

# SYNERGY TIMES

The newsletter of Synergy School

Winter 2015



Nisrene Kazimi with Middle School Students



## Creating Culture at Farm School

by Nisrene Kazimi, Middle School Humanities Teacher

Buzzing hummingbirds, soft sleeping bags, hot sun, sizzling bacon, howling coyotes, foggy flowers, dark night spotted with stars... These are some of this year's sensory memories of Farm School from Synergy middle school students. The week is a real journey for all students, as they cook, clean, write, swim, play games, and learn—outside their comfort zone!

This year the challenge was to create a culture based on a specific OceanSong location. Groups of

students from sixth and seventh grades were stationed at the pond, the redwoods, and Crystal Rock. First, students considered their objectives for the week. To create their culture, they needed to gather ideas from everyone in the group. Each student in the group was given a turn to lead the process.

Each group needed to address several areas: housing, way of life, power structure and government, religion and spirituality, and food  
*(continued on page 2)*

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“The week is a real journey for all students, as they cook, write, swim, and learn -- outside their comfort zone!”



*(Farm School, continued)*  
and survival.

The groups had to create a myth or creation story, an altar or small structure, and a ceremony or ritual designed to introduce the rest of the tribes to their culture. They began by exploring to learn as much as possible

previous day, students had brainstorming sessions about different aspects of culture. For religion, the key question was, “What do we believe?” To answer, “How do we eat?” students thought about the environment and the resources available at their site. Students also had to consider

On Thursday afternoon each group had the chance to show off their hard work. We were greeted with songs and music and enjoyed checking out the shelters, which ranged from a reed teepee structure in the pond group to a reinforced cave in the redwood forest. We listened to myths about coyotes, turtles, and trees, and enjoyed the humor and creativity in their retelling.

We participated in rituals and ceremonies, throwing sticks into the ravine and rocks into the pond. We learned how cultures can both adapt to and be molded by their physical space, and how stories demonstrate a group’s values.

Throughout the week, the themes of exploration, self-discovery and cooperative learning were echoed in our afternoon activities. Every day, students had an opportunity to swim or play in the trees or on the lawn. Many  
*(continued on page 3)*

“We listened to myths about coyotes, turtles, and trees, and enjoyed the humor and creativity in their retelling.”

about the environment—flora, fauna, climate, and geography. Students recorded their observations to create a group record.

Groups hiked out again to their sites on Tuesday. After recapping their discoveries from the

how to best run a community in order to answer, “How are we organized?”

Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday morning were all spent at the sites, working on developing the cultures and preparing for presentations to the larger group.



*(Farm School, continued)*

choose to go to the pond—even on the day it rained! At the pond, kids looked for newts; some enjoyed diving competitions off the dock, and others made mud pies.

Students also carved soapstone. They spent a lot of time choosing the perfect stone, cutting, carving, smoothing, shaping, and admiring the finished piece. I was impressed by the students’ persistence and the beautiful results: rings, pendants, hearts, turtles, animals, and of course, math teacher Sogolon’s favorite: just a really, really, smooth rock.

We all learned to work together in different ways. Students helped prepare the food for the group, dinner or the pancake breakfast. They learned knife skills and other kitchen basics.

Probably the most popular evening was taco night. Those who helped cut onions learned my best kitchen trick: to stop

crying, hold a piece of bread hanging from your mouth! Try it. Really.

The Night Hike is another Synergy tradition. While eighth graders used flashlights to illuminate the way for the rest

teachers, parents, and OceanSong facilitators. And big thanks to the kids, who headed home with a better understanding of each other and a strengthened ability to work together. ∞

“And thanks to the kids, who headed home with a better understanding of each other and a strengthened ability to work together.”

of the campers, we all walked up a hill and stargazed. Students had the option to hike by themselves or in small groups back to the campsite.

After packing up, we headed back to school—a little bit dirtier, a lot sleepier, but also wiser!

Thank you to everyone who made the trip possible—

Save the Date  
Grandparents &  
Special Friends Day

Friday April 22, 2015  
8:30 to 10:30 am  
at Synergy School



Sunroom teacher, Jesse Kitses with students in library



Carolyn Karis helps Zaden with iPad

## Synergy Library gets a Digital Upgrade

by Carolyn Anne Karis and Susanne DeRisi, Synergy Librarians

Synergy’s library includes a rich collection of print books—both fiction and non-fiction— but last year we concluded that it needed an upgrade. A tremendous array of databases and other online information sources are now available to students, but our library didn’t have the resources or hardware needed to effectively access them.

