

ROOTS

Newsletter

Spring 2026

For Friends of SYV Family School



SANTA YNEZ VALLEY
FAMILY SCHOOL

SINCE 1974

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Table of Contents

03

Letter from the Editor

04

People Features

15

Alumni on Campus

16

Alumni Recipes

18

Facilities Update





SHERI REPLANE, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATION

Spring brings fresh energy and new possibilities to SYV Family School! Our campus continues to buzz with curiosity, connection, and joy—from playful morning greetings and lunchtime dance breaks to quiet moments of reflection and focused learning. At Family School, we know that play, presence, and connection are at the heart of how children learn and grow—ideas we explored in our February blog, Honoring Children In a Digital Age.

As Maya Angelou said, “We may not have it all together, but together we have it all.” This sentiment comes to life every day as students, families, alumni, and staff support one another and grow side by side.

In the final few months of school, we have many wonderful opportunities to connect and celebrate—coffee carts, open classrooms, hikes, Special Persons’ Day, the SYVFS Rodeo, and Graduation—all creating meaningful memories for our students and families.

In this spring edition, we’re excited to share alumni updates, including Katie Cromack, Class of 2001, now in her eighth year of school administration at KIPP Public Schools Northern California, and Candice Isaacson, a recent 2025 graduate navigating her transition to middle school. You’ll also meet our first Angel Program sponsors, learn about the impact of their generosity, and celebrate Red Door teacher Jayla Garoutte, whose creativity and energy continue to inspire our young learners. Plus, don’t miss details about our first-ever Alumni Annual Fund Week, taking place May 4-8!

Here’s to a spring filled with play, connection, and new traditions. Thank you for being an essential part of the SYV Family School community!

Forging the Path

Forward

A conversation with alum Katie Cromack on learning, leadership, and life.

By Sheri Replane

Q: What's keeping you busy these days?

A: These days, I'm enjoying a full life with my husband, our almost 3-year-old daughter, and our 8-month-old son. We spend weekends exploring San Francisco parks and playgrounds, connecting with friends and family over home-cooked meals, and spending time in our backyard garden. Becoming a mom has been an incredible journey, and I'm amazed every day watching my kids grow.

I've also recently joined a moms' co-op workout group that meets weekly. It's been a bright spot - a way to stay active and meet new people in a big city

outside of work.

Q: How do you spend your time outside of work or school?

A: Yoga is one of my main hobbies. It keeps me grounded, centered, and energized when it's easy to feel overwhelmed by the long to-do lists at work or home.

Q: What's one thing people might be surprised to know about you?

A: My husband and I met in the mariachi group during college at Stanford. We still enjoy playing music with the kids, even though it's been a while since we performed.

Q: What's a recent accomplishment or milestone you're proud of?

A: I'm proud to be in my eighth year of school administration at KIPP Public Schools Northern California, working across 23 schools in the Bay Area and Stockton. Supporting students with quality enrichment programs — dance, music, cooking, sports, art, outdoor exploration, and more — is what keeps me engaged and inspired in this work.



Q: Got any favorite books, movies, podcasts, or music right now?

A: *Belonging* by Geoffrey Cohen and *Motherhood* by Lisa Marchiano.

Q: How did your time at Family School help shape who you are today?

A: Family School instilled in me a deep love of nature and the outdoors. Growing up in such a beautiful place, surrounded by poppies, lupine, fiddleneck, and shooting stars, was truly special. While raising my own family in San Francisco, I miss the sense of place of the Santa Ynez Valley, with its grasslands and Figueroa Mountain in the distance. Family School also taught me a deep respect for children and what it means to put students' learning at the center of a school. I have vivid memories of my time there, and the child-centered approach gave me confidence and the ability to learn at my own pace — lessons I draw upon every day as an educator.

Q: What's one Family School memory that still makes you smile?

