

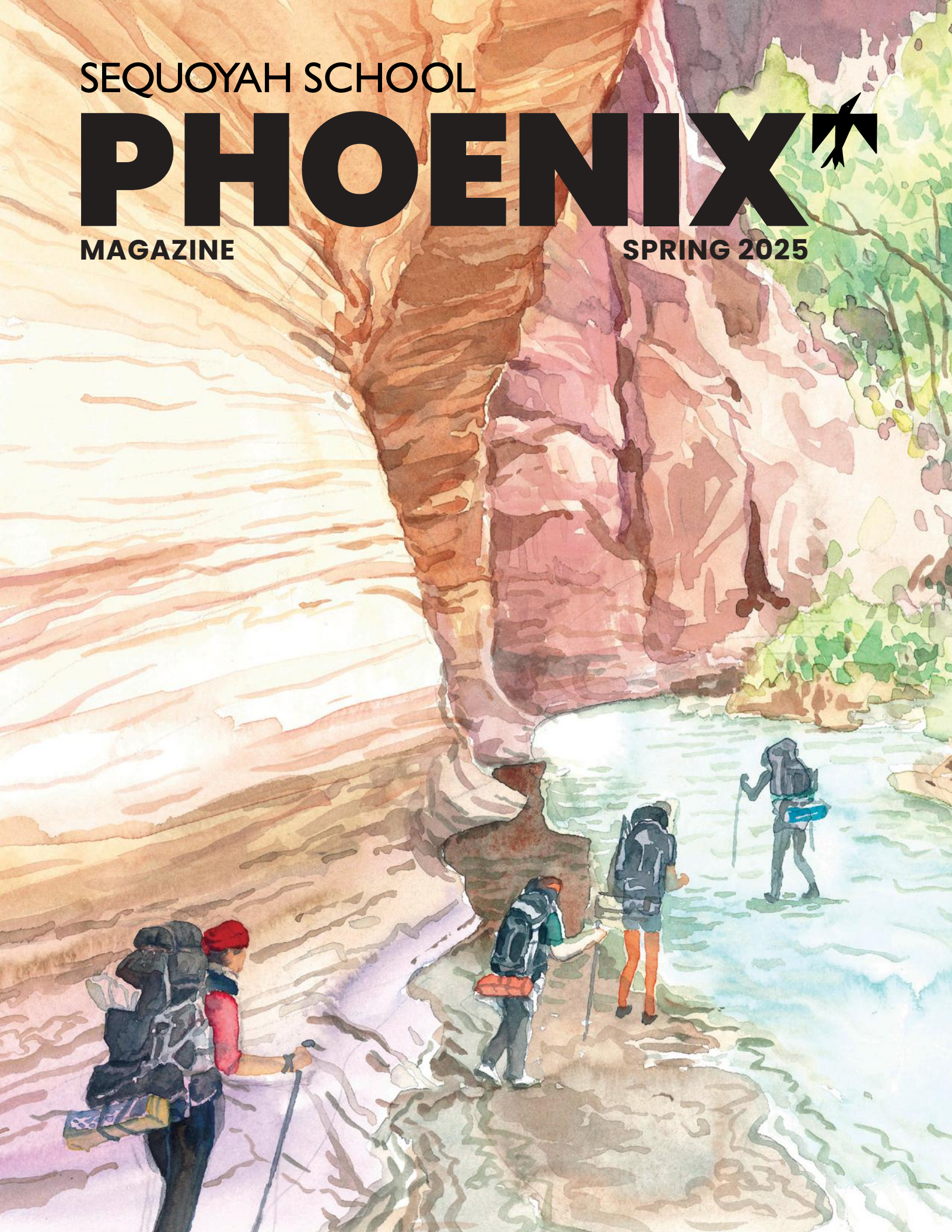
SEQUOYAH SCHOOL

PHOENIX



MAGAZINE

SPRING 2025





From Head of School Rebecca Hong

Welcome to the latest edition of *Phoenix*—a vibrant reflection of the creativity, curiosity, and shared purpose that defines Sequoyah. This issue is more than a look back; it's a celebration of the learning, relationships, and values that have made and make our school thrive.

At Sequoyah, education is designed to be relevant, hands-on, and human-centered—focused not just on what students know, but on how they think, collaborate, and grow as individuals in community. We believe learning should be driven by questions, not just answers. Our approach encourages students to explore real-world problems, wrestle with complexity, and connect their ideas to meaningful action.

Central to this vision is our founding commitment to a diverse and inclusive school. We believe learning deepens when students engage across lines of difference, listen with empathy, and see the world through multiple lenses. That belief shapes not only what we teach, but how we come together every day here.

You'll see that spirit throughout these pages: in the literary voices of our students in *Talon Tales*

and *Seco*; in the design thinking and teamwork behind our Hydrogen Grand Prix team's journey to world competition; and in the accomplishments of alums making their mark in bold and thoughtful ways. You'll also get a glimpse into the work of our remarkable faculty and staff, from Abraham Orozco's innovation in dFab to Kim Diaz's leadership in co-designing our new K-8 playground alongside students.

What ties these stories together is a shared approach to learning—one that centers inquiry, reflection, and purpose. Our students are encouraged to stay true to themselves while developing the skills to work with others, solve complex problems, and make meaningful contributions to their communities and the wider world.

As you turn these pages, I hope you feel the energy and intention that drive our work. Thank you for being part of Sequoyah's evolving story.

With appreciation,

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PHOENIX

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WHAT'S BEHIND THE NAME PHOENIX?

In 1821 Sequoyah, the namesake of our school, invented a syllabary for the Cherokee language. Soon after its adoption, thousands of Cherokee were able to read and write in their own language.

The Cherokee Phoenix, the first newspaper published by Native Americans in the United States, was first published in 1828. We name our magazine in honor of this important milestone.



SEQUOYAH SCHOOL

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SEQUOYAHSCHOOL.ORG

Honoring our Past, Owning our Future

In 2024, Caltrans notified us of its offer to sell the K-8 campus to Sequoyah, and we enthusiastically declared our intent to buy it. Doing so initiated a lengthy, legislatively mandated process, which includes eventual approval of the sale by the California Transportation Commission (CTC).

At this stage in the sales process, the price has not yet been set. We are awaiting the results of valuations and subsequent discussions with Caltrans. The condition of the campus and its historic status will certainly be factors in its appraisal. Given the exceptional rate of inflation in recent years, the price is likely to be higher than was anticipated by the 2017–2019 capital campaign and appraisals, which is why we are calling on our community for additional gifts to ensure we can purchase the campus and maintain plans for its renovation and restoration. More information about the impact of the purchase and ways to give can be found on our website.

Our readiness to purchase the K-8 campus from Caltrans is due to the support and financial commitments of our community and years of planning and preparation by school leadership. We are mindful we would not be here but for the tireless work of those who fought the SR 710 freeway construction through the campus and surrounding neighborhoods from the beginning.

Thank you for your support. We intend to keep you informed at each milestone.

