

ROOTS

Newsletter

Fall 2025

For **Friends of SYV Family School**



**SANTA YNEZ VALLEY
FAMILY SCHOOL**

SINCE 1974

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Dear Family School Community,

As we settle into fall, our campus is buzzing with the energy and joy that comes with the start of a new school year. The classrooms and playgrounds are alive with curiosity, learning, and laughter; it's a wonderful reminder of why this community is so special.

In this issue, you'll meet the seven new staff members who have joined Family School. Each of them brings unique talents and fresh perspectives, and we're excited for you to get to know them. We've also included a financial overview that gives a snapshot of where we are today and how we continue to build a strong foundation for the future.

This fall also marks a special milestone: we celebrate our fearless leader's 20th year at Family School, including 14 years as Head of School. Her steady guidance, dedication, and heart are woven into the fabric of who we are, and we're honored to recognize her incredible contributions.

On a personal note, I'm delighted to introduce myself as Family School's new Director of Communication. I'm especially grateful to step into this role not only as a member of the staff, but also as a parent. My daughter Mimi (Red Door) and my son William Angelo (Green Door) are both beginning their journeys here, and my family and I already feel so warmly welcomed.

Thank you for reading, for supporting, and for being part of what makes Family School the vibrant community it is. I look forward to connecting with you throughout the year and sharing more stories that celebrate our students, staff, and families.

With warmth and gratitude,

Sheri Replane
Director of Communication



Julianne Tullis-Thompson



*Julianne on a class
trip to Yosemite*



A Legacy in the Making: Two Decades of Dedication, Innovation, and Joy in Education

This fall, SYV Family School celebrates a remarkable milestone: Julianne Tullis-Thompson's twentieth year of service. What began in 2005 as a part-time teaching role in Purple Door has grown into two decades of steady leadership, joyful teaching, and tireless devotion to our community. Over the years, she has shepherded Family School through times of challenge and triumph, guiding us with resilience, compassion, and a belief in the power of children to love learning.

Julianne's journey is both personal and profound. From leading lively social studies simulations that sparked joy in

her earliest students, to restructuring classrooms and finances during difficult times, to championing teacher development, her vision has shaped the school we know today. Through it all, she has remained grounded in the values that first drew her here: respect for children, trust in teachers, and a community that cherishes connection.

Twenty years in, her work is still evolving—and her legacy is still being written.

What first drew you to Family School and how did you know it was the right place for you?

Coming to Family School was unlike any school I had experienced. From the start, the philosophy of inspiring children to love learning filled my heart. In 2005 I was returning to work after maternity leave, and Family School was the only part-time teaching position available in the valley. I was blessed to work with amazing teachers: Sandy Hanes, Debbie Esser, Lynn Rector, Gail Wolf, Lissa Samuel and Miki Holden, who mentored me and taught me to trust my instincts.



What lessons have you learned along the way?

I've learned countless lessons along the way. When I stepped into this role, I never imagined I would also become a finance person, an event planner, a psychologist, a career counselor, and a cheerleader. And yet, this is only the beginning of my learning journey—there is still so much more to learn and do.

What are some of the biggest challenges you've faced, and how did you overcome them?

At the end of my first year as Head, I discovered financial mismanagement. I was fortunate to have the support of board members Gordon Miller, David Lawrence, and Steve Finkel. Gordon spearheaded remarkable fundraising efforts that helped us through that crisis.

Two years later, we faced another challenge: our staffing model, valley demographics, and our then-low tuition rate made the school financially unsustainable and put us at risk of closure. Restructuring into multi-age classrooms allowed us to better meet students' needs in a more sustainable way.

In the years that followed, a team of powerful women—including Marnie Diamond, Amy Grenier, Liz Tyng, Kay Knightley, and countless others—took on the work of evaluating our entire model. Their efforts brought greater financial transparency, a stronger system of checks and balances. Through their tireless dedication and a devoted staff, we not only survived but built a stronger foundation for the future.

What are you most proud of as Head of School?

In 2012, we operated in the negative, our teachers were underpaid, and we struggled to retain families. Today, we have close to a \$1 million reserve, competitive teacher salaries, and a robust professional development program. I'm especially proud of how many teachers have started in entry level positions and gone on to pursue further education and growth.

As you look to the future, what excites you most?