A spring 2013 survey of Bay Area independent schools revealed that many of our sister schools had already taken a digital leap forward. We realized that Synergy needed to catch up to adequately prepare students for high school, college, and life-long learning in the information age.

We were able to enhance the library’s digital resources thanks to the generous support of our community. The 2014 Synergy Auction Fund-a-Need raised over

\$17,000 for the library. Thank you to all who contributed. We now have a library that will meet our student’s educational needs.

The resources we purchased will support classroom

digital resources rather than simply subscribing to them.

To stretch our funding dollars further, Synergy’s librarians and library committee members selected databases that will supplement those available for

“Fund-a-Need raised over \$17,000 for the library! Thank you to all who contributed so generously.”

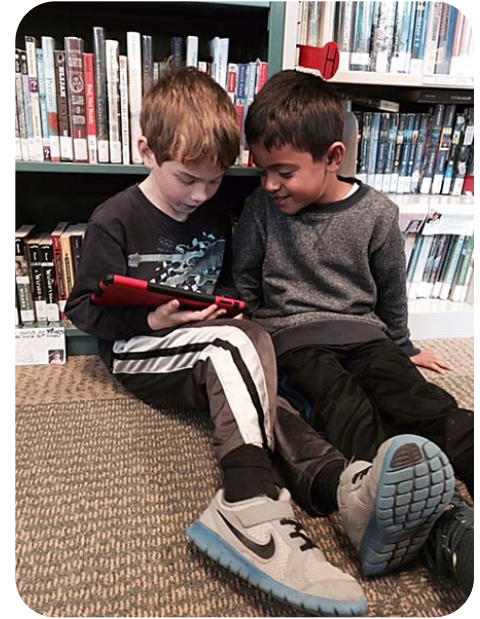
curriculum and teach students how to use digital databases. The library program has acquired access to eBooks and audio eBooks through MackinVia and StarWalk Kids Media. These two resources provide digital books for all levels, from Kindergarten through eighth grade (and some even beyond). As an added benefit, Synergy will own the

free through the San Francisco Public Library. With a library card, students can access the many digital resources available through the public library.

The first of Synergy’s new resources, PebbleGo, is for emergent readers. PebbleGo provides simple information about animals, science, social studies, *(continued on page 5)*



Students using iPads in the Synergy library



and biographies of famous people that young children can use independently. PebbleGo includes images, a “read-to-me” feature, videos and activity games.

For our historians, the library chose CultureGrams, an online database of resources in both basic and in-depth editions. Each edition accesses geographical, historical, cultural, population, and statistical information from countries and provinces around the world. The text can easily be speech-enabled.

The largest new database, eLibrary from ProQuest, includes information found in current and historical books, maps, newspapers, magazines, editor-selected websites, pictures, audio and visual clips, as well as transcripts of radio and television programs on stations like CNN and PBS.

All of the digital resources can be accessed via the Synergy Library’s Alexandra Research

catalog page from school or home.

We have also purchased four new iPads for the library. We are using the iPads to introduce the younger students to digital technology. Students in the Rainbow Room, for example, recently learned to connect to

web worksheet. Students were excited and engaged throughout their research

Thank you, again, to all who helped the Synergy School Library move into the digital age!



“The databases purchased by Synergy will support classroom curriculum and teach students how to use digital resources properly.”

PebbleGo on the iPad, navigate to the categories in the “Animal” database, and choose an animal to research. Students explored how the articles are organized to find information about an animal’s body, habitat, food, and life cycle. Then students recorded what they learned on a graphic

Visit the Synergy School website library page for more resources: [www.synergyschool.org/how\\_we\\_learn/library](http://www.synergyschool.org/how_we_learn/library)

Read our blog: [synergylibrary.wordpress.com](http://synergylibrary.wordpress.com)



## Synergy Launches Middle School Tech Camp

by Russ Curtis, Director of Technology and Tech Camp founder

How do we serve middle school students during the summer? What inspires kids aged 10-14 today? We tried to answer these questions this past summer at Synergy's first ever Tech Camp.

Beginning with week-long classes including Introduction to Coding, Robotics, Moviemaking, and Digital Photography, the

The Tech Camp fills a need for kids who typically go on to other summer camps after aging out of Synergy Summer. Many of this year's Tech Camp participants were current Synergy students, but the majority came from the local community and attended Synergy Summer in the past.