A: I think of the countless hours



THE KATIE FILE

Family School Class:
2001

College: Stanford
University

Degree: BA,
International Relations

Current Role:
Regional Director of
Expanded Learning &
Athletics, KIPP Public
Schools Northern
California

building sandcastles, moats, and cities of sand and mud with other kids. Yosemite stands out, where we sang “I’m Blue” nonstop on the hike and at the cabin — it makes me chuckle thinking about what the teachers endured!

Q: Is there a teacher, moment, or tradition from Family School that stayed with you?

A: Family School teachers had a profound impact on me: Miki, Sandy, Lynn, Ester, Cynthia — I remember so many details of their classes. From the books Miki read, like *The Chestry Oak*, *Holes*, and *Harry Potter*, to Sandy’s koi pond where we learned about compost and garden building. My grandpa, Ray, helped us weekly in the garden, mixing concrete for stepping stones and tending beds.

Trips to Yosemite, Catalina Island, and Astro Camp were unforgettable. We went on night hikes, saw bioluminescent waves, and learned to work as a team. The plays we performed — from Greek myths to “we were cats” — were so enriching that I can’t always tell where class ended and play began. I also remember morning circle, singing the Earth’s prayer in sign language and out loud; those songs have stayed with me.



Q: What advice would you give current Family School students as they grow and explore what’s next?

A: Be open to learning more about yourself, and always remember where you come from. Growing up surrounded by natural beauty is a privilege, and it teaches you to care for the world — take that with you and share it. Family School taught me to stand up for myself and others, engage with difficult topics, and dream of a better world, knowing I could make a positive impact.



Then

A New Chapter: A Q&A with Candice Isaacson

What has been the biggest difference between Family School and middle school so far?

The biggest difference, especially coming from Purple Door, is how much I use computers. Now most of our homework is online, so I'm on them a lot more.

Was there anything that surprised you about middle school?

Not really! Having friends at Dunn School made the transition much easier.

What's one thing you learned at Family School that's been especially helpful in middle school?

Math! We're covering everything I learned in 5th grade, which helps me stay ahead on homework. Writing has also been helpful - we're reviewing paragraphs in English class, which I learned in 5th grade too.

Are there any routines or habits from Family School that you still use every day?

Asking for help. I'm really good at it now!

What do you miss most about Family School?

The Chess Garden.

If you could visit for a day, what would you want to do first?

I'd raid Red Door's library to find the new Warrior Cats book I've been looking for.

What's something you're proud of accomplishing since starting middle school?

I'm proud of getting my homework done on time (usually!). People say middle school has a ton of homework, and there is a lot of homework, but 6th grade at Dunn isn't as bad as everyone says.

What are you most excited to learn or try in middle school?

I'm really excited for the Innovation Class presentation at the end of the year! I'm in that class, so it's especially exciting for me.

When you think about your time at Family School, what words come to mind?

Friendly



Now

FIELD NOTES

Updates from our alumni

Colin Janes, 2015

Colin is in his final semester as a senior at Syracuse University and plans to graduate in May with a Bachelor of Science in Exercise Science and Nutrition. Post-grad, he hopes to move to NYC to pursue high-performance personal training. Aside from academics, he is currently the Vice President of Educational Programming on the Syracuse Interfraternity Council Board.

Zefa Tullis-Thompson, 2015

This past December, Zefa graduated from Rice University with a Bachelors of Arts, double majoring in Sport Management and Sports Medicine & Exercise Physiology and a minor in Business. During her time at Rice, she participated in many sports internships including a three year internship with Rice Football; where she will now be working full time as the Assistant Director of Operations and Recruiting. At Rice, Zefa continued to dance through Rice Dance Theatre, Rice's contemporary dance company, where she participated as a dancer, choreographer and officer. She is excited to start life post graduation and continue to grow in her career with Rice Football.

Charlotte Hecker, 2016

Since 2023, Charlotte has performed in SBCC's professional and student theater, earning her the 2025 Outstanding Achievement Award in Acting. She manages student projects as president of the Theater Club and makes short films with her brother, Evan, under their production company, Runway Number Nine.

Quinby Janes, 2016

After spending two years just outside of Paris in Reims, France studying politics and government as the first part of her dual BA, Quinby is now in her third year at Columbia University studying sustainable development. She is excited to be back in the US exploring the New York City food and art scene!