Education never stagnates—each year brings new students, families, and opportunities to grow. I'm excited about the possibility of an endowment, expanding our Student Advanced Support program, and even imagining housing for staff one day. Most of all, I look forward to nurturing the next generation of teachers to continue this work.

WELCOME NEW FACES

Angelique
green door



WHY I DO WHAT I DO

To make sure every child feels happy and included.

Kimberly
red door



WHY I DO WHAT I DO

It's a chance to make a real difference in kids' lives every day. I love getting to support students, helping them grasp new concepts and build their confidence.

Natalie
blue door



WHY I DO WHAT I DO

I love working with kids and believe each child deserves to be seen, heard, and valued for who they are. Their wonder, enthusiasm, and curiosity are contagious and inspiring.

Sheri
director of communications



WHY I DO WHAT I DO

I do what I do because I believe in the power of a small, connected community to make a lasting impact on children's lives.

Lexy
green door



WHY I DO WHAT I DO

I do what I do to help protect and foster the development of humans, big and small.

Daisy
front desk receptionist



WHY I DO WHAT I DO

I have always wanted to make an impact on kids. I am happy to be a safe space for everyone.

Nicole
reading skills specialist



WHY I DO WHAT I DO

I strive to make learning enjoyable, relevant, and accessible to my students. I love watching the growth of the wholechild throughout a student's educational journey.

Maribel
blue door



WHY I DO WHAT I DO

I do what I do because I believe every child deserves to feel supported, encouraged, and inspired as they learn and grow.

Congrats Grads!

This spring we proudly celebrated the graduation of the SYV Family School Class of 2025. As they step into their next chapters, these students carry forward the curiosity, creativity, and community spirit that have shaped their time here.



Some advice that I have for future (and present) students is don't be afraid to be yourself, many good things come out of that.

Laila, '25



For some people it would be hard to make a decision [like that] because they might think people would make fun of them. It wasn't hard for me, because I am not someone who lets other people's opinions affect how I see myself.

Noah, '25



Something I love about the Family School is that on my first day, and during my whole time at the school, I felt like I belonged.

Julian, '25





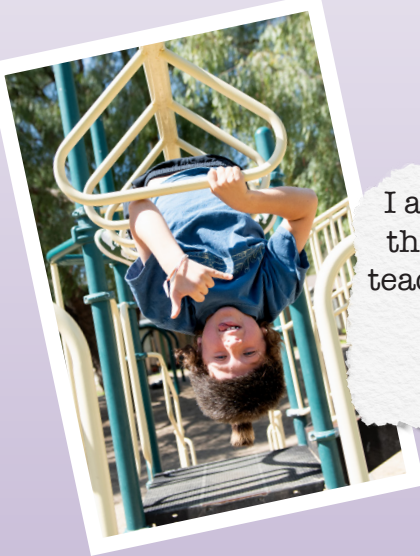
Some advice I have for younger students is to let people into your life, even if you don't think you need to.

Lila, '25



...It just goes to show, anything you are nervous about can still bring you joy.

Hank, '25



I am so grateful for all the memories and my teachers that helped me grow.

River, '25

What I learned from family school was that, if you have a passion, you can make it big if you try, and also if you want to.

Katherine, '25



I learned at the family school a lot of things about myself as a learner, like how I like to learn interactively.

Candice, '25





Alumni Spotlight:

Griffin Markee, Class of 2018

This fall, Griffin Markee began his freshman year of college at Soka University of America, carrying with him a strong sense of curiosity and connection that he traces back to his years at Family School.

"The experiences that have stayed with me the longest would have to be the small class size and bonding that we would go through during our trips to Camp Ocean Pines and Sedgwick," Griffin reflects. "I think the skills I learned from growing up in such a small environment have helped me in developing relationships with my peers and teachers in high school and is continuing to help me now in college."

That supportive environment also sparked Griffin's intellectual curiosity. He recalls the joy of hands-on learning, including building Rube Goldberg contraptions for Einstein Day. "The embrace I had from my teachers helped me realize, that if I am passionate about it, people will be willing to help," he says.

Now, as he embarks on his college journey studying psychology, Griffin is eager to connect with new classmates from around the world while also tackling the challenge of learning Japanese. "I am very excited to build friendships with new people... However, I expect that [learning Japanese] will be a huge challenge I will slowly start to face as it gets more and more complex."

From Family School's small classrooms, to a global campus community, Griffin carries forward the lessons of curiosity, resilience, and connection that continue to shape his path.