The Tech Camp team included

"It was our first summer and it was a learning experience for all of us," said Kristi, who worked at Oceana High School before coming to Synergy, and started a Robotics Club there. "The kids really wanted to make battle bots, so that's what we did and there was lots of enthusiasm and excitement." Kristi carried the tech theme into the school year: she taught Robotics as a middle school elective last fall, and plans to offer a Tinkering elective this spring.

After our successful rollout, plans are underway to expand the Tech Camp in the summer of 2015. We are considering offering the camp for six weeks and increasing the number of class subjects. Visit the Synergy website for more details. ∞

"The kids really wanted to make battle bots, so that's what we did and there was lots of enthusiasm and excitement."

camp engaged nearly 80 students over four weeks. Using the school's upstairs classrooms, the Tech Camp coexisted successfully with Synergy Summer.

middle school teachers Kristi Coale, who taught Robotics, and Nisrene Kazimi who headed Video Production. Synergy alums Ian Sicurella and David Stall worked as camp counselors.



Cathrine Sneed, founder of the Garden Project with Synergy families



## The Garden Project: Community Service Day

by Jenna Schott

*“Oh, can’t we stay longer? These little strawberries still need to be planted!”*

Synergy celebrated our Community Service Day on October 18<sup>th</sup> by getting our hands dirty, working together to weed, transplant strawberries, and harvest greens for the Garden Project, located at the San Francisco County Jail in San Bruno.

Synergy students, parents and staff, proud in our Synergy t-shirts, met at the jail on a glorious Bay Area morning. We were ferried past the jail guardhouse to the well-tended fields where we would spend the next few hours working on the land.

Our work was supervised by The Garden Project co-founder Cathrine Sneed. Cathrine, who is a Synergy alum parent and grandparent, started the project to provide young people support, skills, and work experience. In 1982, Cathrine created the County Jail

Horticulture Project, a training program for inmates. She started The Garden Project a decade later to help low-income young adults and high school students learn environmentally-based horticulture and landscaping skills. All the produce from the Project is

enthusiastically in the hot sun. Many harvested revelations as quickly as the plants: “I don’t like broccoli, but I like *this* broccoli!” said one 8-year-old. A middle school student observed, “This is really hard work! I don’t think I am going to be able to waste my broccoli

“The Garden Project is considered a model for community change across the globe.”

donated to local food pantries like Project Open Hand, which provide food to low-income Bay Area families. The Garden Project is considered a model for community change across the globe.

Throughout the day, Synergy students, parents, and staff transplanted baby strawberry plants, sifted soil, planted, and picked bags and bags of organic kale, broccoli, and chard. Kids picked

at dinner any more. It is really disrespectful.”

We gathered to share a delicious salad of chard, apples, and tomatoes, created by Synergy parents from produce picked the day before. Anthony’s Cookies provided the perfect dessert.

And when it came time for us to take our leave from the farm, the kids weren’t the only ones who were sorry to go. ∞



Students making kites for Air Day



Painting didgeridoos

## Synergy Celebrates Air

by Jessica Gentry, Learning Specialist

When Synergy staff meets in August for our vision planning and team bonding, we remind ourselves of the fundamental principles that make Synergy unique. With that in mind, we planned a school-wide “Air” theme event similar to last year’s hugely successful cross-age “Water” project.

The upstairs and downstairs classes worked together on various projects in poetry, writing, science, math, music, physical movement, art, and Spanish with the common theme of air. Our curricular goal was for students to gain a greater global awareness and sense of social responsibility about issues related to our air.

Activities ranged from explorations with stories, poetry, and music where air and wind are central; cultural practices such as yoga and tai chi that

focus on the breath; and the exploration of air’s role in climate change and conservation.

Of course, academics are what drives Synergy’s themes but we hope these activities will also help students learn to lead, share, support, and encourage all members of our school to cooperate and build our community. We strive to keep learning playful and fun, as we know how much more knowledge is gained when students are enthusiastic participants.

Check out the photos of Air Day activities online at Synergy Photos. ∞

[www.synergyphotos.smugmug.com/20142015-School-Year/Air-Day](http://www.synergyphotos.smugmug.com/20142015-School-Year/Air-Day)  
password: bestpics

## Save the Date

Synergy Auction  
Fundraiser  
Saturday  
March 14, 2015

Purchase event tickets and bid on items at our online auction from February 27 to March 17.