Cas Elliott, 2017

Cas recently competed in the Santa Barbara County Architectural Design Competition, advancing to the top 12 finalists out of 65 students representing 15 high schools across the county.



After presenting his design to a professional jury panel, Cas earned a place in the top five, receiving an Honorable Mention.



Miles Sgro, 2024

After one year at Dunn, Miles and his family moved to Maine, where he now attends Berwick Academy as a seventh grader. He continues to enjoy tennis and creative arts, and has added snowy outdoor adventures to his list of favorite activities! Miles stays connected with his TFS friends, including Ella Sweeney, Violet Rioux, Gemma Sulak, and Olivia Conroy, and he and his family are looking forward to visiting SYV in the spring.

DO YOU HAVE A LIFE UPDATE? Changing schools? Graduating? Got married? Had a baby? Placed in the science fair? Went on a cool vacation?

WE WANT TO KNOW!

Share your updates via our website:
WWW.SYVFAMILYSCHOOL.ORG/ALUMNI

Einstein Day!

This past March, Family School hosted their annual Einstein Day event, a day devoted to connection between our campus and the surrounding community. This free event invited neighbors of all ages to engage in hands-on activities grounded in the spirit of exploration and discovery right here at the base of Figueroa Mountain.

Bridging the gap between academic exploration and community engagement is deeply important to us. We're proud to share a snapshot of how the day went!





A Classroom Built on Trust

JAYLA GAROUTTE ON COLLABORATION, HIGH EXPECTATIONS, AND BELIEVING STUDENTS CAN DO HARD THINGS

BY ERICA OLESEN

When I stepped into the Red Door Classroom, Jayla had just handed out a math assignment. Students moved smoothly to their seats with their materials and partners, settling in without hesitation. Almost immediately, the room filled with soft, purposeful chatter as children leaned toward one another, discussing their thinking with confidence and care.

“So I think that means we need to figure out six times eleven,” one student said.

At another table, a child explained to their partner, “That means we need to do six plus six plus six,” before quickly jotting it down and getting to work.

What stood out wasn't just the calm focus of the room—it was the academic language students were using to make sense of their thinking together. Research consistently shows that opportunities for students to verbalize their reasoning strengthen both conceptual understanding and vocabulary development, and in Jayla's classroom, this kind of talk is not the exception—it's the norm. Jayla believes deeply in the power of collaboration. “Powerful things

happen when students have the chance to work together,” she explains. Rather than positioning the teacher as the sole source of knowledge, Jayla intentionally creates environments where students share observations, test ideas, and construct understanding together. The classroom is firm but fun, with high expectations balanced by meaningful support. “We never underestimate students,” she says. “We proceed with the belief that they can do hard things—with the right supports, for all kinds of minds.”

That belief is rooted in Jayla's careful observation of learners. Her experience working with neurodivergent students has shaped an approach that is both data-informed and deeply human. She pays close attention to where students are academically and emotionally, ensuring learning is challenging, respectful, and doable. The focus is always on what students can do—helping them feel capable, seen, and trusted as thinkers.

Now in her fifth year at SYV Family School, Jayla brings a wealth of experience to her role as a 2nd/3rd grade co-teacher in the Red Door



Classroom. She has served as a Green Door 2 teacher, Blue Door Guided Reading Specialist, Art Teacher, and collaborated closely with colleagues across programs. This wide-ranging experience gives her a deep understanding of how students grow over time.

The collaboration that defines Jayla's classroom extends beyond student learning and into the adult partnerships that support it. Jayla works closely with her co-teacher, Fatemeh, and together they model the same trust, communication, and shared responsibility they cultivate among students. Through careful observation, shared reflection, and ongoing dialogue, Jayla and Fatemeh co-plan intentionally — balancing structure



“When students feel trusted and capable, they don’t just learn more — they become more confident in who they are.”

with flexibility while responding thoughtfully to each child’s needs. Their partnership allows them to hold high expectations while ensuring students feel supported, capable, and respected.

