

SVA Parent Testimonials

Dear Mrs. Dutton,

As Tynan's second semester at Sycamore Valley Academy approaches, rather than lamenting the end of winter break, she is excited to be returning to school. After years of struggling to keep her motivated with homeschooling or suffering daily complaints about private school, we are utterly relieved and grateful.

The collaborative, project-based environment has her enjoying every subject at school again. She is delighted that her ideas and questions are welcome in the classroom, and feels motivated to return her teachers' respect by improving everything from her handwriting to her interpersonal skills. The frequent group projects and constructive communication instruction have dramatically increased her confidence. She has taken to heart to do right because it is right; this most basic and applicable code becoming as much a part of her identity as her love of science.

The past few months have been so rewarding, watching Tynan really start living up to her potential. Unimpeded by boredom from busywork or fear of peer attitude, all that is brilliant and beautiful about her is ever more apparent. The hard work you and your amazing staff put into providing an education for the whole of each student is deeply appreciated. Thank you thank you thank you!

**— Eric and Mary Hetherington
Parents of Tynan Hetherington, 4th Grade (Mrs. Denham)**

Here are few of the bazillion great things I have to say about SVA:

- Sycamore Valley Academy is a small, intimate school. My child is acknowledged by name not only by her own teachers, but all of the SVA staff. The level of individual attention my daughter receives at SVA helps her feel comfortable and confident in school. These personal relationships are important in so many ways to my daughter. Because of them, she is inspired to do her best work.
- The staff at SVA are uniquely extraordinary. Their commitment to the students and the students' best learning is evident in everything they do. They are approachable and thoughtful listeners, and welcome parental involvement. The SVA community has a culture of respect and gratitude; these are traits I have seen blossom in my daughter since becoming an SVA student.
- SVA honors the fact that each student is unique; it is not a "one size fits all" approach. SVA has a differentiated approach in which student abilities and learning styles are taken into account to offer the best possible instruction to the student. Through its collaborative methodology and use of project-based learning, SVA's environment gives each student the opportunity to thrive. I have marveled at my child's progress this year; she has become a deeper thinker, which means she is becoming well-prepared for the future.

- I was volunteering in my daughter's kindergarten class earlier this year helping a student with a project. She spontaneously declared, "*Being in Mrs. Poggione's class is awesome!*" (FYI, this was Mrs. Padilla's daughter, Diana!)
- Being an SVA parent is different, too. There are so many opportunities to make a positive difference and to be heard when I have concerns. This is an exciting and dynamic school, and we are grateful to be a part of it.

— Rachele Berglund Bailey
Parent of Sela Bailey, Kindergarten (Mrs. Poggione)

My daughter has blossomed since becoming an SVA student. I can't overstate what a positive influence the SVA curriculum and community has had on her. She likes to get up in the morning and looks forward to going to school. She does not want to miss one day. She loves her elective classes, drama and Spanish. She has made better friends in two months than she had in the last two years. Though I was initially concerned about her being one of the youngest members of a mixed-age-group class at SVA, I believe she has only benefited from the mixed-age classes. She is exposed to higher-level thinking, yet she is taught core curriculum and is assessed at her own level. She has become committed and interested in learning again. Her class spent one month writing short novels and she accomplished her 4,000 word goal! These 10- and 11-year-olds wrote more than I did in high school and learned to endure through the difficult process of writing, editing, and enjoy the feeling of accomplishment. The teachers do not expect students to perform above grade-level, but help create an atmosphere where the students encourage each other to push their learning limits.

As a first grader, my son had the benefit of physical education, Spanish, and a separate science teacher. I feel extremely fortunate for him to have had the opportunity to start his education at SVA. He loves his teachers, he loves learning, and he is proud of his school. My son's abilities in math, reading, and writing have been thoroughly and accurately assessed. The SVA teachers put an enormous amount of effort in ensuring that each student's needs are addressed. They go above and beyond every day by sending home individualized challenge homework or ensuring students with skill deficiencies get the help they need.

The students complete at least one substantial project each term. The themed projects excite the students and contribute to a deeper learning. SVA students and staff are a community of learners. I find the school to carry an incredible balance of strength and humility. The staff is strong and consistent in their direction and values, yet they listen to parents and students to identify when improvement and change is needed. The school maintains excellent communication through newsletters and e-mails. They have demonstrated that fundraising can be fun for parents and the community through their Bands for Bands event. Though the school is relatively small, they provide extensive services. SVA has a nurse, library, science room, hot lunch, after-school care, as well as before- and after-school transportation available to students. The bus not only makes life easier on me so I don't have to drive the kids in the morning, but they have developed significant friendships on their way to school. Sycamore Valley Academy rocks!

