt like an institution. We've always been an advocate of mixed ages, so that was really important to us.

The connection with the outdoors and the environment was also critical. For us, that's our lifestyle, and it feels super unnatural to not have that be at the core of what we do. When you integrate kids into the environment at a young age, they naturally become stewards of the environment. When kids can connect their learning into the natural world, that's where that love of the environment is going to seed from.

As we've evolved, we've gotten more rooted in inquiry based learning, allowing each child's interests and passions to pave the path for their own learning. We're all about individualized learning, and meeting each child where they're at. So you're not going to see a canned curriculum for our students. We meet each child where they're at with an individualized learning plan, and I think that also gives kids a lot of autonomy over their learning. When they have autonomy over their learning, they're excited about it. We've developed our model around this idea that academic subject areas are not implemented in silos, they are integrated into everything that we're doing. Reading, for example, is taught through a desire to learn about something or to communicate with somebody, which fosters a lot of love for it.



**EP: I love how outdoor and nature based learning provides a really different and exciting model for learning than a traditional classroom environment. Can you tell us more about how you're able to meet the academic goals of the school in that context? How does a typical school day look?**

**NH:** Our students spend probably 75% of their time outdoors. That can be really hard for teachers to adapt to if they're coming from a traditional indoor program, and there are some systems and tricks of the trade that we've developed that can help with that. Learning also looks a lot different, because we're outdoor and because we're hands on and experiential based. We've created his model that's based around autonomy in their learning, and a lot of it is also community based. The outdoors are integrated into everything that we do, so whether it's a formal garden lesson, or just access to the gardens through choice time, it's always there. It's not like every academic subject area we do is taught through food - that would become so boring! But it's the backdrop - this enriched environment in which they can then experience all subject areas, naturally creating that connection, which is really exciting to see.



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From an academic perspective, we're not common core or state standard, forward. We're not leading with Common Core State Standards, we're trailing with common core standards. And what I mean by that is that we're not creating any kind of lesson or activity around the intent to check off a list of our common core state standards. But when you go backwards, and you take what we've done in a day, or a week, or a month or a year, it's very easy to weave Common Core State Standards all through it.



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For example, we don't follow traditional grade levels, but for students equivalent to second, third, and fourth grade, we have monthly goals that are inquiry-based, and centered in place-based learning. We have a unit theme that weaves throughout, and the kids create a goal that's focused on that theme. This can be anything from building a solar powered pizza oven, to sewing their own garment, to a robotics project. It gives you this really amazing sense of the individuality of each child. The teacher will guide those students on their path of learning to reach their goal. That's broken down into really tangible process-oriented steps - while they're reaching towards an outcome, it's really all about the process to get there. And the kids have space for research and critical thinking and overcoming challenges and connecting with mentors in the community. And then they reflect on that through writing, and applying their knowledge.

The goal setting mechanism and the inquiry-driven approach allow us to scaffold learning across these topic areas, integrating academics with social emotional learning as well. And then you have also created a pathway for a child to better understand how to reach goals and how to overcome challenges along the way, because these are longer term, one month at a time projects - they aren't easy! We're able to look back and really see how our students have grown and learned.



**EP: Tell us more about the school's relationship with the larger community, and how it fits in with the work of the school.**

**NH:** We're in a very small community. There are two towns close to us, each with a population of around 600 people. So everyone is super connected. And we've had a lot of opportunities to build a stronger community network.

When the concept of farm school was born, back in 2018, it wasn't well received by all parts of the community - some people saw it as a threat to our public schools, because public school funding is so dependent on the number of enrolled students. But then COVID happened and everything changed, and we were able to help a great deal because of our experience with outdoor learning. And now we have a great relationship with the public school. We don't partner formally with the public school district right now, because it didn't feel like we could keep the integrity of our vision and still meet their requirements, so right now we're getting a lot of support from our regional and local foundations which allows us to connect in the broader community in many ways.



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We also offer part time homeschool enrichment programs, so that the homeschool community has access to our community a couple of days a week. And we've created summer programming so that the public school kids have access to our summer programming. Our farm school is located on three acres. It has always been one of our goals to maximize our production in a meaningful way - this is obviously an asset to our own program, but we would love to be donating produce to public school districts at a regional or local level. At a regional level, we want to work with public schools in our area to develop a model in which our property and our programming could be used as more of like a lab for them and their students. We do field trips now, where the public school kids visit the farm, but not in a formalized way. We would like to be a resource and an asset to the larger education network, whether that's bringing fresh foods into their cafeterias, helping to develop curriculum, in connection with food and the outdoors, or having our property be a resource so kids can come out and actually help grow their food. All of those things really matter to us.

**EP: In what ways have you been collaborating with the Golestan colab?**

**NH:** I feel like the Golestan connection, for us, is like a sisterhood, and it feels really special to have made that connection at such an early phase of our formation. When we were initially doing our one day a week program back in 2018, we found out about Golestan through Alice Waters' Edible Schoolyard Project, while we were researching models for our school and planning to visit the Bay Area. They referred us to Golestan, and when the three of us visited, there was an immediate connection. We had no idea about the Colab at the time, we were just taking a tour to gain inspiration and ideas, and we joined right away. And since then, the Colab has really provided us with the right support at the right time. In our initial days, our teachers would come down and workshop with the Colab, doing goal setting and visioning. And I have conversations with Yalda about everything from budgeting to staffing to HR to troubleshooting to financial sustainability. The Colab model is so needed in this space. And now we're hoping that with our farm school model, we can pay this forward and share resources for outdoor learning that schools in our region or maybe other rural areas could utilize.



**EP: We talked about this a bit before, but can you tell us more about your plans for the future?**

**NH:** As I mentioned, developing our Farm to School initiatives and maximizing our food production is definitely in our immediate future. We're also working on strategic planning right now, and we're really excited about potentially creating kind a regional network of educators focused on place-based and outdoor learning so that we can both pay forward some of our help we've received and share things we've learned in our own process as well as help connect resources and peer learning across organizations that are in a rural setting.

We live in an under-served and financially distressed area, and private school isn't accessible or affordable for the majority of people here. So working at a broader level to create some kind of sustainable system where this high caliber programming is accessible to all rural children is really important to us.

We are so excited to share that we just received an award notice from the California Department of Food and Agriculture through their Farm to School Incubator grant program. Our focus with this work over the next couple of years is to serve as a conduit to connect ECE (early childhood educators) across our county with more resources to integrate children with farm, garden, and food centered learning. Farm to School initiatives are so important to rural California, where agriculture is such a backbone to the lifestyle but food access and security is still such a critical challenge. As we've learned in developing Farm School, the earlier we can get kids digging in the dirt, tasting the fruits of their labor, and delighting in nature's gifts, the better we can set them up for success; from increased healthy eating, to improved mental health, making this style of education more widely available is an urgent issue. We are honored to be the stewards of this important work and can't wait to see where it goes.





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**Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.”**

— John Dewey

# 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 and Strategic Planning
- 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



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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

# 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 & learn more.](#)

- 10.04.22 Living Schoolyards Act:** Golestan's campus redesign featured in Fact Sheet for Senate Bill: Living Schoolyards Act
- 07.01.22 Parents Press:** Golestan is voted 2022 Parents Press "Best of" in the category of Top 5 Elementary Schools in the Bay Area.
- 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



## WITH GRATITUDE

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

To find out about volunteer opportunities, please [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 contributing to creating positive change in the greater community. **Thank you!**



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

Please click here to support our work today!



Planting Knowledge  
Cultivating Kindness

GOLESTAN