Jayla holds an undergraduate degree in Creative Writing and earned her Master’s degree in Education from UC Santa Barbara. She also holds a California Multiple Subject Teaching Credential. Her

academic background blends creativity, language, and pedagogy — a combination that shows up daily in her classroom through rich discussion, expressive thinking, and carefully designed learning experiences.

When asked what a successful day looks like in the Red Door Classroom, Jayla describes busy students communicating with one another, deeply engaged in their work, solving complex problems while building skills for the next level of learning and beyond.

And when she imagines her students years from now, Jayla sees them as adults contributing to society with the same personalities and curiosity they hold today. With

that vision in mind, she hopes students leave her classroom understanding that they are special simply because they are living, breathing, thinking humans — and that they see themselves as global citizens who care for their communities and one another.

Jayla’s empathy, discretion, and commitment to children make her a trusted teacher, colleague, and friend. Her classroom is a place where students feel brave enough to try, supported enough to persist, and valued for exactly who they are. We are grateful for the care, collaboration, and heart she brings to SYV Family School — and for the many ways she helps our students learn to think, work, and grow together.

Expanding Access

Committed to expanding access to a Family School Education, two donors stepped forward to make opportunity a reality.

The Angel Program is a sponsorship initiative that helps make a SYV Family School education possible for more students and families. Through a six-year commitment, a sponsor's pledge covers \$25,000 towards Tuition Assistance for Blue Door through Purple Door. This support strengthens our school community by promoting access, opportunity, and economic diversity.

We are grateful to introduce two of our Angel Program sponsors who are helping make this meaningful work possible. Below, they share why they chose to support SYV Family School and what the Angel Program means to them.

Lisa and Scott Ramsey P'23

What Inspired Me to Give

The children at Family School continue to amaze and inspire me. Having a teenage daughter and witnessing her personal growth, both emotionally and academically, has been truly eye-opening. Watching her navigate these formative years deepened my appreciation for schools that intentionally support the whole child. The proof really is in the pudding. We couldn't be happier with our daughter's experience at TFS. I remember watching the Sir Ken Robinson video on the TFS website while Scott and I were deciding - it was so different from anything

either of us experienced growing up. That moment, combined with meeting Julianne, created a connection I will never forget. It immediately felt aligned with our values and hopes for our child.

Why Family School Matters

Parents are often understandably focused on academic success, but sometimes underestimate how critical social and emotional growth is during these formative years. Those skills shape confidence, resilience, and self-awareness long after grades are forgotten. Family School's commitment to nurturing emotional intelligence alongside

academic learning resonates deeply with me. The intentional focus on relationships, self-reflection, and individualized growth creates an environment

"Giving is about investing in potential. It's about believing that every child deserves the chance to grow in a space that honors who they are..."

where children feel seen, valued, and supported. That balance is powerful and rare.

The Power of Community and Paying It Forward

Community is everything.



Isabella, then and now



Marisol, then and now

When families, educators, and supporters come together with a shared purpose, children thrive. A strong community reinforces belonging, trust, and accountability, reminding students that they are supported not just by a school, but by a network of people who genuinely care about their success and well-being. Giving is about investing in potential. It's about believing that every child deserves the chance to grow in a space that honors who they are, not just what they achieve. Supporting Family School through the Angel Program is our way of paying forward an experience that has meant so much to our family.

Wanda and David Mills P'22

What Inspired Me to Give

I could go on and on about how much I love The Family School and how much it has meant to our family. From the moment we visited campus, I knew this was the school for us. The school felt warm and welcoming. The teachers were friendly and kind. Children were building creeks in the mud. It felt like a school children would imagine, a place that could have been

“Being part of this environment showed me how powerful a supportive school community can be...”

designed by Pippi Longstocking. Environment matters. It sets the stage for the story. Even the drive to school became part of the experience - hot air balloons, cattle drives, golden eagles, and hills covered in California poppies. That sense of wonder made every day feel special.

