

# SYNERGY TIMES

The newsletter of Synergy School

Winter 2016



Engineering: students design and test the ability of their structures to withstand seismic waves on shake tables.



## Synergy Science with Kristi

by Connie Matthiessen, Alumna Parent

Making and tinkering come naturally to middle school science teacher Kristi Coale. Her grandmother was a seamstress and a pattern maker, and her mother taught Kristi to sew. Her father, an aerospace engineer, was very handy, and insisted that Kristi learn how to fix things too.

When she got her first car, a '74 Honda Civic, in high school, her father made her take the engine apart and put it back together again. "My dad wasn't going to send a girl out into the

world not knowing anything about cars," she says. "When I met my husband, I knew a lot more about cars than he did." Kristi cooks, bakes, brews beer, and makes pickles. Recently, she and her two sons built an omnicycle robot that plays soccer.

In the two years since Kristi started at Synergy, her hands-on approach to life has shaped the middle school science curriculum. Her robotics and tinkering classes are popular *(continued on page 2)*

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"I think it's a time when kids either get turned on or they tune out. I wanted to be there to help them tune in."



Middle Science Teacher Kristi Coale working with students.



*(Synergy Science, continued)*

electives. She recently purchased a 3D cutter (or mill) for the science classroom that students will be able to use to etch circuit boards and carve other 3D shapes. Her classes include a large dose of traditional science

research, and environmental problems at the Chevron plant in Richmond, for example. She loved being a journalist, and was developing a daily show at KALW when her mother became gravely ill. After her mother's death, something changed. "I realized I

realized I wanted to be more involved." She spent some time volunteering at one of her sons' schools and really enjoyed it. "I'd also mentored younger journalists at KALW and I realized that I really liked working with young people," she recalls.

So she went back to school to get a teaching certificate. After student teaching at Visitation Valley Middle School, she got her first teaching job at Oceana High School in Pacifica. At Oceana, where she taught for three years, she started a robotics club. She loved her students at Oceana, many of whom she still sees. When she heard about the job as Synergy's science teacher, she decided to apply. "I always thought I wanted to teach high school, but one of my teachers told me that working in middle school made him a better teacher. I think that's because in middle school you have to push  
*(continued on page 3)*

"I really like to see kids try things and make mistakes – I tell kids that being wrong is part of the learning process."

too, of course, from rat dissection to participation in the annual science fair.

Before becoming a teacher, Kristi worked at Wired, the Center for Investigative Reporting, and public radio station KALW, among other news organizations. Much of her journalism had a scientific spin: she reported on subjects like genetic engineering, stem cell

didn't have that fire in the belly for what I was doing," she recalls. "When I woke up in the morning I just didn't want to go to work. I'd never felt that way before."

It took her a while to get her bearings after her mother's death. She knew she wanted to do something different but didn't know what. "As a journalist you are always detached, writing about other people doing things. I



*(Synergy Science, continued)*  
kids more. They are going through puberty, and so much is happening at once. I think it's a time when kids either get turned on or they tune out. I

Institute for middle and high school math and science teachers, and still attends regular professional development workshops there.

“My goal is to help kids find something about the natural world that makes them excited.”

wanted to be there to help them tune in.”

Teaching middle school also appealed to her, she says, because by high school, “Kids are focused on grades and see learning as to an end, versus just being curious about the world. I really like to see kids try things and make mistakes – I tell kids that being wrong is part of the learning process.”