[www.biddingforgood.com/synergy/auction](http://www.biddingforgood.com/synergy/auction)

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Richard Lawler  
Pat Tokunaga



Synergy Board of Trustees 2014-15

## Report from the Board of Trustees

by Cynthia Louie, Board Secretary

The Board of Trustees has begun a year-long process of strategic planning inspired by design thinking. Our goal is to ensure that Synergy and its values continue to thrive.

We began in early October with a retreat facilitated by Carla Silver, the founder and executive director of Leadership+Design. Carla is an experienced independent school educator and administrator. She partners with schools on strategic design and professional development.

We are currently in an exploratory phase of the planning process, conducting research in several areas. These include program needs and assessments, community participation and communication, administrative structure and leadership in a cooperative model, and optimizing our ability to recruit and retain excellent,

committed staff. These areas are preliminary and may change, evolve, or even narrow—depending on our research.

Synergy families will be a key part of the design process as we reach out to our community to access needs. There will be many opportunities to participate, and we hope everyone will! The Board anticipates it will complete its strategic planning by the end of the school year.

### New Board Members

The Board of Trustees welcomes seven new members including Art Teacher Pam Heyda and parents Cat Gratz, Gregor Berkowitz, Jason Yurasek, Kathleen Gear, Sumi Paik, and Tony Miller. ∞



## Gifts to the Synergy Annual Fund

Thank you for your support.

We are grateful for the generosity of our donors who helped to raise \$184,000 for the Synergy Annual Fund in 2013-14. Our Board participation in Annual Fund was 100 %, and Synergy families' participation was 80%.

## Ways to Give to Synergy School

Synergy School is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and gifts are tax deductible to the extent allowed by the law. Donations are accepted in the following ways:

Mail your donation to:  
Development Office  
Synergy School  
1387 Valencia St  
San Francisco, CA 94110

Donate online or download a pledge card at [www.synergyschool.org/giving](http://www.synergyschool.org/giving)

Gifts of appreciated securities are gladly accepted. For more information, please contact Liz McDonald at 415 567-6177 or [liz@synergyschool.org](mailto:liz@synergyschool.org)

Many employers have a matching gift program that allows an employee's gift to be matched by 1:1. Ask your employer about their matching gift guidelines.

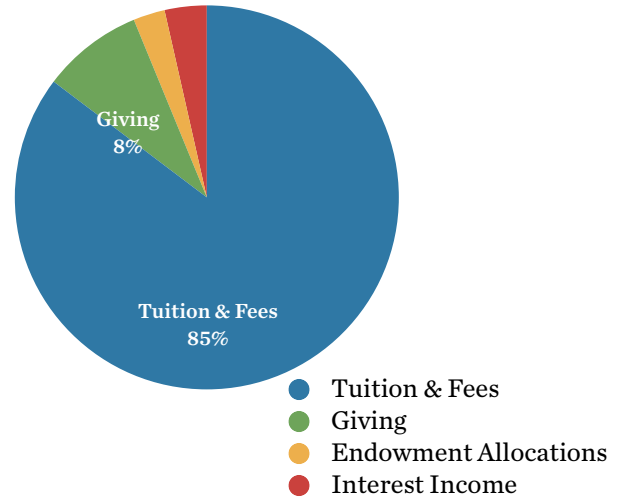
For more information about including Synergy School in your estate plans, please contact Liz McDonald.

# Financial Report

Fiscal Year September 1, 2013 - August 31, 2014

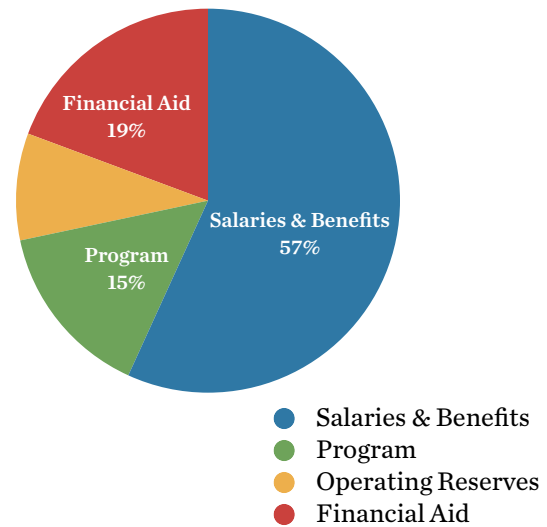
Income	
Tuition & Fees	3,261,245
Giving	324,724
Endowment Allocations	102,000
Interest Income	135,381
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,823,350</b>