*Julianne and Griffin celebrating
high school graduation*

Alumni Spotlight:

Daniella Gelles, Class of 2014

After recently graduating from Amherst College, Daniella Gelles is setting out on her next adventure: a ten-month term of service with AmeriCorps NCCC. Based first in Minnesota, she'll be traveling across the country with a team of young adults to take on projects ranging from disaster relief, to infrastructure work, to youth development.

"It's a team-based community service term which involves traveling to different project sites across the U.S. in a group of 18-24 year olds," Daniella explains. "So I'll be all over the place, starting in Minnesota for the first project!"

Daniella credits her time at Family School with instilling the values that guide her today. "Family School showed me the importance of community from a young age, leading me to seek it out throughout my life, including now with AmeriCorps which involves living and working in a team of 10 young adults," she says.

"It also fostered curiosity and open-mindedness which has pushed me to new and exciting experiences such as this."

Looking ahead, she's eager to embrace the opportunities and challenges of this new chapter. "For AmeriCorps NCCC, I'm most excited to see new places while making a positive impact on others and developing my own skills," Daniella shares.

From her early lessons in collaboration and curiosity at Family School, to a life of service and discovery, Daniella continues to carry those values into each new experience.



Graduated Grace



SYV Family School Strategic Plan

As we look to the future of SYV Family School, our Board of Trustees and administration have come together to create a strategic plan that reflects both our mission and our community's aspirations. These goals are designed to strengthen the foundation of our school, support our teachers and families, and ensure that every student continues to thrive academically and personally. Rooted in our values and guided by a vision of long-term sustainability, this plan outlines the priorities that map our future.

OUR MISSION

SYV Family School fosters an inclusive and inspiring community of learning where students respect and take responsibility for their educational journey, the natural world, and each other.



Goal 1

Enhance the student and family experience



Goal 2

Retain teachers and staff



Goal 3

Strengthen the financial sustainability of the school



Goal 4

Improve academic performance for all students

Dear Family School Family,

As we begin the 51st year at SYV Family School, I want to start with gratitude—for our current and alumni families, faculty and staff, and supporters near and far.

In my role as both a parent and Chair of the Board of Trustees, I've seen from a unique perspective, the positive impact of your effort, financial support, and care. Each morning's drive up Figueroa Mountain Road leads to something special: a community that is welcoming, supportive, and deeply committed to these formative years in our children's education.

I have lived in the valley for just shy of four years, and in that short time, Family School has been a staple in three of our children's lives. While two of them are now at Dunn Middle School, they have carried their love of learning with them and approach their educational journey in a curious and thoughtful way. While I'd love to credit that to exceptional parenting, this is truly the result of the intentional spirit that was created on our campus more than five decades ago.

As a board, our primary goal is to ensure the long-term sustainability of the school. While this sounds simple, it is more than just ensuring that we have "money in the bank" (although that is important!). Last year, as part of our periodic review by the California Association of Independent Schools, we developed a Strategic Plan that sharpened our priorities and will anchor us in the coming years.

Thanks to a successful Bounty and Annual Fund, last year was a momentous one financially. We invested much of that support directly into our operating budget in the form of additional staff, expanding Specialty Programs for students, and enhancing benefits for faculty and staff. With more hands on campus, we are off to a strong start this year. We also strengthened our cash reserves, placing us in a more secure financial position for the future.

That said, we continue to operate on a tight budget. Without Bounty this year, meeting our Annual Fund goal is especially critical. Your generosity supports teachers, enriches programs, and ensures Family School remains strong for future generations.

Transparency remains one of our guiding values. As a tight-knit community, you deserve clear access to our goals, our numbers, and our leadership. Please reach out to me (dominicr@syvfamilyschool.org), to Julianne, or to any board member with your questions and ideas.

I would also be remiss if I didn't extend special thanks to Julianne, who has led Family School with tireless dedication for two decades. There will be time to celebrate her fully this year, but I encourage you to take a moment to congratulate her and thank her for her remarkable leadership.

Finally, thank you for making Family School such a vibrant and inspiring place. Together, we are doing great things.

With gratitude,
Dominic Rioux Chair, Board of Trustees

2024-2025

Financial Snapshot

This past year marks one of the most remarkable fundraising years in our school's history, and it's all thanks to the extraordinary generosity of our supporters. Your commitment allows us to nurture a vibrant learning environment, attract and retain passionate, high-quality educators, and provide experiences that prepare our students for life beyond the classroom.