Before she started at Synergy, Kristi attended the Exploratorium’s Teacher

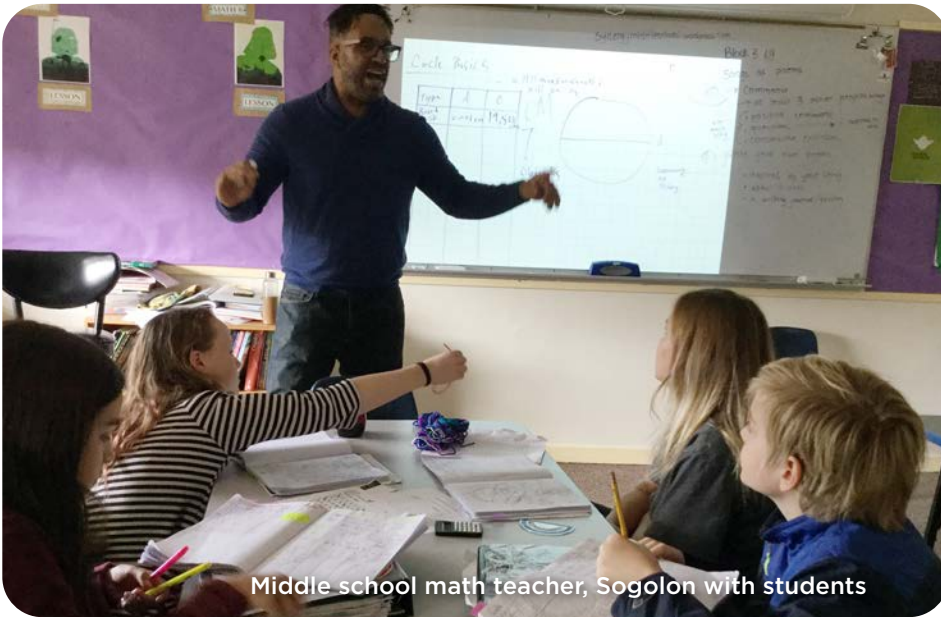
Asked to describe her goals as a teacher, Kristi said, “I love to see kids get excited about learning. My goal is to help kids find something about the natural world that makes them excited. Some kids get excited about engineering and building; for some kids it’s dissection, for some kids it’s the earthquake project we did. I want every kid to find at least one thing they’re excited about.” ∞



## Save the Date Grandparents & Special Friends Day

Friday April 15, 2016  
8:30 - 10:30 am  
at Synergy School





Middle school math teacher, Sogolon with students



## Math Night at Synergy

by Connie Matthiessen, Alumna Parent

Two students sat in tiny chairs at the front of the classroom as third grade teacher Teresa taught a math lesson. The goal was to learn the multiples of 13, and the two students vied with each other to give the correct answers. When Teresa erased all the sums and invited the whole class to join in, the other students called out the answers in eager sing-song voices.

The occasion was Synergy's first ever "Math Night," a presentation for parents who wanted to learn more about the school's math program. The two pumped up students at the front of the classroom were Synergy dads; all their classmates were parents as well.

The evening started with a slideshow presentation describing Synergy's math program, and how it has changed in recent years. During the 2010-11 school year, Synergy

teachers began attending "Making Math Real" professional development courses. Making Math Real, a multi-sensory, comprehensive program aligned to state standards, is sequential,

"It's not about getting the right answer, it's about the strategy you use to get there."

breaking down all basic math content into its concrete elements, while moving all instruction gradually to the abstract. New concepts are added by grade so students learn a common language that is consistent as they gradually master more complex skills. In addition, Synergy has revised and updated its K-8 math

curriculum maps, created a new classroom space for downstairs math classes, and started using an online math program called Mathspace for grades 5 through 8.

There has also been a significant change in Synergy's middle school math program in recent years, as teachers concluded that mixed grade math classes weren't meeting all students' needs. As of 2013-14, all middle school math classes are exclusively single grade, and  
*(continued on page 5)*



*(Math Night, continued)*

students learn in smaller groups.

After the slideshow, a parent asked for a summary of Synergy’s math philosophy. “We want kids to learn math fluency and critical thinking,” Tanya replied. “We want kids to feel comfortable with math, and to gain a deep understanding of math concepts. It’s not about getting the right answer, it’s about the strategy you use to get there. So we’ll ask kids to explain the strategy they used, versus the answer they got. This is murder for kids, especially at first. They want to give you that right answer!” ∞

