



Synergy School

2020 STRATEGIC PLAN

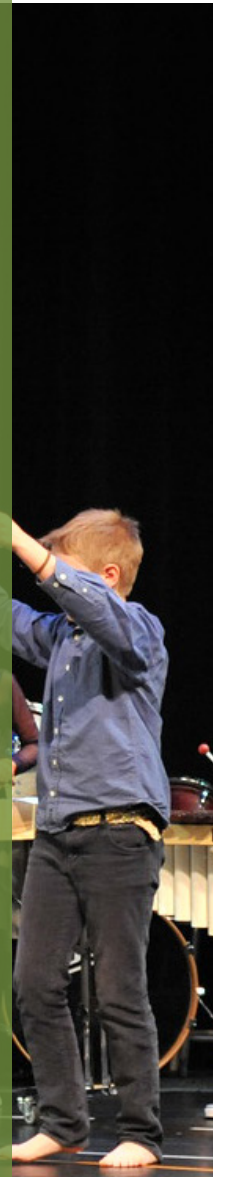




SYNERGY SCHOOL

was founded in 1973 as a teacher co-operative that would provide children of the San Francisco Bay Area a creative and diverse student-centered learning environment. To this day, Synergy remains committed to a progressive philosophy and educational model that allows students to thrive intellectually, socially, emotionally and physically. Cultural and socio-economic diversity and inclusivity are at the heart of Synergy's educational program and distinguish us from many of our peer schools in San Francisco.

The founding structure of shared leadership has fostered a strong community and an egalitarian culture. Our social justice mission is reflected in everything we do, from the experiential, differentiated instruction we provide to our school-wide Agreement System. We partner with parents to guide children in becoming engaged community members and global citizens.



“Our strategic plan is ambitious, in keeping with the strength of our founding vision. It’s about defining, strengthening and continually assessing our effectiveness as a school.”



Synergy began with a few inspired teachers, a handful of students, and some intrepid and trusting parents. Over the course of its four decades, our school has changed location multiple times, increased its student body, and gradually created the robust program we have today. Each important milestone was reached through a period of analysis and reflection.

Last fall the Board of Trustees began our latest five-year strategic planning cycle. Our 2001 strategic plan was focused on racial diversity and our 2008 strategic plan emphasized our academic program, increasing our endowment and greening our campus. To begin the next plan, we studied our current demographic and peer school context; conducted interviews with parents, teachers, staff, students, and alumni; and launched a parent satisfaction survey. Our research highlighted the many reasons families, teachers and staff choose Synergy -- and also elucidated areas for growth amid the evolving needs of students, parents, staff, and teachers.

The shifting demographics and thriving economy of the San Francisco Bay Area have changed how we must plan for the future and created challenges in:

- maintaining economic and racial diversity
- supporting families with a variety of needs regarding communications, volunteering, and extended care; and
- building and sustaining a collaborative community in a competitive atmosphere.

Our strategic plan is ambitious, in keeping with the strength of our founding vision. It’s about defining, strengthening, and continually assessing our effectiveness as a school. It’s also a chance to reaffirm our core values and our commitment to progressive education and the cooperative model. Its goals and objectives will allow us to continue to uphold our educational mission while meeting the changing needs of our community.



PROGRAM: ENSURING EXCELLENCE

Synergy has always been forward thinking about how to develop successful 21st Century learners and leaders. Students are prepared through our commitment to experiential, differentiated instruction that fosters a love of learning and teaches the skills to be a life-long learner, our well-rounded program that celebrates individuality and fosters community, our emphasis on creativity, collaboration, and empowerment to make change, and our care and attention to social and emotional development in partnership with parents.

VISION

Ensure the highest quality progressive education for every student through a system of continual improvement.

GOALS

- Articulate the vision for the program in all areas.
- Refine program evaluation to include annual assessment.
- Improve communication about program strengths, goals and improvements.
- Create a vision and plan for maintaining or increasing the size of the school in the future, and determine the implications of any planned growth for Synergy's program.