We are committed to transparency in our financial reporting and operate with a lean budget, strengthened by reserves that safeguard our mission. As a non-profit organization, donations play a vital role in supporting our programs and initiatives, ensuring we can continue to provide a high-quality education and enriching experiences for our students.

Every gift, every act of support, strengthens our community and shapes the future of our students. We are deeply grateful for your partnership and trust in our mission.

Gratefully,
Julianne

27.22%

gross tuition revenue
dedicated to tuition
assistance and remission

47%

students who received
tuition assistance

49%

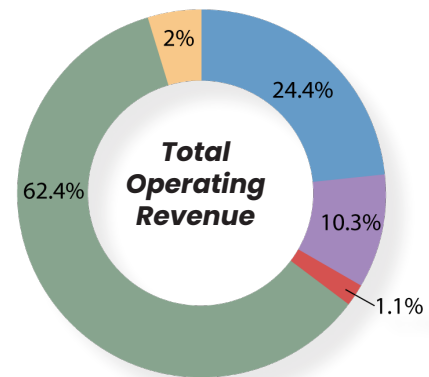
students who received TA
were awarded between
29-49% of tuition

\$7,700

average award given

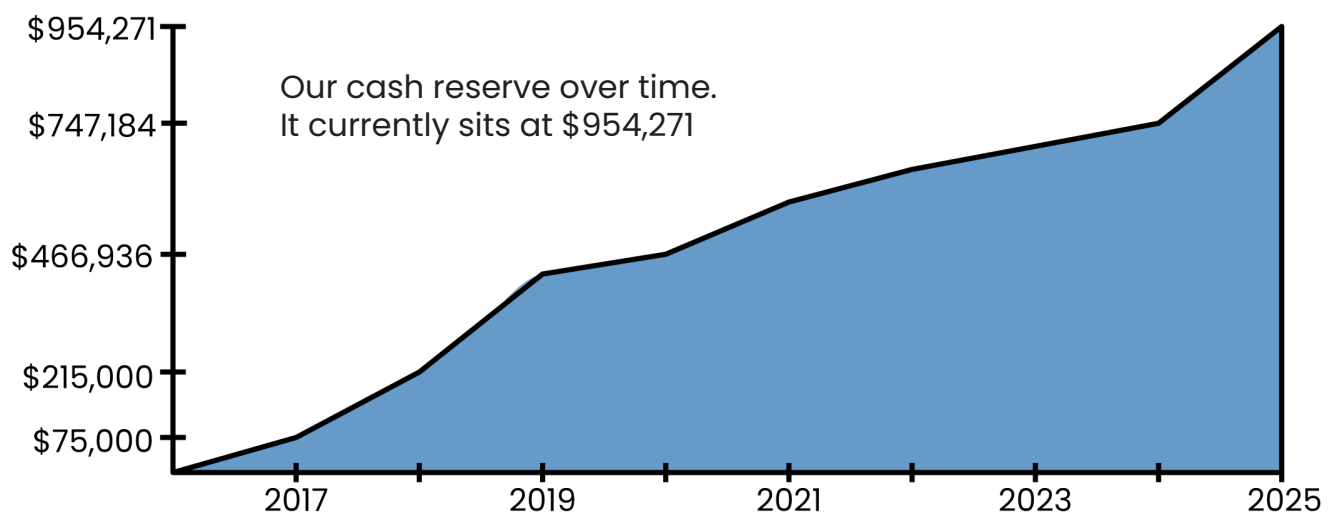
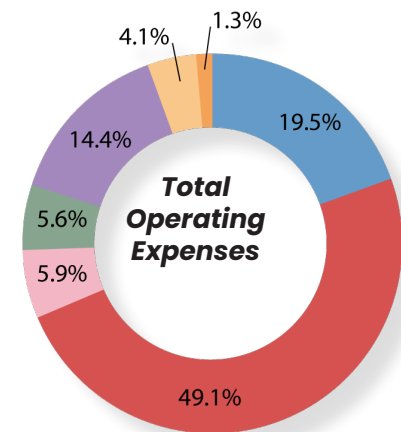
At SYV Family School, we are committed to making our program accessible to a wide range of families. Tuition assistance is awarded based on demonstrated financial need and determined through School and Student Services (SSS), a nationally recognized program that provides an objective and consistent assessment of each family's financial situation. In addition, we support our dedicated faculty and staff by offering tuition remission, ensuring their children can also benefit from the nurturing community and high-quality education they help make possible.