## Income



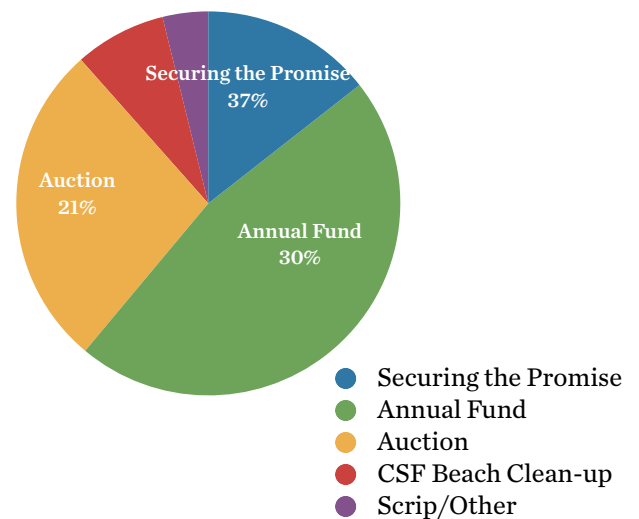
Expenses	
Salaries & Benefits	2,172,048
Program	568,280
Operating Reserves	344,162
Financial Aid	738,860
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,823,350</b>

## Expenses



Giving	
Securing the Promise	56,900
Annual Fund	184,000
Auction	108,000
CSF Beach Clean-up	30,390
Scrip/Other	15,150
<b>Total</b>	<b>394,440</b>

## Giving



# Gifts to the Annual Fund

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We are grateful for the generosity of our donors who helped to raise **\$184,000** for the Synergy Annual Fund in 2013-14. Thank you for your support.

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 Clorox Company Foundation  
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 Echo Springs Transition Study Center, Inc.  
 Google Matching Gift Program  
 Genentech  
 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.  
 Messing Family Charitable Foundation  
 Onecause  
 Oracle Corporation  
 Sales Force.com Foundation  
 St. Francis Lutheran Church  
 Schools Mentoring and Resource Team  
 The Swig Foundation  
 Wells Fargo Community Support Campaign

## Class of 2014 Gift

Thank you to the parents of the class of 2014 for directing their class gift of \$2014 to the Endowment. This tradition started with the class of 2008 and has continued every year as the Eighth Grade Class Gift at graduation. Their gift will be a part of Synergy forever and help provide the Synergy experience for generations of students and their families.

## In Honor/Memory Gifts

Ruta Allen in honor of Annabel & Sanders Tillitt  
 Marilyn Bancel & Rik Myslewski in honor of Tammy Damon & Elena Dillon  
 Susan Caston in honor of Ebie Schweizer's graduation from USF  
 Patricia S. Dinner in honor of Steve Grand-Jean  
 Noel & Terry Hefty in honor of Russ Messing & Arlene Naschke  
 Benjamin Heldfond in honor of Steve Grand-Jean  
 Carolyn Zecca Ferris in honor of Steve Grand-Jean  
 Abby Lehrman in memory of Cheryl Meyer  
 Bonnie Mackenzie and Art Tressler in memory of Gladys Alice Mackenzie  
 Carol & David Magnuson in honor of Leila & Kenan Magnuson  
 Alan Markle in loving memory of Dr. Joan Campagna  
 Jake Messing in honor of Wilma Messing and Helen Naschke  
 Ruth Mortenson in memory of Grandpa Mortenson  
 Carole S. Pertofsky in honor of Russ Messing, Jill Goffstein Stocks and Katherine Czesak  
 The Swig Foundation in honor of Steve Grand-Jean  
 Helen Wood in honor of Tammy Damon & Elena Dillon  
 Diane Zacher and Howard Gelman in memory of Eli Golvin-Klein

Donors who made gifts to the school between September 1, 2013 and August 31, 2014 are listed in this annual report. We have tried to provide accurate and complete information for this report. Our apologies for any names omitted or listed incorrectly. Please contact the Director of Development, Liz McDonald, to correct any records.