Elena Phleger
Director of Advancement

*The Sequoyah School campus in 1956. Photo by Julius Schulman.
© J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles
(2004.R.10)*

New Trustees



Gillian Bush

Community Member

Gillian is a STEM educator as well as a non-practicing attorney. She has worked at independent schools (Polytechnic School, Windward School, Buckley School, and Harvard-Westlake School) as a science and math teacher, department chair, and high school administrator. In addition, she served for several years as the Executive Director of Partnership for Success, a college access and college success program for Pasadena's public school students.

Long ago, Gillian worked as a public defender in Los Angeles county and remains passionate about working to right the injustices in our criminal justice system. Currently, she runs a tutoring business supporting students in math and science courses and standardized test preparation. Gillian has a B.S. from Caltech and a J.D. from Stanford Law School. She lives in Eagle Rock with her husband and their adorable morkie, Indiana.



Yvonne Cheng

Current Parent

Yvonne is a seasoned executive and entrepreneur in the real estate, entertainment, and consumer packaged goods industries. She is currently a Partner at Property Resources Corporation (PRC), a real estate fund specializing in sale-leaseback financing, and one of the largest private holders of owner-occupied real estate in the country.

Yvonne is also a Partner at Shoes Off Productions, a TV and feature film production company, currently producing feature film comedies *Man's Best Friend* with Sony/TriStar and *Match*, starring Quinta Brunson.

Yvonne holds a B.A. from Yale University with a double major in Economics and Chinese, and an M.B.A. from Harvard Business School. She lives in Silver Lake with her wife and four children (three who currently attend Sequoyah's K-8), three dogs, and possibly a guinea pig in the near future.



Adam Lisagor

Current Parent

Adam is a technologist, filmmaker, entrepreneur and investor. He is the founder of Sandwich, the preeminent storytelling studio for the tech world.

His focus at Sequoyah is on helping to model and share the school's values in the form of story by developing an investment framework for the community to support the Board's efforts in increasing access to resource, and in fostering the responsible and future-forward adoption of new tech into the school's already highly innovative platform of social-emotional learning.

Adam received his BFA from Tisch School of the Arts at NYU, worked in visual effects for a number of years before starting his own studio, and is a lifelong jazz appreciator who plays a few instruments (but not well). When he attends All-School Meetings at the K-8 with his two kids and partner Roxana, he is optimistic about the future.

2024-25 Board of Trustees

Sequoyah's Board of Trustees provides strategic leadership, oversight, and governance to ensure the school's mission, financial health, and long-term success.

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Joyce Ybarra
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Renee Dake Wilson

The Amazing Race



Sequoyah's Hydrogen Grand Prix teams crossed the finish line victorious this spring, heading to the World Championships for the second year in a row. Learn how they work together to compete on the international stage.

It's Spring Break, and Ross Chapel has been transformed into a racetrack. Two sleek stock cars—one black, one blue—tear down straightaways, navigate hairpin turns, and battle for dominance. Pit crews pull their model car aside, make modifications or repairs, and release their creations back onto the road. Timing and collaboration are everything, because the following day Sequoyah's Hydrogen Grand Prix (H2GP) teams will compete to secure entry into the World Championships in Germany.

The Grand Prix is a worldwide competition where students build and race remote-controlled cars powered by hydrogen fuel cells. Each car is backed by drivers, engineers, and data analysts to ensure their car not only outpaces other racers, but outlasts them as well by carefully calibrating power usage. It's an excellent way for young engineers and scientists to engage in today's growing alternative fuel conversation through real-world problem solving.

"We have strong drivers and a refined strategy," says Camilo Reynoso '25. "We have a pretty good shot at doing at least as well as we did last year."

That's putting it mildly; Sequoyah's team entered the arena in a big way in 2024, securing first place at state championships and fourth in the world

in just its first year. Inspiration for the team came from Director of Design and Fabrication Abraham Orozco, Kenya Gordon '26, and Harry Freeland '24. "I had five years' experience running multiple teams at other schools," says Abraham. "I thought it was a perfect fit for Sequoyah, and this year we expanded our program to two stock car teams—*Dialed In* and *Track Dialed*."

With the help of donors, the team roster has expanded as well to over a dozen Sequoyah students and faculty working alongside one another. "I think when you are with your team, collaborating and passing on ideas, it makes it really easy to be successful," says Kenya. "Abraham stays late every day to help us because he sees our passion on this project and wants us to succeed."

"I serve as a knowledge base," adds Abraham. "The students are designing and working on the cars, spending time after school practicing, and pushing innovation. They are in charge of the program and its success and how well the teams function. I just help them steer where to go in terms of logistics. And I think it really helps build strong connections."

Dialed In is composed of veteran students who joined the H2GP program in its first year, while



Sequoyah's H2GP team (l-r): Abraham Orozco, Daisy Cano Ruiz '25, Eurus Wang '27, Natalie Wray '27, Kenya Gordon '26, Aidan Byrne '26, Orion Thomas '27, Eric Yang '26, Andrew Fyke '26, Diego Del Toro '25, Camilo Reynoso '25, Ryan Asperger '25. **Not pictured:** Avo Day '25.

Track Dialed is crewed by newer members. (The team names are pulled from racing terms for peak performance and perfect track conditions, respectively.) Both teams have multiple drivers—some races can last up to six hours—in addition to maintenance crews and a data analyst, so collaboration is essential at all times.

Natalie Wray '27 serves as *Track Dialed*'s analyst. She's trained alongside *Dialed In*'s Daisy Cano Ruiz '25 to learn the ropes and is also responsible for the design of her team's hydrogen racer.

"I handle the data," she says. "I keep track of our lap times to see where we went wrong or where we were going too slow. We also find the lap times of our top competitors to see if we're on the same level or if we know we can beat them or not."

Camilo, one of *Dialed In*'s mechanics, has found the process very rewarding. "It's probably been the most transformative and realistic engineering experience I've had in my life," he says. "It's competitive, creative, and fun. If you enjoy engineering or you enjoy making art that you'll see perform in functional ways, I would totally recommend H2GP."

Last year's winning car has been replaced with two new models. To lighten the racers, the students switched to narrower carbon-fiber chassis that lets them get more aggressive with their driving style without sacrificing durability. The wiring has been completely redone, and the Sequoyah team installed custom-built computers that limit the fuel cell's power output to create sustained, longer-lasting races. At the 2024 state championship, the team was able to complete 100 more laps than the second-place team. These upgrades could widen that gap even further.

"The majority of this year has been about refinement," says Camilo. "That's the way a lot of engineering projects work, especially when you already have the baseline knowledge to build what you got to build. The rest of it is just making sure it works the way you want it to work."

Orion Thomas '27, one of *Track Dialed*'s drivers, appreciates how those refinements translate to the course itself. "I've enjoyed just being able to drive a lot. It's a lot of focus you have to keep for an extended period of time, but if you can control it, it's relatively relaxed if you handle your time right."

Both teams ultimately exceeded expectations at state competition, outperforming last years' lap count and earning *Dialed In* an invitation to the World Championships in August. Abraham hopes to bring members of both teams to Germany to race and celebrate the growth of H2GP at Sequoyah.

"I'm confident we will continue to strive to reach our potential and continue to value the principles that have made us as successful as we have been," he says. 🏁



Above: Kenya Gordon, Avo Day, and Camilo Reynoso run diagnostics on last year's H2GP car during a 2024 competition.