EMERGING PRIORITIES

- Describe and benchmark Synergy's Program in a way that is accessible to students, teachers, and parents.
- Develop Program Vision for the future and inform the work of the Buildings and Grounds Committee.
- Strengthen the system for program evaluation, using best practices in the wider independent schools and progressive education communities.
- Align teacher development goals and opportunities with assessed needs.
- Create a leadership role(s) to guide curriculum development, program evaluation, professional development, and communication about program. Devote resources to support and accelerate the work of the Program Committee.
- Establish opportunities for parent dialogue and education about Synergy's program.
- Explore accreditation as a way to conduct a regular comprehensive self-study and to receive objective feedback from peer schools.

"We can strengthen our program and support our teachers by engaging the best tools for curriculum evaluation as well as building a strong ongoing dialogue about educational philosophy and practice."





GOVERNANCE & LEADERSHIP: EVOLVING ROLES

Synergy's collaborative, non-hierarchical structure relies on an active practice of individual and collective responsibility. Our commitment to a socially progressive model means that leadership has to be developed in every part of the organization. Ongoing assessment will inform how roles evolve within the teacher cooperative, administrative team, parent committees and the Board of Trustees. Clarity will allow the entire community to actively support the educational mission of the school. **

VISION

Synergy's leadership and governance structures will evolve to meet the needs of an increasingly complex organization while maintaining the core values of egalitarian, cooperative governance.

GOALS

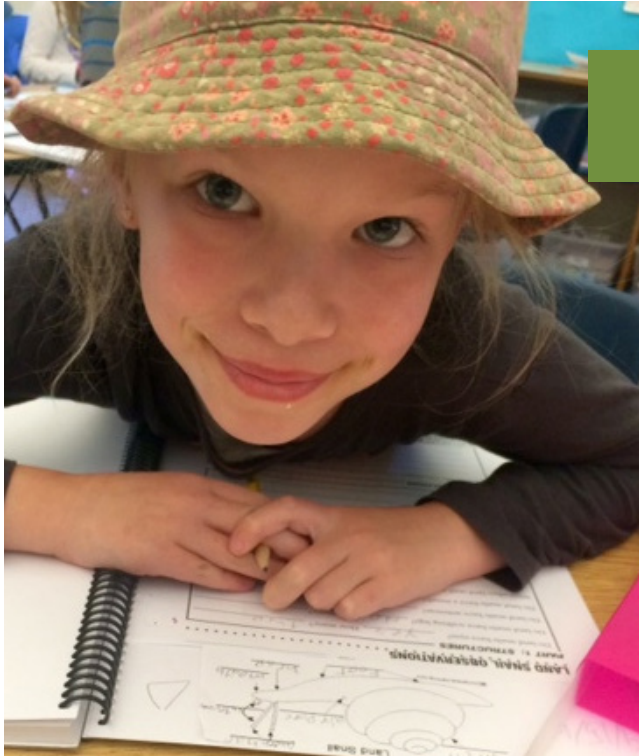
- Develop a clear and comprehensive plan for leadership and governance structures that defines areas of responsibility and accountability.
- Create a sustainable pathway for leadership development within the teacher cooperative.

EMERGING PRIORITIES

- Appoint a Board of Trustees task force to assess governance and leadership roles and develop a plan to meet the current and future needs of the school. Include:
 - co-administrator responsibilities, staffing and succession planning
 - board committees
 - parent committees
- Review the current co-administrator responsibilities and determine a reasonable, practical, and effective administrative structure.
- Complete development and implementation of co-administrator evaluation process.
- Implement leadership development program for all teachers and staff and develop a culture of enabling and supporting leadership within the school.
- Review and develop co-administrator hiring process and criteria, including timeline.
- Develop a succession plan for all leadership roles to include identifying, attracting and training candidates from inside and outside Synergy.

“Our commitment to a socially progressive model means that leadership has to be developed in every part of the organization.”





COMMUNITY: NURTURING OUR CULTURE

A treasured value at Synergy is the feeling of family and inclusivity at a small school where the teachers know every student from kindergarten through 8th grade by name. Students have cross-age relationships and there is an open door for parents in every classroom. We will nurture a diverse community by ensuring that we honor all voices and lay clear pathways for engagement.