TOTAL REVENUE		\$1,925,055
	Fundraising (Bounty & Annual Fund)	\$469,059
	Restricted (Paddle Raise)	\$197,623
	Grants	\$37,585
	Tuition and Fees	\$1,200,310
	Other	\$20,478



***Bounty will now be held every other year, with the next event in Fall 2026. Your support truly makes a difference!

TOTAL EXPENSES		\$2,160,553
	Tuition Assistance and Remission	\$420,989
	Compensation	\$1,061,712
	Development	\$128,018
	Program	\$121,844
	General and Administrative	\$310,740
	Facilities	\$88,993
	Other	\$28,257



Maintaining healthy reserves ensures long-term stability and protects our mission during uncertain times. These funds are not excess—they are carefully stewarded, and annual giving continues to be essential to sustaining our programs and tuition assistance.

YOUR IMPACT

How every gift makes a difference

When you give to Family School, you support more than a single program. **You strengthen the foundation that makes our mission possible.**



Spanish
Language and Culture



Music Class
preschool-fifth grade



Cooking Class with Apples to
Zucchini Cooking School



On staff math intervention for
students who need more—
greater challenge, greater
support

Key:

Specialty
Programs

Student Advanced Support
(SAS) programs

At our 2025 Bounty of the Valley, **our paddle raise directed restricted funds to enrich and expand our students' daily experience.** This year, those gifts support our Student Advanced Support (SAS) program as well as specialty classes such as Performing Arts, PE, Spanish, Samala Language and Culture, and Art, programs that shape the whole child and set Family School apart.

Meanwhile, Annual Fund contributions close the gap between tuition and the cost of running the school, ensuring that any family can access a Family School education. By covering this essential need, the Annual Fund allows us to cover Tuition Assistance and Remission expenses and frees up other fundraising monies to go directly to program and professional development.



Partnering with The Talk Team, Speech Therapist Mackenzy



Partnering with community organization, Arts Outreach, to provide art class to Blue Door-Purple Door Students

Together, these two funding streams keep Family School strong: one expanding access, the other enriching the experience. And because we continue to operate with a lean budget, ***unrestricted support to the general fund remains the most powerful way to sustain Family School***—allowing us to invest in our people, adapt to changing needs, and secure a thriving future for the next generation of students.



PE Class with Kyser



On Staff Reading Skills Specialist



Samala Language and Culture



SYV Family School Annual Fund

Investing in the next 50 years

Support the SYV Family School 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.

Your impact:

- **Enrich Student Learning:** Support hands-on programs, multi-age classrooms, and outdoor experiences that spark curiosity and joy.
- **Invest in Teachers:** Fund professional development so our educators can bring the best practices and latest research to the classroom.
- **Expand Access:** Strengthen financial assistance programs to ensure all families can experience an SYV education.
- **Enhance Campus Spaces:** Maintain and improve our facilities to create safe, inspiring learning environments.
- **Fuel Innovation:** Help us introduce new ideas and programs that meet the evolving needs of our students.

Every gift, big or small, makes a difference. Your support is an investment in our children, our teachers, and our community.

Annual Fund Week: October 27–31, 2025

Join us during Annual Fund Week to celebrate our community and make a gift that supports every student. Donations can be made anytime, but this week is a special opportunity to come together in support of SYV Family School.



***Make a gift
today!***

Stay Connected

At Family School, our alumni are always part of our story. Here's how you can stay involved and share your journey with the community.



Get Involved

Volunteer, attend events,
or support our programs
- your continued
engagement matters!



Join Us on Social

Connect with fellow
alumni, share stories, and
stay up to date on events
and happenings at Family
School.



Share Your Milestones

Tell us about personal or
professional achievements,
family updates, or other
highlights - we want to hear
from you!



Update Contact Information

Make sure we have your
current email, phone, and
mailing address so you
don't miss any news or
special announcements.

Connect With Us

Email us: alumni@syvfamilyschool.org

Follow us on Instagram and Facebook: @SYVFamilySchool

Visit us: www.syvfamilyschool.org



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JOIN US!

Annual Fund Week

October 27 – October 31, 2025

Turkey Trot and Thanksgiving Sharing

Friday, November 21, 2025
On Campus Celebration

Einstein Day

Saturday, March 21, 2026
On Campus Celebration

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.*