In Conversation with Abraham Orozco



Abraham joined Sequoyah's high school faculty in 2023, and has recently expanded his role as the school's Director of Design and Fabrication.

First introduced to H2GP competition through colleagues, Abraham saw it as a way to innovate STEAM programming, especially at the high school level. Below he shares his thoughts on mentoring H2GP students at Sequoyah and what makes it such a welcome addition to the school's extracurricular offerings.

What sold you on H2GP?

The various entry points for students to engage with climate science, technology, and the excitement of a global competition. I have coached multiple teams on various campuses, but being at Sequoyah gave me the opportunity to help develop the program and the team.

How do you measure success in competition?

I value building up student confidence and skill levels throughout the race season, particularly during moments of failure and frustration. A race is a one-time competition, but the ability to apply the skills developed is part of lifelong learning.

What's it like advising the two teams?

Being a coach is a lot like being a parent in some ways. Some days, you're helping team members find their place on the team and in life; other times, you're chasing them down for field trip slips, reminding them to wake up on time, or picking them up last minute because they slept through an alarm.

It constantly keeps me on my toes, and there's nothing better than witnessing the growth of each individual student and the team's potential over time.



Wordsmiths

Students of all ages contribute to Sequoyah's literary traditions. This year, Phoenix is pleased to share selections from Talon Tales and SECO—two of many publications available on campus.

The Yellow House by Emi Gurewitz '31

I felt like it was important to acknowledge all the people who were affected by the Eaton wildfires – including my grandparents, who lost their yellow home in the fire.

November, 2024

My eyes blink open

3:00 am

Grandma's "jello bed"

hallway floorboards creak

light peeks through

sheer curtains on the antique glass door

my sister peeks her sleepy head in

Only here,

at grandma's house,

Do we wake up this early

I gaze at the Icelandic picture book

The colorful plates filling the glass cupboard

Ironie towels hanging in the kitchen

We are cuddled on the teal green sofa

together

January 2025

My eyes blink open

8:00 a.m.

Soft, comfy bed

not the jello bed

not the yellow house

I hear my grandpa on the phone

My grandma walking down hallway

my great uncle's dog's nails

scritch, scratch, pitter, patter

down the hall of

My house

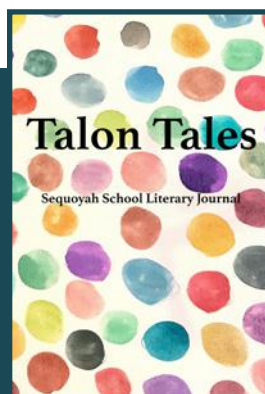
Filled with displaced guests.

Then we find the green house

Together

Student Works

Sequoyah School supports a number of student publications. Learn more about them here—then download their latest issues!



Talon Tales, the K-8 literary journal, provides students the opportunity to see their work in a published form that is shared and celebrated by the community. Each selection honors the effort, commitment, deep thinking, skill, and creativity of our young writers.

The Cashier

by Kiara Gamboa '24

Would you like your receipt?

The customer declines as they quickly stuff their card back in their wallet and leave. Crumpling the receipt, you take a breath as the register resets and you can call another customer to check out. Only three hours into your double shift and you already can't concentrate. Not like the workplace is helping, with the same old mundanity day after day and your point of employment being a walking, talking computer. Nobody really cares about your life, or what you do. As long as their card isn't being declined and there isn't a cleanup on aisle seven, your point is to be insignificant. Invisible.

You signal another customer to your station where you slowly start scanning their items and bagging them. However, unlike most, this one seems to be in a rush and continually taps their card on the counter. They look at you as if to say "can you go any slower?" to which, with some sick satisfaction, you return the favor and log the final items into the system by hand, which by rough calculations takes about thirty seconds longer per item. The customer pays and curtly refuses the peace offering of a receipt. He leaves in a huff, plastic bags swinging by his side.

To be fair, it's not your fault you're a slow scanner. You've only been here a total of three months and it's not like the line at the drugstore means life or death. You may not mean much to these people, but the work pays the bills and you still have some control. Even if you're remembered as the asshole who scans slowly, you've still left an impression on them, enough to be remembered. That's consolation enough for you.

Receipt trashed and the register reset, you call the next customer. She's a woman, smaller in height, and wears the expression of someone who's been here a while. You'll try to scan it fast for her. You signal you're ready when a man suddenly cuts in front and places his things on the counter. He must have come from around the side because you certainly didn't see him in line.


He starts fiddling with his wallet when you say "Sir, she was next," and gesture to the woman behind him. He stops and turns with genuine surprise. He says "oh my god, I didn't see you," to which the woman excuses this ultimately rude action by saying he must be in a hurry.

To this, the man says, "no, no, no. I really didn't see you."

Something feels off about this encounter. Not just the obvious difference in race between the two, but the nonchalant way he speaks like he "forgot" people like her exist altogether. An awkward air hangs around your station, not just because of what happened but also because he refuses to move. His items still remain on the counter and he now turns back to you, waiting for the regular routine.

The ball is in your court now. Are you really going to let something like that slide? Did something even go wrong to begin with? Maybe he sincerely forgot there was a line. Or maybe he's just an entitled asshole who knows he can get away with anything. Either way, it's your decision now, you're just really confused. But shaking it off, you make eye contact with the woman, giving her a look as if to say "are you ok with this?" to which she shrugs her shoulders and motions to continue.

So slowly you take up the scanner, and as you ring up the items a sick feeling builds in your stomach. The kind that's not influenced by anything you ate, but rather a feeling you can't shake. Guilt is the name you decide to place on the feeling. Guilty about not doing more, doing less, or doing anything at all. It feels like he's stealing as you hand him the receipt, and the guilt stabs you in the gut as he walks through the doors without any alarms or consequences coming his way.

The woman is next and she finally places her things on the counter. Three items. All of that hassle for three items. You think to yourself "is she used to this?" A person shouldn't have to get used to that. You keep contemplating if you should say something, or do something, but would it help? The guy's gone and he isn't coming back. The woman thanks you for the receipt and all you manage to say is "have a nice day," before she walks out the doors and disappears. 

This piece originally appeared in Seco #3.
Kiara is currently studying at Emerson College.



Seco is the high school's student-produced literary magazine. In addition to works of fiction, Seco highlights the poetry, photography, and visual arts of Sequoyah students.

Gender Matters collects thought-provoking works produced by students for class or Talking Leaves. Readers are invited to explore photography and visual art alongside academic analysis of topics related to gender, sexuality, and their intersections.

The Barefoot Times is ground zero for student journalism at the high school campus. If you're looking online for features, news, and commentary—all in a distinctly Sequoyah voice—visit newsgoesbarefoot.com.



Students climb to the top of the Jungle Dome, a multi-story web that forms the centerpiece of Sequoyah's new play structure.

Play, Constructed



Sequoyah entered a new era last spring with the K-8 campus' new playground structure. Learn how current students shaped fun and games for future generations of Sequoyahns.

Last spring, more than 250 members of the Sequoyah community made their way to the K-8 campus for one last slide on the school's venerable old playground structure. Students, faculty, staff, and families crowded onto the sand, clambered up the slide, and took their place on the monkey bars and bridge while a drone flew overhead to commemorate the occasion.