Building a culture of philanthropy is essential to maintaining diversity and ensuring sustainability for Synergy. We have always been wise stewards of our resources, but continued affordability for a broad variety of families depends on widening our circle of supporters. We will find ways to inspire everyone in our community to participate in sustaining Synergy.

VISION

Synergy School will remain an engaged, diverse community with a philanthropic network that supports the school's mission and sustains Synergy into the future.

GOALS

- Create opportunities for engagement, discussion, community building, and mutual support that include our families, teachers and staff.
- Assess the impact of all goals and priorities on maintaining diversity and inclusivity.
- Develop a shared language that embraces the spirit of philanthropy in a diverse community.
- Build philanthropic pride and understanding of how participation is two-fold: volunteerism and financial contribution.

“Building a culture of philanthropy is essential to maintaining diversity & ensuring sustainability for Synergy.”



EMERGING PRIORITIES

- Ensure that volunteer opportunities are meaningful and enhance the life of the school.
- Ensure that community events and volunteer participation are inclusive of all families.
- Investigate in what way extended care could better meet the needs of families.
- Educate the parent community about the fiscal goals and needs of the school in a way that honors and celebrates gifts of all sizes.
- Increase the size of the average gift to the annual fund.
- Increase the number of families who give to the annual fund.



COMMUNICATIONS: ATTAINING CLARITY

Modern life in a technology-rich city offers an overwhelming amount of information. The school needs strategies for communicating relevant information to parents at the right time. Parents need clear ways to access information, give input and communicate their concerns. With a mutual understanding of what makes a truly great progressive education, Synergy's unique community of educators and parents can champion this approach in the broader community.

VISION

Synergy will effectively communicate both internally and externally in order to build community and create partnerships.

GOALS

- Design a communications strategy that deepens understanding of the philosophy of progressive education, the educational program at Synergy, and the classroom experience.
- Clarify the leadership structure of a teachers' cooperative, the role of co-administrators, and the role of the Board of Trustees so that the entire community of parents, students, teachers and staff are informed, aligned and supported.
- Ensure that communications with the San Francisco Bay Area education community showcase our unique and distinguishing qualities.

"The school needs strategies for communicating relevant information to parents at the right time."

EMERGING PRIORITIES

- Audit, update and streamline the current methods for communicating with current and prospective families: the website, social media, mail, email, blogs, face-to-face, and telephone.
- Review and amend written documentation on the cooperative structure.
- Conduct an annual community survey to identify trends, areas of strength and areas for growth with regards to program, communications, strategic initiatives and community. Supplement survey information with focus groups when needed.
- Establish communication norms, guidelines and practices between parents and the school that facilitate dialogue and clarity.
- Audit, update and streamline newsletters, admissions and marketing materials to ensure consistency with the mission, educational philosophy and core values of the school.
- Explore the current perceptions of Synergy in the Bay Area community to ensure consistency with the actual program and practices.
- Network with like-minded schools and educators in the area and serve as a model for progressive educational practices and cooperative leadership models.





TEACHERS & STAFF: SUPPORTING OUR BACKBONE

Teachers at Synergy assume complex and demanding roles as members of a teacher cooperative. Non-teaching positions are essential, yet lean at Synergy. We need to evaluate compensation, professional development pathways, and workload to ensure the sustainability of our teachers and staff.

VISION

Synergy will be a model for teacher-led schools. Our systems and structures will be adapted to sustain Synergy's mission into the future.

GOALS

- Ensure that all teachers and staff feel supported in fulfilling their role and that their families are a valued part of the school community.
- Adopt a compensation structure that reflects the high level of commitment and responsibility required by the cooperative structure and preserves the core value of equity.
- Develop an accelerated cycle of professional evaluation for all teachers and staff and facilitate professional development opportunities.
- Ensure that we will continue to attract and retain talented teachers who will enrich and develop our educational vision.
- Create a plan to ensure that we are able to attract and retain people in staff and administrative roles.
- Evaluate whether current staffing level is sufficient in order to successfully execute the teaching and non-teaching responsibilities of the school.