## Read the Synergy Times online!

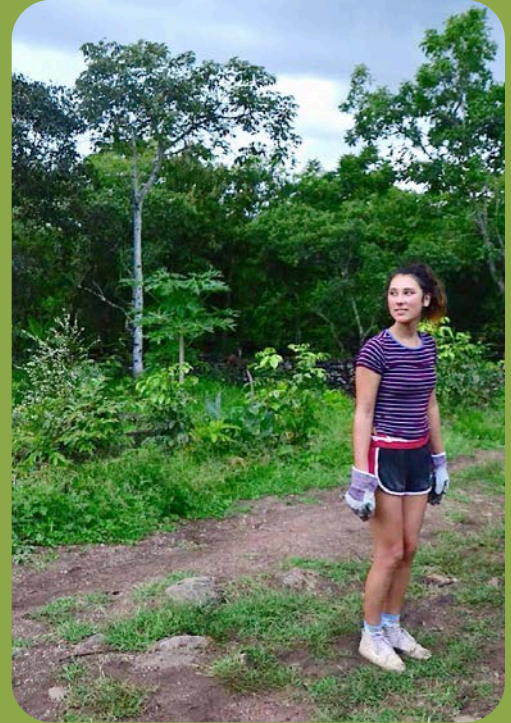
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## Alumni News

2011 alumna Kate Yachuk decided to throw caution to the wind and step outside her comfort zone to attend LIU Global (formerly known as Global College). The program, now affiliated with Long Island University (LIU) was started by the Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) community 50 years ago as a social justice program and has since developed into an experiential program, with academic coursework

based in the classroom and supported by field-based independent research projects, local involvement and internships with various organizations. The emphasis is on cultural studies, arts, language, development and sustainability issues, and international relations.

Kate was drawn to the small size of the program and the hope that she would develop close relationships with her teachers, in the way that she did at Synergy. Kate considers the program a “Synergy-version” of college. “My experiences at farm school and Puerto Rico helped prepare me for the challenges of a less-traditional college



program. Looking back at what I learned from Synergy I realize that I totally get my passion for social justice and equality from Synergy, while opened my eyes to people who don’t have the same opportunities as me,” she says.

Kate is currently living with a host family in Heredia, Costa Rica and has just returned from Nicaragua, where the students studied the impacts of the Contra War, sustainability and working conditions of farmers in the tobacco plantations that are a large export crop and they also volunteered at a local school, helping them establish a garden. Kate is loving her experience at LIU Global.



## Eighth Grade Service Learning Trip

by Lexie Schwartz and Ian Hunte-Doyle, Middle School Students

The skies were always blue and the sun was always shining. We were always surrounded by green, and there were always friendly people to wave back at us.

One of the most interesting things on our trip was seeing the similarities/differences in a country separate from America.

directions in Costa Rica. On two occasions, we visited farms. Both of the farms were self-sustaining, as are many other farms in Costa Rica. The first farm we visited had animals, sugarcane, and fruit. We tried at least four different types of lemons and other sour fruits, including one sneaky one that looked just like a sweet mandarin. The highlight?

poop. They were truly sustainable: the farm harvested the natural gas for their kitchen from the cow's poop! In Costa Rica people really do put their available resources to use. It's really different from America, where we take so much for granted.

One of the more negative things I noticed were the drastic changes in small spaces—in one place, you'd have a dilapidated house, and the next building over would be a nice hotel, repeating multiple times in the space of one block.

Most of the community service we did was cleaning up the site we were at. We re-paved and made new paths, we cleaned out fish ponds, we helped to make cement, and finished a fountain. We got a lot of opportunities to speak to people in Spanish. On Thursday, we used the lessons we *(continued on page 6)*

“It was really exciting and fun to connect with the kids, especially since we were using something as significant as the language we speak to bond.”

Costa Rica is different from America in many ways, but alike in many others. In Costa Rica, there's an air of approachability that you don't have here. To put it more simply, it would be easier to just go up to someone and ask for

Puppies. The second farm was amazing as well, albeit gross - the animals there weren't as varied, they were mostly farm animals: cows, goats, etc. The “gross” part about the farm was their generation of natural gas. It was



*(Costa Rica, continued)*

made before the trip to help teach a group of 5th graders how to speak English. Using animals, colors and a mix of the two, we taught the kids in a large group

people, but once we got the hang of it we started to have more fun. All of us danced with at least one person who we didn't know, which was actually really exciting. It was interesting to

how Spanish is actually spoken outside of the textbook. All in all, Costa Rica was an amazing experience. It didn't matter whether you had traveled or not before, I think it's safe to say we speak for everyone when we say it was great. Going to Costa Rica was such an amazing experience for us and many of us long to go back some day. ∞

“We learned how to Cha-cha and how to Salsa...It was interesting to learn a new dance and really brought us all together.”

and then individually in a “centers” type of activity. It was really exciting and fun to connect with the kids, especially since we were using something as significant as the language we speak to bond.