Three days, later, a new era of play began.

Thanks to the support of two generous Sequoyah families, Sequoyah commissioned and installed a new structure on the old site for future generations to explore and call their own. The Student Government Structure Committee—with guidance from Assistant Head of School Kim Diaz—was able to shape play and be a part of the decision-making process.

"Getting a committee together was an effective way to gather student voices, needs, wants, and ideas," says Kim. "Anyone was welcome, and the committee reported to the community at large through All-School Meetings."

"I thought the idea that students had a say in the community was great, and led to a better school," adds Finn Webster '28. "I was involved in collecting and sharing feedback about the new structure."

Students were asked what mattered most to them and what features they'd like to see. Priorities included a slide, swings, and being able to climb—the higher, the better. They also learned about the benefits and drawbacks of different types of ground cover, ultimately choosing to run on wood chips instead of sand or artificial turf.

Sequoyah then contracted with Kompan, a company known for its sustainable practices and commitment to fun and captivating outdoor playgrounds. "They were most responsive, eco-friendly, and creative," says Kim. Construction began shortly after the farewell celebration and concluded a few weeks later, giving the K-8 crowd ample time to get acquainted with the new structure before the school year ended.

"It was weird seeing a new structure," says Finn. "I have a lot of memories of the old one, but I was excited to see what the new one would look like and how the community would feel about the change."

Zola Wills '28, another member of the Structure Committee, agrees. "I was definitely sad to see the structure I'd always known be changed, which made me appreciate my true love for the structure when I was younger," she says. "But I realized that, by having a choice in the process of selecting the new structure, I could make my mark and my decision for future generations of kids to enjoy, and that is endlessly special."

With a slide, spinner, multi-story climbing web, tire swing, and more, the new playground has proven to be a big hit with current students. "It is a pretty epic structure," says Zola, "one that reflects **our** opinions."

"My favorite part," she adds, "is the web rope structure—specifically the part with the mobile chair. It's so comfy to relax and read a book in."

"There is nothing more exciting than watching new games and traditions be born for new generations," Kim adds.

Now, one year later, Sequoyah has fully embraced the new structure. The playground is abuzz with activity and laughter on warm days, and the mood is light and carefree. A new tradition has been born.

"I was glad I could have a part in selecting a new structure," says Finn. "I am really impressed with how the school handled the change, and how they were open to student suggestions." 📷



Above: The Sequoyah community bids a fond farewell to the structure in March 2024.



Award-winning visual journalist and photo editor
Bryan Denton '97.

The Advocate

Bryan Denton '97 works tirelessly to document the human experience during crisis, conflict, and climate change through photography. His recent work for The New York Times exposing environmental malfeasance in India has been recognized by the Overseas Press Club of America.

Delhi, India, is one of the most polluted cities in the world, with its poor air quality and lax waste treatment serving as a cautionary tale for other industrialized nations.

So when Bryan Denton '97 learned of the Timarpur–Okhla Waste to Energy plant in 2019, he wanted to investigate India's initiative to convert thousands of tons of garbage per day into electricity. Instead of finding a model for green energy and sustainable urban development, however, he discovered more than a decade of toxic exposure, illegal dumping, regulatory failure, and health impacts devastating millions of people just trying to breathe.

Now he has received acclaim for helping bring this story to light.

In March 2025, the Overseas Press Club of America awarded Bryan and his wife Maria Abi-Habib the [Whitman Bassow Award](#) for their November 2024 *New York Times* piece, "Is a 'Green' Revolution Poisoning India's Capital?" The award is given for the best reporting in any medium on international environmental issues. Maria wrote the words; Bryan took the photos.

"It's always a tremendous honor to have your work recognized by the Overseas Press Club of America, but this award, for this story, was particularly special because I won it alongside my wife," says Bryan. "We worked on this story for five years, and I'm not sure we would have pursued it as doggedly or even finished it if we hadn't been married."

In investigating Timarpur–Okhla's practices, their reporting found the plant had likely "been poisoning over a million residents of the capital, both rich and poor, in full view of the government and its regulators."

The pictures alone tell a heartbreaking story: open-air taxis in full view of exhaust stacks, families rooting through the landfills that dominate the skyline, vehicles covered in thick layers of soot and ash, and schoolchildren with face masks on protesting air quality. The [full piece dives deeper](#), with detailed reporting on the surge of illnesses, ongoing dumping of heavy metals, and the power and influence exerted on local government by the plant's owner, the Jindal Group.

Alternating his base of operations between Los Angeles, upstate New York, and Mexico City, Bryan has worked for years as a principled photojournalist, with clients including the *Times*, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and Human Rights Watch. He has reported extensively on the Taliban and the war in Afghanistan, and won the Robert Capa Gold Medal Award from the Overseas Press Club in 2017 for his work documenting injured children in Gaza. Unsurprisingly, this award is given to those who show "exceptional courage and enterprise" in their reporting.

"I came to photojournalism as a sort of natural response to 9/11 and the US embarking on its Global War on Terror," says Bryan. "I knew the region was going to feature centrally in the history and experience of my generation, and I wanted to immerse myself in it. The camera was my way in."

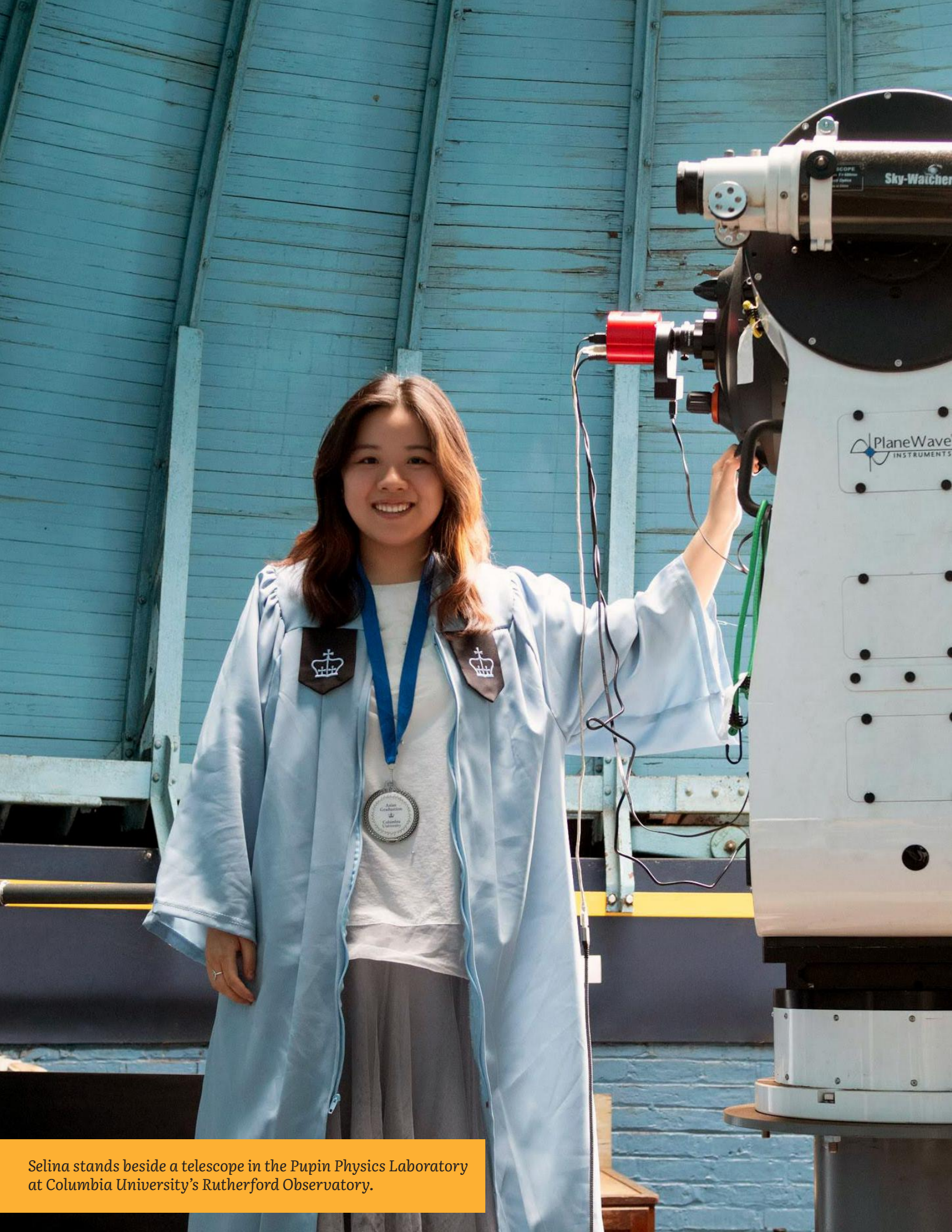
After graduating from NYU in 2005, Bryan moved to the Middle East to begin reporting. He currently works as both an editor for the *Times* and as a film consultant, enjoys crafting thought-provoking journalism, and looks forward to returning to the field when able. In the meantime, he reflects fondly on his time at Sequoyah.