Why Family School Matters

What makes TFS so special is the joyful environment and the way learning comes alive. I saw it in the deep connections between teachers and students - how Marisol formed such a special bond with her teachers and how one teacher truly can make a difference in a child's life. I saw it in thoughtful moments, like when Brenda included Lautner in Marisol's autobiography collage because he is her twin, and when Kira came to our house during Covid to teach a compass class and create a "treasure map." These experiences reflect the heart of Family School.

The Power of Community and Paying It Forward

That sense of community carries through every part of the school - from Julianne's warm morning greetings and funny question of the day, to Monday Circle, singing the Earth's Prayer, and hiking at Green Gate. It's a community that celebrates connection, curiosity, and care. Being part of this environment showed me how powerful a supportive school community can be, and it's something I will always be grateful for.

Interested in becoming an Angel? Contact Head of School, Julianne Tullis-Thompson at juliannett@syvfamilyschool.org

ALUMNI Annual Fund Week

SUPPORT THE PROGRAMS YOU LOVED

We're excited to announce our first-ever Alumni Annual Fund Week, happening **May 4-8!**

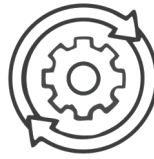
Did you know that schools with strong alumni participation are more likely to:



**GROW
PROGRAMS**



**ATTRACT
FUNDING**



**SUSTAIN MISSION-
DRIVEN EDUCATION**

Annual Fund contributions bring Family School's mission to life by supporting daily operations and expanding access to programs that enrich every student's experience, including performing arts, PE, Spanish, Samala language and culture, on-staff reading support, speech therapy, cooking, music, and art.

Alumni can participate by making a one-time online donation or setting up recurring monthly gifts by clicking here or by mailing a check to SYV Family School, P.O. Box 481, Los Olivos, CA 93441.

Support the Annual Fund

At SYV Family School, we create a nurturing, inspiring environment where every child can thrive. Tuition covers much of the cost of our programs, but the Annual Fund bridges the gap, helping us provide an exceptional education for every student.



Make a gift today!

A L U M N I

O N C A M P U S



Alumni Recipes: Spring Edition



From alumni kitchens to our Purple Door classroom, spring flavors are in full swing! Discover alumni favorite recipes, go-to treats and meals, along with the current Purple Door cooking class favorite that brings fresh flavors to campus.

Katherine's (A'25) Easy Chicken Nuggets with Fries

Ingredients:

Chicken breast	Breadcrumbs
Potatoes (cut into wedges)	Oil
Cornstarch	Paprika
	salt+pepper

1. Cut chicken into nugget-sized pieces. Clean, peel, and cut potatoes into fries. Soak potatoes in cold water for 20–30 minutes, then drain and pat dry. Toss potatoes with cornstarch and set aside.
2. Preheat the oven to 425°F. Place chicken on a sheet pan with oil and toss to coat. Add breadcrumbs and toss again.
3. Add potatoes to the pan. Season everything with paprika, salt, and pepper. Spread into a single layer (use two pans if needed).
4. Bake for 10 minutes, flip, then bake another 5–10 minutes until chicken is cooked and fries are golden and crispy.
5. Serve warm with ketchup, honey mustard, or your favorite sauce. Enjoy!

Purple Door's Famous Crepes

Ingredients:

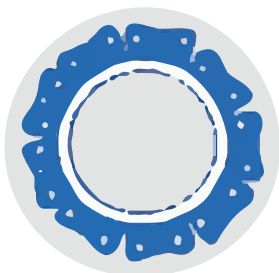
2 cups all-purpose flour	Extra butter for sauteing
4 eggs	<i>Optional Toppings:</i>
2 cups of milk plus extra in case the batter needs thinning	Whipped cream
1 tsp vanilla extract	Fresh berries or bananas
1 pinch of salt	Jam (warmed)
1 pinch of sugar	Peanut butter
1 tbs of butter or neutral oil	Nutella
	Sugar and lemon
	Sugar and cinnamon

1. In a large bowl, mix flour, sugar, and salt. Make a well in the center.
2. Whisk eggs and vanilla, add to the well, then slowly whisk in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup milk while pulling in flour from the sides.
3. Gradually add remaining milk, whisking until smooth. Let batter rest 15 minutes.
4. Pour about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup batter into a hot skillet, swirl to spread thin.
5. Cook about 45 seconds, flip, and cook the other side.
6. Remove, add toppings, and roll or fold.
7. Serve and enjoy!