We also got to learn how to dance in Costa Rica. We learned how to Cha-cha and how to Salsa, among a few other dances that were taught to us. At first it was really uncomfortable for some

learn a new dance and really brought us all together.

While speaking Spanish did get a little awkward on occasion, it was extremely beneficial for our learning. Being in a country that speaks predominantly Spanish helps to teach you certain local phrases, and in our case, it helped a lot of people construct sentences faster. Hearing other people constantly speaking helped us understand





## The Hard Yard Transformation

by Esmé Krummel, Synergy middle school student

Over the summer of 2015, the outdated and unsafe “Hard Yard” (sports yard) at Synergy School was replaced by a safer, upgraded, multipurpose sports yard. Unlike Synergy’s old Hard Yard, this new yard allows our various teams (such as volleyball and basketball) to host home games.

Our old Hard Yard simply consisted of a concrete lot with faded hand-painted lines and two rusted basketball hoops. Kids that were simply passing through or eating their lunches were constantly in danger of being hit with flying balls because there wasn’t anywhere in the Hard Yard that was shielded from the main court. There were hard walls and gates that kids would run into and get hurt. Injuries happened daily on this yard, and that’s why many teachers and kids felt the need to update it.

In the fall of 2014, Melvin Smith (the middle school P.E. teacher) organized a small group of middle schoolers to work on a video that they hoped would fundraise for the long overdue new yard.

After months and months of planning, filming, and debating, a video was formed. This video included a short skit, some interviews, and a clip of entire school expressing their need for a new yard in a loud cheer.

“For the first time in forever, our Synergy team had a home court and a beautiful, supportive audience that made our team feel special.”

“We started this whole project in November of last year with a group of fourteen kids who started thinking of ways to improve the yard not only for recess but also for physical education. So we came up with a concept of a video in which we showed some of the hazards of the yard,” Melvin said.

This video was shown at the Synergy School Annual Auction of 2015 with the hopes that the parents there would give donations for the new yard. Their goal was to raise at least \$20,000 dollars, but they ended up raising over \$43,000!

The improved Hard Yard is a  
*(continued on page 8)*



*(Hard Yard, continued)*

much safer environment than the old Hard Yard. Pads were installed on all walls, which significantly decreases the injuries people obtained by running into the old hard walls. There are now railings surrounding the the sports area,

home volleyball games, and soon, home basketball games! Another big upgrade to the yard was a rock climbing wall, which is popular among many of the younger kids.

On October 15, 2015, Synergy hosted its first ever home

hardest, which is all that mattered to them in the end. In previous years the school's sports teams were using Noe Valley Rec Center as their meeting place and home court. This was an inconvenience for the team and for the coaches because it was difficult to schedule practice and game times. It's much more convenient for them to practice at the school.

"For the first time in forever, our Synergy team had a home court and a beautiful, supportive audience that made our team feel special." Tomi Osawa, a seventh grade girl on Synergy's volleyball team, explained. Many people like Tomi are very happy with the yard and with the volleyball that they played this season.

This yard is a great addition to Synergy School. Feel free to look on the Wednesday Word for upcoming home games, or come over and check it out! ∞

"Although the team didn't win, everyone tried their hardest, which is all that mattered to them in the end."

which provides a safe area to those who just want to sit on the sidelines to watch, eat, and hang out.

The school now has a volleyball net that can be stored under the yard, some properly positioned basketball nets, overhead lights, and bold court lines which can be used for a variety of activities. These allowed us to have our first ever

volleyball game on the new court. It was an exciting game with a very enthusiastic and supportive crowd. The game was played against the Lycée Français de San Francisco School. The After School staff, students, and Kristi Coale (the Synergy's volleyball coach), were all there to cheer on the team. Although the team didn't win, everyone tried their



## 2020 Vision for Synergy's Future

by Rea Inglesias, Skylights Teacher

Our latest 5-year strategic plan, *A Vision for 2020*, was just released to our community. This plan is about defining, strengthening, and continually assessing our effectiveness as a school. It also reaffirms our core values, our commitment to progressive education and the cooperative model. Just like our founding vision, our plan is ambitious and exciting!