"It was one of the places I believe shaped me and helped imbue me with the curiosity and empathy that have fed my journalism," he says. "I think what was great about Sequoyah is that it was very effective at providing students with different perspectives on life that most kids, at least at the time in Pasadena, might not have been exposed to."

In a world where newspapers compete with television, TikTok, and Reddit, Bryan remains undeterred about the possibilities of long-form journalism—even though it's harder and harder to get people to pay attention.

"History has always been a major interest of mine, and as a journalist, we get to create primary documents by tapping into our curiosity and empathy," says Bryan. "In a world that increasingly feels reductive, shrill and oversimplified, journalism is all about nuance and context."

"It's a pretty cool job." 📷



Selina stands beside a telescope in the Pupin Physics Laboratory at Columbia University's Rutherford Observatory.

Stargazer

As a Sequoyah high school student, Selina Yang learned to reach for the stars. Now she's working to complete a PhD in astrophysics at Cornell University.

The views around Inyo National Forest near Mammoth Lakes are breathtaking — but for Selina Yang '20, they were transformative.

"There was no light pollution," she says of her first Field Studies experience. "We were looking at the night sky for the first time." Over the next few days, Selina studied star charts, learned about constellations, and made new friends while embracing astronomy as one of several potential Sequoyah hobbies. When Selina gazes to the heavens today, however, she does it with the practiced eye of a PhD candidate in astrophysics at Cornell University.

Selina discovered Sequoyah because of its Field Studies program. Having moved to the United States a year earlier, she was looking for an education that was challenging and fun — and the brand-new high school offered both in abundance. She got over her fear of bugs through numerous camping trips, learned English reading Tolstoy and *The Odyssey*, and helped found the STEM Institute with fellow Sequoyah students. As a result, former science faculty Laura Haney was able to gain access to the Goldstone Apple Valley radio telescope and teach the science behind the cosmos. It was the first time Selina had ever used one.

"[Sequoyah] made that connection for us," she says. "The intent was student-driven, but the school's resources really helped. By touching the telescope, I realized this is an actual path. That we were taking a rigorous approach to learn about such a romantic part of the world."

As a result, Selina dove deeper into scientific work. "I didn't learn math to brag," she says. "I did it so that math can be a tool to learn, that there are people who dedicate their life to advance a field of science. Laura exemplified that and showed me that I could do astronomy in college."

Selina attended Columbia University as an undergraduate, graduating magna cum laude in spring 2024. During her studies, she was part of the Gravity Team and revived Blue Shift, an astronomy club coincidentally founded by Laura Haney. As president, she grew its membership during the pandemic, invited guest speakers to campus, and built an alum network for fellow astronomers. "I wasn't scared to network with people who are more powerful than I am," she says. "That came from

Sequoyah's Social Innovation Program building me up.

"Sequoyah hired great people," Selina adds. "We learned scientific writing. We learned LaTeX. The faculty had extraordinary research backgrounds and were able to share their experience with us. It's about the teacher teaching the things you need for you to ask your own questions. A Sequoyah education is very holistic."

Now finishing her first year as a doctoral student, Selina looks forward to completing her PhD and exploring the universe — and the planet.

"I'm hoping to travel," she says. "I'm hoping to work on the telescope in Kitt Peak in Arizona and another one being set up in Chile." When on campus, however, she'll continue her coursework, work as a teaching assistant for lower-level classes, and reflect on her professional goals. While many technological advances have created a modern-day renaissance in astronomy, telescopes are still the heart of the equation. Will she look for work building them for NASA or Jet Propulsion Labs after graduation, or stay in academia to teach and research the next big thing? She has five or six years to decide before officially becoming Dr. Yang.

In the meantime, she plans to occasionally camp with friends and family.

"I'll be the one who knows how to set up tents." 🏠



Above: Selina during Sequoyah's 2020 high school graduation ceremonies.

Alum Check-In

Established as a K-6 school, Sequoyah added a junior high in 1978, expanded to high school in 2016, and graduated the inaugural Senior class in 2019. An alum's final year at Sequoyah is indicated after their name in the notes below.

Akira Abderrahman '09

and his wife, Elizabeth Growdon, welcomed a baby boy, Niko John Abderrahman on December 20, 2022. They live in San Diego and enjoy taking Niko to the beach, zoo, and Padres games. He loves to swim, play sports, and dance to music.

Right: Akira with Niko John and brother Ethan Abderrahman '13.



Maya Almaraz '97

started a position as an Associate Research Scientist at Yale University this year, where she is working to develop climate mitigation tools in agriculture. She is working on a project which seeks to model the effects of enhanced weathering implementation in the Mississippi watershed. She is also working on a documentary that highlights scientists working on climate change solutions within our food system. Maya lives in Salt Lake City with her partner and a few cats.



Tamia Anaya '99

recently returned to Los Angeles with her family. She's working in conservation and preservation at the Getty Research Institute, and happily living on the east side (find her strolling the Atwater Village farmers market most weekends). She's thrilled to reconnect with the Sequoyah community and can't wait to visit on a Hot Lunch Friday!



Right: Tamia with her partner and child.