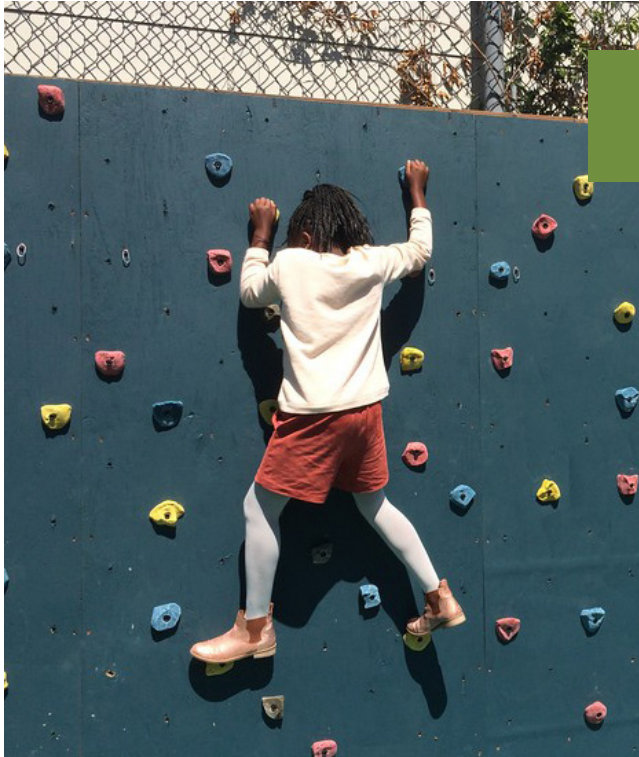
“Synergy will be a model for teacher-led schools.”



EMERGING PRIORITIES

- Evaluate salary and benefits structure for adequacy and fairness. Modify in a way that is affordable and sustainable.
- Review the responsibilities and compensation structure of teachers, co-administrators and staff at peer schools to inform this process.
- Conduct a comprehensive review of the workload of co-administrators and non-teaching staff to determine effectiveness and sustainability of the positions. Identify gaps in areas including but not limited to program evaluation, professional evaluation and development, finance, admissions, high school counseling, development, communications, human resources and facilities management.
- Modify or add teacher and staff roles where it is necessary, appropriate and feasible. Obtain consulting services when needed.
- Devise financial strategies to help Synergy meet these goals.

CAMPUS: ADAPTING FOR THE FUTURE



“In order to adapt the campus to our current & foreseeable needs, we will assess all aspects of our facility and explore possibilities.”



Since moving to the Valencia Street site 16 years ago, Synergy’s program has developed to include more students, smaller class groupings, and a larger variety of classes. We have increased both teachers and staff without adding physical space.

While fruit trees and redwoods mature in our South Yard, we have made great strides towards sustainability and meet over 90% of our energy needs with our rooftop solar installation. We are also renovating our North Yard to better accommodate our physical education and athletics programs. In order to adapt the campus to our current and foreseeable needs, we will assess all aspects of our facility and explore possibilities. A site plan will be developed to best utilize the school’s property, resources and Mission district location.

VISION

The Synergy campus will support the robust and vibrant program, with learning spaces, community spaces and adult collaboration spaces that meet the needs of students, teachers and staff.

GOALS

- Conduct a comprehensive and holistic review of Synergy’s facilities to make the most effective, efficient and sustainable campus.
- Create a vision and plan for maintaining or increasing the size of the school in the future, and determine the implications of any planned growth for Synergy’s campus.

EMERGING PRIORITIES

- Establish a Buildings and Grounds Committee charged with the development of a campus master plan rooted in the program vision.
- Work with property lawyers, architects, developers or other industry professionals to explore potential uses of the Triangle building as well as rethinking current learning and common spaces to maximize usage and functionality.
- Conduct a feasibility study to determine the possibility of a capital campaign for campus enhancement and endowment.
- Consider ways that Synergy can utilize facilities that build on the outstanding work of the Green Committee and contribute to environmental sustainability.
- Ensure that the campus embraces and supports both the high tech and low tech needs for students, teachers and staff.



“Synergy remains committed to a progressive philosophy and educational model that allows students to thrive intellectually, socially, emotionally and physically.”