**Thank you for your generous support!**

# Securing the Promise 40th Anniversary Campaign

## Gifts and Pledges to the Campaign

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 Sogolon Best & Nicole Branch  
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 Ilsa and Tony Miller  
 Judy and Paul Minton  
 Melanie Moore  
 Ruth and Ed Mortenson  
 Elizabeth Murdock & Paul Cort  
 Carey Myslewski & Katy Yan  
 Nisha Nanda & Peter Monks  
 Mike and Penney Odell  
 Andrea Palash & Jessica Watson  
 Greg Pennington & Linda Parker  
 Carole Pertofsky  
 Joan Pettijohn  
 Robert Redlinger & Michelle Hecht  
 Diane Robbins  
 Teresa and Carlos Rodriguez  
 Jason Rohwer  
 Anne Rosenthal & Maggie Jones  
 Rio Roth-Barreiro  
 Jessica Roybal  
 Anne Salisbury & Jules Steimnitz  
 Risa Sandler  
 Robert Schmitt  
 Paul Schumer  
 Lois Scott & Bernie Choden  
 Alys & Dan Shin  
 Shonni Silverberg & John Shapiro  
 Jane and Tom Singer  
 Christopher Slagle  
 Rob Tan & Richard Smith  
 Sonya and Melvin Smith  
 Lissa Soep & Chas Edwards  
 Mohan Srinivas  
 Tiffany Tai  
 Edward and Heather Taylor  
 Steven Terlecki  
 Lisa Thorpe & Jack Dowling  
 Shannon Thyne & Christopher Benitez

Candice and Russell Tillitt  
 Joseph Timonere  
 Pat Tokunaga & Jeff Moad  
 Samantha Tripodi & Matt Rolandson  
 Jill and John Walsh  
 David Wang  
 Julia Ward & Adam Savage  
 Wendy Werby  
 Kevin White & Annamarie Faro  
 Carolyn Wilson Koerschen & William New  
 Helen Wood  
 Jinoos Yazdany & Arash Anoshiravani  
 Diane Zacher & Howard Gelman

## In Honor/Memory Gifts

### In honor of Tammy Damon & Elena Dillon

Cheryl Barth & Tom McCurdie  
 Molly Burke & Mike Valan  
 David Gast  
 Katrina and Michael Krantz  
 Marcia & John Kreidler  
 Alexis Limberakis  
 Carey Myslewski & Katy Yan  
 Carole S. Pertofsky  
 Rio Roth-Barreiro  
 Anne Salisbury & Jules Steimnitz  
 Lisa Thorpe & Jack Dowling  
 Helen Wood  
 Carolyn Wilson Koerschen & William New  
 Diane Zacher & Howard Gelman

### In honor of Russ Messing & Arlene Naschke

Nancy and Keith Anding  
 Noel and Terry Hefty  
 Leslee and Lewis Levey

Jane and Tom Singer  
 Jill and John Walsh

Consuela Faust & Thor Anderson in honor of Madeleine and Thea Anderson  
 Alison Kim & Christiane Medina in honor of Isa & Gabriel

Susan Mizner in honor of Tanva Baker  
 Ruth and Ed Mortenson in honor of Rolf, Aline & Anabella