After devoting many years to dance, **Siena Apodaca '20** has turned her focus to medicine and becoming a doctor. Last summer, she interned for Dr. Lily Lee where she had the privilege of scrubbing in for over 30 surgeries and is attending Southern Methodist University on a pre-med track. Siena remains engaged with The Ubuntu Education Fund, a fund she established while in high school to help children in South Africa with school fees, uniforms and supplies. Ubuntu is the African philosophy of "I am what I am because of who we all are", which is something she says she first learned about during her early years at Sequoyah.



Rob Bierman '05 is 31 years old and continues to be a Sequoyah kid to this day. His love of learning, exploration, camping, wonder and compassion has been his mainstay. Rob is living in New Jersey, working at Princeton as a Research Software Engineer in a Genetics Lab.

Right: Rob with fiancée Katy.



William Bigby '20 was named a 2024 YoungArts winner with distinction in Photography, the highest honor of the organization. Bigby has been recognized for the caliber of his artistic achievement and joins nearly 700 of the most accomplished young visual, literary, and performing artists from throughout the country. YoungArts award winners are selected through a



highly competitive application, which is reviewed by panels of esteemed, discipline-specific artists in a rigorous adjudication process. 2024 YoungArts award winners join a community of artists who are offered creative and professional development support throughout their careers. William's photography was recently featured in the group art show *Meet Me Here Tomorrow (Again)* at the All Street Gallery in NYC. William attends NYU.

Andrea Bizarro '21 is a student at the University of California, Davis majoring in Community and Regional Development and minoring in Sustainability in the Built Environment. This past summer, Andrea studied abroad learning about housing and urbanism in Barcelona. She gained insight into innovative city planning practices and is excited to incorporate what she learned, including skills such as urban sketching and cartography, into her college projects.

Above: Andrea at La Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, Spain.



Clemencia Dane '19 works for the Not Impossible Foundation, where she is working to help Daniel Omar, a young Sudanese refugee who lost both lower arms in a bombing as a child, come to the U.S. for specialized rehab services. Clemencia is a sophomore at George Washington University majoring in International Affairs and Human Services and Social Justice.

Above (l-r): Clemencia with Chandy Shair and Zoela Gullo '19.



Leon Gold '21 interned last summer at NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory as a Visiting Student Researcher under Dr. Thomas T. Lu. He worked on the evaluation of next-gen processors for use in spacecraft and the construction and operation of a virtual test lab utilizing Web 3.0 standards to aid in model interoperability. Leon is a Physics-Geophysics Double Major at University of Chicago.

Aidan Grimm '19

worked last summer as a Legislative Intern for Congressman Adam Schiff, where he had the opportunity to engage directly with constituents, attend policy roundtables and conduct research. He is a College Fellow for the NY Democratic Party and spent the fall working on a successful GOTV effort to flip the NY 22nd Congressional District.

Aidan is a sophomore at Hamilton College, majoring in Government & Economics on a pre-law track and a member of the Swim team.

Above: Aidan with District Representative Mohammed Almourazzen, US House of Representatives.



Julia Ihly '20 was recently named Female Student Leader with Epilepsy of the Year (2024) by the UCB Foundation, a medical foundation specializing in treating and supporting people with epilepsy to live their lives to the fullest.

Julia was nationally recognized and chosen out of 500 qualified nominees for her advocacy work supporting civil rights legislation (including HR 6640: Marriage Equality for Disabled Adults Act by getting Representative Grace Napolitano as a co-sponsor on the bill and working with the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund in a year-long research project she just completed). Julia is a student at Scripps College pursuing a dual philosophy and politics degree with a French minor on the pre-law track. She hopes to attend law school and become a civil rights lawyer and legislator advocating for disabled Americans within the law.

Above (l-r): Julia with Emily Singer and Betty Chavez.





Above (l-r): Oliver '22, Leo '20, Ava '14, and Scarlett '17

A Ferry Family Update

Ava Ferry '14 is a 2022 graduate of Barnard College, Columbia University. She is currently living in Highland Park and working as Audience Coordinator and Production Assistant on the new Disney show *Wizards Beyond Waverly Place*, which premiered on Disney in the Fall of 2024.

Scarlett Ferry '17 is a fourth-year student at Trinity College Dublin studying Global Business. She spent the spring semester of junior year studying at France's École Supérieure de Commerce de Paris. As a bonus of attending college abroad, Scarlett has enjoyed numerous side trips to countries including Germany, France, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, the Netherlands, and Croatia.

Leo Ferry '20 now attends Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut (along with fellow Sequoyah alum Harry Freeland!). While at Flintridge Prep, Leo was captain and Most Valuable Player for the varsity soccer team, a three-time First Team All League honoree, and founder of the Students Together Organizing Peace (STOP) club, dedicated to educating teens about rape culture and promoting healthy relationships.

Oliver Ferry '22 left Sequoyah after sixth grade to attend middle school at Flintridge Prep, ending the continuous procession of Ferry children through Sequoyah that began in 2005. He is a ninth grader at Prep and looking forward to being the family's very first multi-sport athlete, starting with football in the fall, then soccer in the winter, and finally golf in the spring. Most days you can find him working on his chip shot at Brookside golf course, frequently alongside his old Sequoyah pals.

Alum Check-In continued

Riya Koh '19 spent last summer working as a Legislative Intern for Congressman Adam Schiff. She attended briefings, conducted policy research, and engaged with constituents. As a sophomore at Wellesley College, she is majoring in Political Science and English.

Right: Riya with US Representative Adam Schiff.



Blake Logan '20 is a senior at Oberlin College and Conservatory majoring in Biology and Cello Performance. This past summer Blake did soil science research at the Harvard Forest in Massachusetts, and has been reflecting upon how they first became interested in biology at Sequoyah during junior year in Chelsea's biology class, which they loved so much.



Kayla McCue '07 received her Ph.D in Computational Biology from MIT in the fall of 2023. Kayla is taking time off to relax and recuperate after the intensity of finishing before beginning work in the tech industry doing computer modeling of "big data."



Maia Mosse '03 is a graduate of Stanford Medical School and works as a concierge physician in Palo Alto. She married Ross Overline in August 2023, CEO and founder of Scholars of Finance, a nonprofit which provides mentorship in ethical investing and leadership skills to students of finance across the United States.

Milan Mosse '08 completed his Masters in Computer Science at Stanford and is finishing his PhD in Ethics (Philosophy Dept) at Berkeley. Teaching ethics and consulting regarding ethical AI use are his areas of passionate interest and expertise.

Uly Spencer '23 is now in their sophomore year at MassArt in Boston. They continued to develop their music under the Artist name 2004. Uly also founded their own rave collective, hosting renegade parties in secret locations and warehouse raves. Summer 2024 began with touring as a DJ in Beijing, Shanghai, and Xi'an.

Sequoyahns in the News

Claire Schwartz '08 (right) was profiled by the *Los Angeles Times* for her work in reuniting Altadena residents with photos and other memorabilia thought lost in the Eaton Canyon wildfire. An archivist with experience cleaning and storing lithographs, Schwartz has set up a [website](#) and [Instagram account](#) to help share some of her discoveries and find their original owners.

“This is the best way I know how to help right now,” she says. “If I can get even one photo back to its owners, I’ll consider this project a success.”

To learn more about her efforts, [read the article](#).