The process we undertook in developing this plan was multifaceted. Throughout the 2014-2015 school year, the Synergy Board of Trustees engaged in the process of developing the plan. First we examined our accomplishments and where we were in relation to our last plan. We got grounded in Synergy's mission and looked at the ways we need to adapt to change.

With the guidance of a facilitator skilled in design thinking, the board formed teams to explore and research topics they identified in a day-long workshop in fall of 2014. Areas of focus included 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 faculty and staff.

During the research phase, many interviews were conducted with faculty and staff, current parents and Trustees, alumni students and parents, and current students. In addition, 145 people responded to the Synergy Family Survey. When asked to give three words that describe Synergy, the most

common responses were "safe," "community," "diverse," and "progressive," with "warm" and "fun" not far behind.

At a February 2015 meeting, the teams shared their findings, started brainstorming solutions, and began crafting what should go into the plan – the ideation phase. The plan was written in the spring and an overview was presented at the April State of the School parent meeting. At our first meeting of this school year, the plan was approved by the Board of Trustees.

In starting to implement the goals set out in our plan, new Task Forces were formed to augment the work of the teacher cooperative and existing committees such as Diversity, Finance and Development. One group is looking short- and long-term at our building and

*(Strategic Plan, continued)*

another group is investigating the possible benefits of various types of accreditation, and others are working on leadership, communications and supporting our teachers and staff.

We have already had great response from parents who want to get involved in some of the initiatives and lend their expertise. As we further define Synergy's future and what sustainability means for a school in San Francisco at this point in time, it will truly take a community effort to move forward in a way that meets our

## Class of 2015

This year's eighth grade class was accepted to a wide range of public, parochial, charter and independent high schools. Our graduates can now be found at:

Archbishop Riordan High School  
Jefferson High School  
Lick Wilmerding High School  
Lowell High School  
Menlo Atherton High School  
Ruth Asawa School of the Arts  
Sacred Heart Cathedral  
San Francisco Waldorf  
The Bay School  
The Urban School  
Westmoor High School

community's needs and upholds our educational mission. We invite you to read the plan on our website at [www.synergyschool.org/home/strategic\\_plan](http://www.synergyschool.org/home/strategic_plan). We'd appreciate your emailed questions and comments to [trustees@synergyschool.org](mailto:trustees@synergyschool.org). ∞

## Class of 2011

Congratulations to our 2011 alumni, who will matriculate at the following schools:

Bennington College  
California State Northridge  
Cardiff University  
Chapman University  
Duke University  
Laney Community College  
Lewis and Clark College  
Long Island University Global  
New York University  
San Francisco State University  
Santa Rosa Junior College  
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## Gifts to the Synergy Annual Fund

Thank you for your support.

We are grateful for the generosity of our donors who helped to raise \$211,000 for the Synergy Annual Fund in 2014-15. Our Board participation in Annual Fund was 100 %, and Synergy families' participation was 97%.

## 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.

# Securing the Promise 40th Anniversary Campaign

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 Derek Rosenfield & Jenna Schott  
 Anne Rosenthal & Maggie Jones  
 Jessica Roybal  
 Maria Sanchez & Domagoj Vucic  
 Paul Schumer  
 Suzanne & Lonny Schwartz  
 Danya & Con Shegoleff  
 Jeannette Shereda & Matt Frantz  
 Alys & Dan Shin  
 Catherine Singstad & Seth Dickerman  
 Jennifer & Eric Steinle  
 Jackie Sung & Josh Polsky  
 Mie & Mikkel Svane  
 Jessica Sweedler & Chris Colwick  
 Rabab Tawfik & Marc Garvey  
 Shannon Thyne & Christopher Benitez  
 Candice & Russell Tillitt  
 Rena Tom & Derek Linder  
 Kristy Troup & David Hoare  
 Thaa Walker & Michael Susor  
 Laura Jo Wegman & Donovan Corliss  
 Frances White & Steve Oddo  
 Tanichya & Nat Wongprasert  
 Danielle & Robert Wrixon  
 Brenda Yang and Kevin Tsurutome  
 Yanling Zou and Martin Llamas