— Sasha Anderson
parent of Aaliyah Anderson, 5th Grade (Mrs. Borowicz)
and Marcus Anderson, 2nd Grade (Mrs. Johnson & Mrs. Padilla)

There are many aspects of Sycamore Valley Academy that I have come to appreciate as both an educator and as a parent of an SVA student. First, the educators at SVA are trusted with the freedom to make decisions that are best for their students. As parents already know, every child is unique, even among siblings of the same household! Classrooms are the same in this regard. No class is ever alike, so teachers need to be given the ownership to make those executive decisions that will help students succeed. SVA discourages “cookie cutter” classrooms in which all students need to be doing the same thing, regardless of ability, interest, or appropriateness. What *is* encouraged is true authentic learning, challenging students of varying levels, and basically respecting each student and his/her needs.

I also appreciate that SVA steps up and educates the *whole* child. This is done through tried and true programs like Second Step, the Core 4, and emphasis on the Habits of a Scholar. Children of all ages are absorbing and making sense of everything in their world every second of the day. SVA not only recognizes this, but is proactive in helping families build thoughtful learners. It is also reassuring, as a parent, to know that my daughter’s teacher nurtures her and is truly invested in her success.

Furthermore, Sycamore Valley Academy offers extra subjects in which other schools are limited. Science, Physical Education, and Spanish are offered to students beginning in kindergarten and consistently taught through 8th grade. As a parent, it is exciting to see my child’s reading, writing, and math skills improve. It is also thrilling to hear her singing in Spanish, sharing her knowledge of “dirt’s birthday,” and see her eagerness to share new outside games she has learned in P.E.

Not only is SVA unique in its available subjects, but the *way* these subjects are taught are distinct to effective education. Project based learning, depth and complexity icons, thematic classroom . . . all are part of SVA’s philosophy to do what is best for students. Many of these components claim to be an effective part of “gifted” education, which holds true; however, all SVA teachers offer this same rich curriculum for every student. As a way to help teachers grow, stay passionate about education, and keep up to date with valued teaching strategies, Sycamore Valley Academy invests in its teachers. Yearly, teachers have the opportunity to attend conferences, seminars, book studies, and curriculum workshops. Needless to say, an up-to-date, educated teacher is beneficial for students of any age!

I could fill pages and pages of my support for Sycamore Valley Academy. As an educator, it is nothing short of a dream job. As a parent, I feel blessed watching my child excited about school to the point of her crying when she is too sick to go! SVA is truly a wonderful community filled with rich academia, amazingly supportive families, and dedicated educators.

— Sandra Padilla
parent of Diana Padilla, Kindergarten (Mrs. Poggione)

Dear Future SVA Family,

I am writing this testimonial to share why I chose Sycamore Valley Academy as the educational option for my children, as well as what SVA has done for them.

It became apparent to me that my oldest daughter was an above average learner during her toddler years. Once she entered public school, she quickly mastered the grade level curriculum and was begging for scholastic challenges. She was fortunate to have an excellent kindergarten and first grade teacher who made sure she attended higher grade level classrooms for part of her academic day to meet that challenge, as well as working with her afterschool on enrichment activities. This was fantastic, but my daughter was still coming home from school stating that she was bored. I did not feel that it was acceptable for my then six year old to already experience boredom and consequently relate school with that emotion. I also did not see the opportunities for her to go into other grade level classrooms as well as receiving enrichment instruction continuing beyond her first grade year.

I had heard about Sycamore Valley Academy prior to that school year, even attending an informational meeting to learn more about the school. Once it became evident to me that my daughter would be “falling behind” in her education as a result of there not being interventions offered for above average learners, I made the decision to apply to Sycamore Valley, and add her name to the lottery.

We were very fortunate, and her name was selected soon after the lottery began. This not only ensured her a seat for the 2012-2013 school year, it also cemented a seat for her sister who would be starting kindergarten the following year.

Since joining the SVA family, I have been very pleased with the decision to have my children attend Sycamore Valley Academy. The opportunities offered through their program have truly made a difference in my children’s education. It has been wonderful to experience my children being excited about learning, coming home with so much to say about their day. I have seen dramatic growth in my oldest daughter and her critical thinking skills. The way she approaches and analyzes information presented to her has become extremely mature and inquisitive. Her writing skills have taken off, and she has developed a strong author’s voice. No doubt this is a direct result of her teacher encouraging and leading her towards finding that voice! Both my girls love to sing the songs they are learning as part of the Spanish curriculum, as well as share about the latest topic they are learning about in Science. My youngest has taken to reading, and begs for opportunities to demonstrate her skill. Thank you to her teacher for fostering this love! I find that often times, at the end of the day, I have become the student, and they my teachers of all that has been learned that day. I call that successful, indeed!

Sincerely,

Jane Gahl, SVA Parent/ Supporter

— Jane Gahl
parent of Olivia Nichols, 3rd Grade (Mr. Breakstone)
and Madeline Nichols, Kindergarten (Mrs. Poggione)