Miro Serrell-Freed '10 was profiled by CNN for his efforts to save homes during the Eaton Fire. A former firefighter who left the Forestry Service in September of 2024, Miro is now starting his own fire resiliency business with trained wildland firefighters to help homeowners feel safer moving forward.

To view the interview, [click here](#).



Sookie Orth '24 was featured in a *Los Angeles Times* piece on the mysterious origins of pizza box art used by restaurants across the western United States. Orth, who is currently studying at Bard College in New York, began working at Pizza of Venice in Altadena after demonstrating an unusual aptitude for assembling the pizza boxes for fun while dining there. Her experiences even shaped the first draft of her college admissions essays.

The story delves into the Internet’s interest in tracking down the original artist and commissioner. To read the full piece on the *Times’* website, [click here](#).

“East of Wall”

Kate Beecroft '07 wrote and directed her first feature length film, *East of Wall*, which won the Audience Award at the 2025 Sundance Film Festival. Fellow alum **Lukas Frank '08** composed the music for the film. “It’s been the most rewarding, amazing, moment of my life,” she says.



2023–24 Annual Report

From the Head of School

Together we—parents and guardians, alums, students, faculty, staff, and more—believe in a progressive and human-centered education that challenges the mind, nurtures the heart, and celebrates human dignity. We share moments of wonder, dig deep into learning with students, and support one another.



This year's Annual Report reflects the ways our past has shaped our present and lays the foundation for our future. In a time of widespread uncertainty, Sequoyah has remained steadfast, benefiting from prudent financial management and the strength of a closely-knit community rooted in shared values and generosity. Guided by our mission, the school is moving forward with resilience: building assets, continuing to support extraordinary faculty, and preparing students to engage meaningfully with the world beyond our doors.

At Sequoyah, we understand academic excellence is interdependent with a diverse and dynamic learning community. Our students thrive because they learn in a culture of collaboration and inquiry, supported by dedicated and talented educators and a school committed to equity. We continue our efforts to promote inclusivity and provide indexed tuition for families, while ensuring competitive compensation for our faculty.

As Head, I am honored to be part of this extraordinary school and look forward to the milestones ahead, as we plan for a future as bold and thoughtful as our students.

Rebecca Hong
Head of School

Thank you!

As always, we are grateful to our donors and volunteers who contribute their time, talent, and treasure in support of Sequoyah's mission to challenge the mind, nurture the heart, and celebrate human dignity. To see a full list of donors for 2023-24, please [visit the Sequoyah website](#).

From the Board of Trustees

The 2023–24 school year was one of progress and promise for Sequoyah. We welcomed Rebecca Hong, whose leadership is guided by her passion for progressive education and our school's mission and values. Community-driven fundraising efforts like Jogathon and the Auction surpassed their goals. We also moved closer to securing ownership of our beloved K–8 campus. This year has seen continued success, in particular the establishment of the [Fund for Access](#), an endowment supporting Indexed Tuition. Paired with the endowment for competitive faculty compensation, these investments reflect and uphold Sequoyah's founding commitments and core values.



As we celebrate these successes, we also navigate challenges, including recovery from the Eaton fire and the need to continue building our endowments to further solidify the school's financial foundation. A deep commitment to access and affordability requires careful management of school resources. Also essential are parents, alums, and other supporters willing to invest in building and nurturing the kind of educational excellence that is possible only in a genuinely diverse community.

I encourage you to read this Annual Report to learn more about how our school thrives because of your support and generosity. On behalf of all Trustees, thank you for being an essential part of Sequoyah. We look forward to your continued partnership in investing in this remarkable school and its bright future.

Laura Gowen
President, Sequoyah School Board of Trustees

Statement of Financial Position

The generosity and support of the Sequoyah School community makes possible an education that challenges the mind, nurtures the heart, and celebrates human dignity.

Like most independent schools, Sequoyah depends on charitable giving to sustain the school's institutional values, in particular a founding commitment to a socioeconomically diverse school community. On average, 30-40 percent of students pay less than the top tuition. As a result, our students benefit from an inclusive school community reflective of our region's social, economic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds and identities.

Assets

	2023-24	2022-23
Cash & Equivalents	\$15,933,456	\$11,459,566
Accounts Receivable	\$192,137	\$221,500
Pledges Receivable	\$186,233	\$115,000
Prepaid Expenses	\$47,526	\$56,004
Investments	\$2,042,851	\$1,281,319
Property and Equipment	\$10,489,852	\$10,364,559
Right of Use Assets	\$4,596,196	\$5,062,900
Total Assets	\$33,488,251	\$28,560,848

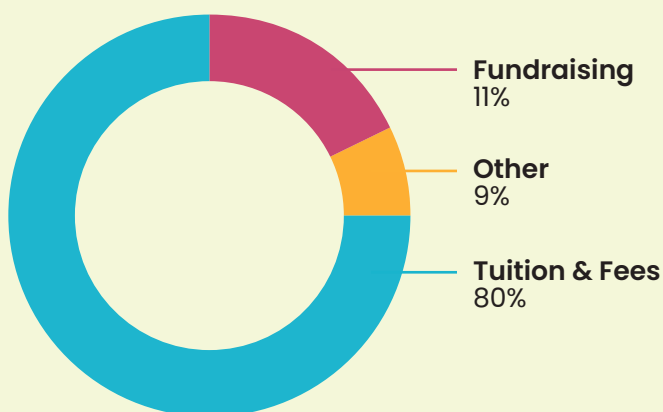
Liabilities

	2023-24	2022-23
Accounts Payable	\$51,980	\$343,174
Accrued Liabilities	\$286,584	\$715,796
Term Loans	\$5,955,291	\$6,086,552
Deferred Revenue	\$5,933,752	\$5,408,070
Right of Use Liabilities	\$4,934,838	\$5,256,355
Total Liabilities	\$17,162,445	\$17,809,947

Net Assets

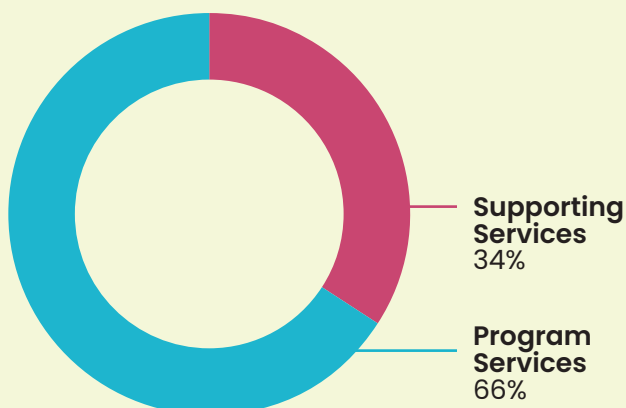
	2023-24	2022-23
Unrestricted	\$12,081,930	\$8,534,035
Temporarily Restricted	\$1,500,000	\$800,201
Permanently Restricted	\$2,743,886	\$1,416,665
Total Net Assets	\$16,325,816	\$10,750,901
Change in Net Assets	\$2,144,107	\$5,574,915

Revenues



	2023-24	2022-23
Tuition & Fees	\$13,238,568	\$11,594,261
Fundraising	\$1,798,584	\$2,706,423
Other	\$1,553,092	\$1,108,973
Total Revenue	\$16,590,244	\$15,409,657

Expenses



	2023-24	2022-23
Program Services	\$9,023,415	\$8,553,620
Supporting Services	\$4,651,680	\$4,838,616
Total Expenses	\$13,675,095	\$13,392,236

Why We Give: Carolina Valle '02

Carolina Valle joined the Sequoyah community as a kindergartner in “Andi’s Class” (now the Treehouse) in 1993. Since graduating in 2002, she has become the Director of Power Building at Disability Rights California and a member of Sequoyah’s Board of Trustees. She is also the co-founder of the All People’s Health Collective.