## Staff & Former Staff

Deirdre Devine & Al Indelicato  
 Doug Kim-Brown  
 Carolyn Karis  
 Natham Mellado  
 Charmaine Stavedahl & Bruce Jancin  
 Liza Thorpe & Jack Dowling  
 Diana Wild  
 Carolyn Wilson Koerschen & William New

## Alumni & Alumni Parents

Madeleine Anderson  
 Janet Arnesty & John Good  
 Marilyn Bancel & Rik Myslewski  
 Sara Bartholomew & Peter Good  
 Carol & Michael Blecker  
 Kathy Brennessel  
 Robert Carr & Andrea LoPinto  
 Eugene Cash & Pamela Weiss  
 Susan Caston  
 Alice Chan  
 Debbie & Steve Dells  
 Ronan & Patty Dunlop  
 David Emanuel & Maria Wamsley  
 Krista Farey & Vishwanath Lingappa  
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 Heidi Howell  
 Gail Fratar Kessler  
 Abby Lehrman  
 Paul Linde & Laurie Schultz  
 Constance Matthiessen  
 Alison Kim & Christiane Medina  
 Jessica & Eric Metoyer  
 Jessica Minton  
 Judy & Paul Minton  
 Carey Myslewski & Katy Yan  
 Dunja & Jeffrey Solari  
 Sally & Patrick Stull  
 Edward & Heather Taylor  
 Julia Ward & Adam Savage  
 Kevin White & Annamarie Faro  
 Helen Wood  
 Diane Zacher & Howard Gelman

## Grandparents

Ruta Allen  
 Rena Bransten  
 Vija Burgelis  
 Nathaniel & Jeri Clayton  
 Jay & Alicia Crawford

Alison DaRosa & Jim Miller  
 Joan Fleming  
 George & Anne Grady  
 Carmen Hall  
 Jean Hall  
 Sue Hill  
 Stuart Hyde  
 Ets & Eddie Kanenaga  
 Rachel Kline  
 Elaine Krantz  
 Bonnie MacKenzie & Art Tressler  
 Richard Mead  
 Rebecca Miller & Leo Mize  
 Margaret Mirande  
 Ruth Mortenson  
 Sheila & Jack Nichols  
 Saul Rosenfield & Rob Marks  
 James Shelby  
 Norman & Judy Soep

## Friends

Frances Bowes  
 Kathleen & Greg Cartine  
 Larry Chazen  
 Patricia S. Dinner  
 David Gast  
 Steve Grand-Jean  
 Glenn Greenberg  
 Beverly Hines  
 Gerald Hurwitz & Susan Borkin  
 Noah Hurwitz  
 Olivia Joelle  
 Ellen Joy  
 Leslee & Lewis Levey  
 May Lim & Ciff Frey  
 Alan Markle  
 Tessa McDonald  
 Jeanne Messing Walsh  
 Ali Naschke-Messing  
 Noel & Terry Hefty  
 John Schulz D.D.S.  
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 Sandra Valle  
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 PhilanthroPal Foundation  
 The Swig Foundation  
 Wells Fargo Community Support Campaign

## In Honor/Memory Gifts

Ruta Allen in honor of Annabel & Sanders Tillitt  
 Vija Burgelis in honor of Evan Miller  
 Susan Caston in memory of Michael Schweizer  
 Greg & Kathleen Cartine in honor of Katherine Czesak  
 Stuart Hyde in memory of Allie Hyde  
 Abby Lehrman in memory of Cheryl Meyer  
 Connie Matthiessen and Aidan, Dylan, and Julia Weir in memory of Eli Golvin-Klein  
 Diana Morris Wild in honor of Carloyn Karis  
 Helen Wood in honor of Tammy Damon  
 Diane Zacher & Howard Gleman in memory of Eli Golvin-Klein

We are grateful for the generosity of our donors who helped to raise **\$211,000** for the Synergy Annual Fund in 2014-15. Thank you for your support.

Donors who made gifts to the school between September 1, 2014 and August 31, 2015 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!**

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: 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!**