Jonathan Palash-Mizner in honor of Tanya Baker

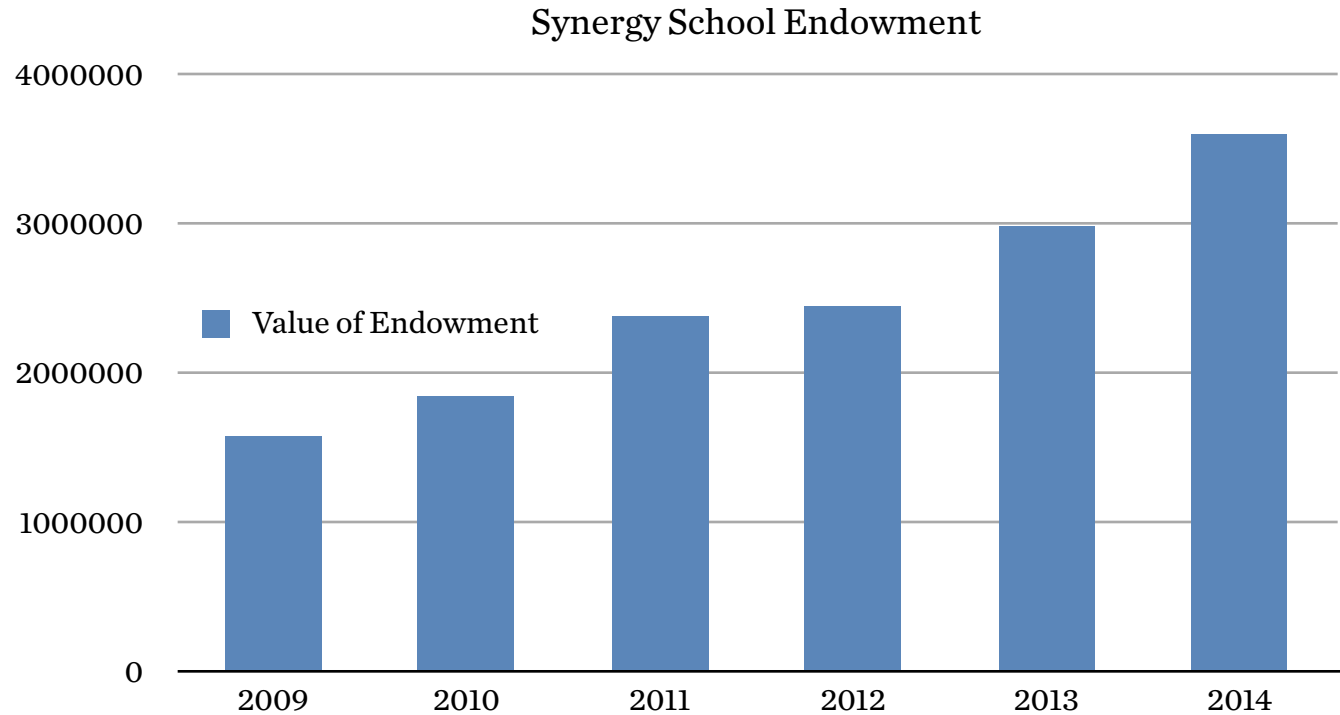
Carole Pertofsky in honor of Russ, Katherine & Jill

Diane Robbins in memory of Charles Robbins  
 Robert Schmitt in honor of Elizabeth Russell & Russ Curtis

Upcoming	February	March	April
<p>Here are the schedule highlights for the quarter. For a more detailed schedule, please see our calendar at <a href="http://www.synergyschool.org/calendar">www.synergyschool.org/calendar</a></p>	<p><b>6</b> Brown Bag Party for the Homeless</p>	<p><b>6</b> Lunar New Year Celebration</p>	<p><b>2</b> Spring Concert</p>
	<p><b>22-28</b> 8th Grade Trip to Costa Rica</p>	<p><b>14</b> Totally Awesome 80's Auction &amp; Raffle</p>	<p><b>16</b> Kindergarten Play</p>
	<p><b>24-27</b> Snow Trip to Claire Tappan Lodge</p>	<p><b>25</b> Science Fair</p>	<p><b>24</b> Grandparents &amp; Special Friends Day</p>

## Securing the Promise: Synergy Endowment Growth

Synergy School launched the **Securing the Promise—40th Anniversary Campaign** in 2011 to double our endowment and ensure a Synergy education for future generations. Our endowment is now valued at \$3.8 million.



Return Service Requested

## Mission Statement

Synergy Times is published twice a year by the Development Office of Synergy School. Feedback and story ideas are welcome. Editors: Jenna Schott, Liz McDonald, Connie Matthiessen  
Photography: Russ Curtis, Annie Aguirre

The mission of Synergy School is to provide a quality education by empowering children to flourish academically, to blossom as individuals, and to become self-confident, creative learners.

Synergy School was founded in 1973 and is a non-profit teacher cooperative, wherein students, parents, and teachers cooperate together to further a rewarding education for each child. We are a vibrant, diverse community with 190 students in kindergarten through eighth grade located in San Francisco's Mission District.

## Synergy Annual Fund



## Every Gift Counts

The Annual Fund helps to bridge the gap between tuition and the actual cost of educating a student at Synergy School for a full year.

The support we receive from our community of parents, friends, alumni and grandparents helps Synergy to maintain the strength of our program while keeping our tuition affordable and offering financial aid more than a third of our community.

Every gift counts. Donate online at [www.synergyschool.org/giving](http://www.synergyschool.org/giving)

If you have any questions about donations, please contact Liz McDonald, Director of Development, at [liz@synergyschool.org](mailto:liz@synergyschool.org).

**Thank you for your support!**