Candice's (A'25) Banana Bars With Cream Cheese Frosting

Bars

1 cup sugar
1 cup mashed banana (or 2 medium)
1/3 cup vegetable oil
2 eggs
1 cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon salt
Cream cheese frosting (below)



1. Heat oven to 350°F. Grease rectangular pan, 13x9x12 inches. Mix sugar, bananas, oil, and eggs in a large bowl with a spoon. Stir in flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, and salt.
2. Spread batter in pan. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool completely, then frost with the cream cheese frosting. Store covered in the fridge.

Cream Cheese Frosting:

1 package softened cream cheese (3 ounces)
1/3 cup butter (margarine works, too.)
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 cups powdered sugar

1. Mix cream cheese, butter and vanilla in a bowl
2. Gradually beat in powdered sugar with a spoon until smooth and spreadable.

Fresh Idea

Colin (A'15) has recently been making slow-cooked buffalo chicken dip for himself and his roommates.



Fresh Idea

Katie (A'01) made almond cherry thumbprint cookies as well as molasses cookies with her toddler. As a family, she looks forward to their family tradition of making tamales together.

Fresh Idea

Quinby (A'16) has been making Momofuku's Bo Ssam lettuce cups - a flavorful favorite that brings bold, cozy comfort to the table.



Amelie's (A'20) Chocolate Chip Cookies

Ingredients

1/2 cup butter (can be substituted for vegan, works just as well!)
1 cup brown sugar (best if dark brown)
1 egg
1 tsp baking soda
1/2 tsp salt
1 cup flour
3/4 cup chocolate chips



1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Mix wet ingredients together.
3. Stir in baking soda and salt, then add flour.
4. Fold in chocolate chips.
5. Scoop onto a baking sheet (grease optional).
6. Bake 11 minutes for chewy, crispy-edged cookies.
7. Sprinkle with chunky salt and let cool (on sheet for slightly more cooked cookies).



Facilities Update

After a Gratitude Circle honoring all this magnificent pepper tree gave to our community, students and staff said farewell to our aptly named "Gratitude Tree." Though it appeared strong, the tree had been slowly rotting from within and ultimately needed to be removed. We left the stump standing tall, creating a new space for students to sit, climb, play, and continue making memories around a tree that still gives.

Stay Connected

At Family School, our alumni are always part of our story. Here are some specific ways you can remain part of our community.

Get Involved

Take our Alumni Survey!
We are going through our accreditation self-study with CAIS. Your voice counts!

Join Us on Social

Follow us on Instagram!

Share Your Milestones

Submit a Field Note to be published in the next issue of Roots!

[www.syvfamilyschool.org/
alumni](http://www.syvfamilyschool.org/alumni)

Update Contact Information

Moved? Updated your email? Let us know in an email to alumni@syvfamilyschool.org

Connect With Us

Email us: alumni@syvfamilyschool.org

Follow us on Instagram and Facebook: [@SYVFamilySchool](https://www.instagram.com/SYVFamilySchool)

Visit us: www.syvfamilyschool.org



**SANTA YNEZ VALLEY
FAMILY SCHOOL**
SINCE 1974

The Santa Ynez Valley Family School
PO Box 481, Los Olivos, California 93441

www.SYVFamilySchool.org
(805) 688-5440

JOIN US!

Alumni Annual Fund Week
Monday, May 4 - Friday, May 8

Graduation Ceremony
Wednesday, June 10, 2026
On Campus Celebration

Ways to Give

Your gift helps SYV Family School nurture curiosity, creativity, and community for today's students—and tomorrow's.



Scan the QR code to give online or visit syvfamilyschool.org/annualfund

Together, we plant the seeds of tomorrow.