An immigrant from Nicaragua, Carolina came to the U.S. as a refugee when her home country was in the midst of a revolution. Class and economic justice are at the heart of her work, and she serves on the board to push Sequoyah to connect its values of human dignity with real-world necessities like housing, money, and universal healthcare.

“I benefited from the Indexed Tuition model before it was even called that,” she shares.

“Sequoyah was founded on the radical idea of integrating people from different social classes into an educational environment with progressive education as a core principle. That, no matter where you are economically, you have a right to a quality education, and that all families deserved a path

to stability and safety and real opportunity, not just those who can afford it.”

For Carolina, securing the future of a socio-economically diverse student body is essential to maintaining the spirit of the school: “That’s why I’m on the board. It’s my biggest priority.”



“No matter where you are economically, you have the right to a quality education...if we truly believe in our values, we must commit our energy and resources to the Endowed Fund for Access.”

She is overjoyed by Sequoyah’s recent creation of the Endowed Fund for Access (see below) to provide equitable access to education for students, and she is ready to give of her time and talents to keep it growing.

“Class and economic justice must be central to our work, especially as our city continues to gentrify,” she says. “Sequoyah has the opportunity to lead by example, but it requires intention. We have a choice: live up to our mission or fall short. If we truly believe in our values, we must commit our energy and resources to the Endowed Fund for Access.

“Sequoyah culture really matters. And I think we’re striving to make sure Indexed Tuition and socio-economic diversity is preserved. Not just preserved, but **grown**.”

The Power of Endowments

Established with a \$100,000 gift in December 2024, the **Endowed Fund for Access** created an endowment that will, in perpetuity, fund access for students whose families could not otherwise be able to afford a Sequoyah education. The fund welcomes donations of any size, with additional contributions providing a stable source of growing financial support for Indexed Tuition—upholding a community where 30–40% of families pay less than maximum tuition.

Current value: \$128,000

The **Endowed Fund for Faculty** supports competitive compensation for faculty, addressing a strategic priority. This is a long-term financial commitment to the art and value of teaching, which is at the heart of Sequoyah’s mission. Additional contributions enable the fund to grow in size and impact—making a difference in the recruitment of outstanding faculty.

Current value: \$2 million

Building and Celebrating Community



Jogathon

Student-Led Fundraising

Sequoyah's **Jogathon** introduces students to fundraising in support of a collective purpose—in this case, our founders' commitment to establish and sustain an independent school community that is socioeconomically diverse. K-8 students run at nearby Singer Park, while high school students complete a 5K through Pasadena's Arroyo Seco. All students are encouraged to ask for contributions, and many donations come from beyond their immediate families. Students feel ownership through goal setting, individual achievement, and knowing they worked hard to make their school a better place for all.

The 2024 Jogathon raised \$65,266.



Auction

Volunteer-Led Fundraising

Sequoyah's **Community Auction** is our annual opportunity to come together and enjoy food, fun, and phenomenal music, all while raising funds to benefit students and teachers.

Thanks to the generous donations of families and friends, the Auction gives Sequoyah the opportunity to offer art, vacation opportunities, homemade items and one-of-a-kind experiences to the community—and thanks to everyone who keeps the Sequoyah community vibrant!

In 2024, the Auction raised \$195,510 to help the school while bringing parents, grandparents, and more together as volunteers.



Annual Campaign

The **Annual Campaign** is the cornerstone of our fundraising program, directly supporting the school's operating budget and spent within the fiscal year it is raised. Consistent, generous giving over time provides the school the flexibility to address longstanding budget obligations, unanticipated costs, and a deep commitment to sustain a socioeconomically diverse school community. Salaries and benefits make up over 70% of the school's operating expenses, which also include classroom materials, facilities maintenance, transportation, utilities, and more. Tuition revenue doesn't cover it all.

In 2024, the Annual Campaign raised \$730,800.

From the Treasurer

The creation and growth of an extraordinary K-12 educational program is not possible without the generosity and support of community members, past and current parents, grandparents, alums, and friends. Thank you for all that you do to make Sequoyah an amazing place for our students.

Each year, your generous donations to the Annual Campaign, Jogathon, and Community Auction enable Sequoyah to attract and retain an extraordinary group of teachers and specialists who are committed to an innovative curriculum, where individual attention and support is given to each student's social, emotional, and academic progress.

As you've seen, the Board of Trustees continues to take thoughtful and concrete steps to secure the long-term financial sustainability of the school. Looking ahead, we'll continue building on this momentum through strategic financial planning to secure the future of Sequoyah for generations to come.



Taejo Kim

Treasurer, Sequoyah School Board of Trustees



Above: Dean Jablonski and the Nest class of 2024 commemorate the old structure with this amazing painting. See page 9 to learn more about the new structure.

It's a home run!

Giving to Sequoyah's Annual Campaign supports every student, celebrates their effort, and brings them home.

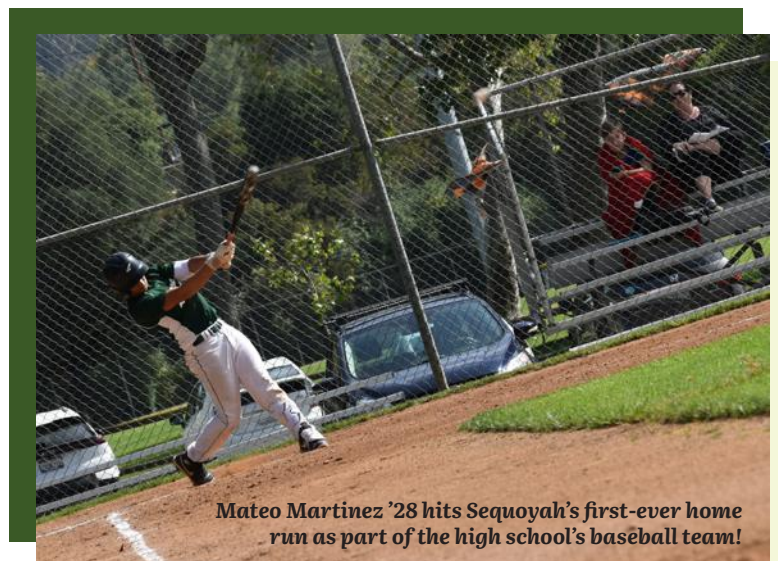
If you are in a position to give, swing for the fence.

Thank you!

Contribute today ➔



SEQUOYAH
SCHOOL



Mateo Martinez '28 hits Sequoyah's first-ever home run as part of the high school's baseball team!