

SYNERGY TIMES

The Newsletter of Synergy School

Winter 2019



Mahala Bundy at 8th Grade Graduation



Fund-a-Need for the Big Room

by Mahala Bundy, Synergy Retired Music Teacher

In the space of a week, every Synergy student takes classes in the Big Room. From the moment our doors open for morning care until the last child is picked up at 6:00 pm, the room hums with activity. Our 2017 auction Fund-a-Need raised \$46,500 for performing arts and technological improvements to the Big Room, and our 2018 auction raised another \$42,200 for music. If you donated to these tandem causes, thank you!

When we moved into 1387 Valencia Street in the Fall of 1999,

the former mortuary chapel seemed like a cathedral. Going on twenty years later, the Big Room no longer seems quite so large — music and drama have grown from small potatoes to a bushel and peck. With these new funds, our plans for the Big Room advanced from talk to action. Here is where we started and how we are spending the money.

Memory Lane

Our Big Room evolved as a well-tended but unplanned garden. We solved unforeseen problems as they cropped up—in Synergy DIY

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“Going on twenty years later, the Big Room is well broken in, no longer seems quite so large, and is overdue for a physical and technological overhaul.”



Music Teachers Kim McClain and Sam Heminger



Mahala Bundy, Spring Concert

fashion. Early on, I used up two hand-me-down home stereo systems, and MS dances blew woofers and tweeters on three pairs of old speakers. I nailed old blankets to the ceiling moulding to control sound. Alum parents Dan Matarozzi and Richard Lawler each made a generation of platforms that became our stage and choral risers. We shared stage flats with our music teacher friends at the SF School, ferrying them back and forth twice a year and forgetting at whose school they were last stored.

For stage lighting, we used hardware store clamp lamps and cast off theater lights supplied by alum parents Lyn Shimizu and later, Chad Kubo. We rolled out a projector cart trailing extension cords and showed movies. Tech committee member Jeff Cross installed our wall speakers with 2012 fund a need money. I laugh now, but every idea

and little improvement helped us.

Our most important modification happened three years after moving in: acoustic panels cover the upper walls and run the length of the ceiling, complemented by carpets. With the exception of fixed cabinets designed for instruments and sound system, we have kept furniture movable. Music classes and extended care slide in and out of each other's way every day. For crowded events we have to empty and reconfigure the room.

Tech Vision

When Russ Curtis came on staff, we started a broader media plan. We are still using a donated amplifier that dates from the '80s, but we have a multi-media sound board. Parents Rem and Jill Hoffman donated a real video screen, and a SMART Board provides a quick screen for use in classes and after school.

Where the Money has Gone

This past spring, we started to spend our new funds. With new technology options, our goals for the Big Room are essentially the same as when we moved in. The space must be versatile and easily transformed. Jana, Sam, Russ, and I put our heads together, divided up the research and decisions, and got to work.

Stage/Risers

Our new Wenger platforms will break down and store in a compact rolling rack. This should be a big space benefit to after school and day programs. Out went the big black boxes and risers! They served us well. We kept the cubes, ramps, and steps built by current performing arts committee members Christian Dauer and Maggie Jones. They will combine with our new pieces.

Stage Lighting



Mahala Bundy with students at Spring Concert



We started on a stage lighting plan in spring of 2017, but it took a year to arrive at the right solution. Our vision was to install the trusses on the ceiling and hang our lights, adjusting them via ladder as needed toward a stage. We anticipated significant electrical and structural work. Holzmueller Productions, our supplier and contractor, proposed the alternative of portable lighting trees and, after consideration, we decided that this was the best way to go. It allows greater flexibility in experimenting with our set up. With the LEDs we selected, they don't get hot and use a fraction of the power. Holzmueller delivered the stage and light equipment in December in time for our Holiday Choir Concert. Jana, Sam, Kim, and Russ received training on set up and use of the light board.

Video Projector

We now have a projector powerful enough to reach the

length of the Big Room. For now, it is installed in the "Romeo," the storage loft that once housed the mortuary organ.

Instruments

For our 2018 Fund-a-Need, the marquis items were a vibraphone, a marimba, and a full scale glockenspiel. Students in our music program grow up playing the "Orff instruments"—xylophones, metallophones, and glockenspiels specially designed for classroom use.

They are well made and sound beautiful, but middle school students should know the professional versions of these instruments and that their mallet skills can transfer to high school band or orchestra. We had to special order these instruments to have them tuned to A 440 pitch standard. The Fall Creek glockenspiel arrived at the beginning of the school year; we expect the Adams vibraphone

and marimba in before Spring Concert. We also upgraded our drum set components.

The Future

We have held back a portion of funds for Sam and Kim to use as they continue to develop the music program and to make adjustments to our light and stage purchases. To do list items include a new stereo amplifier, a large movie screen, movable/student accessible storage for instruments, and ceiling mounted projector.

It makes me a little sad not to teach with the new instruments or work on the forth-fifth grade plays with grown-up equipment. But I am happy for Jana, Sam, and Kim; and I will be satisfied with my seat in the audience. ∞



8th Students on Ropes Course at Fort Miley



Rites of Passage: 8th Grade Ropes Course

by Jessica Schott-Rosenfield, Class of 2018

At the end of May, the eighth grade class took a trip to the Presidio and spent the day on the Fort Miley Adventure Challenge Course. The rites of passage program builds teamwork and bonds the students together. They set goals, practice leadership, and build trust in one another.

We arrived in the morning at Fort Miley located in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area in Northwestern San Francisco. We knew that this wouldn't be a Farm School experience. We began our day with a few trust falls and team games. We then received helmets and proceeded to brave a metal tightrope together, which was a staggering feat off the ground.

Eventually, we suited up in harnesses, to begin the real ropes course, around 200 feet in the air. Our activities included more tightropes, various balancing courses, jumping from a very tall pole, and lastly, the zip-line.

The point of the ropes course activity, the course leaders assured us, was to support each other during these activities, and use trust to get over our fears. I had never been on a ropes course and it was reassuring to have my friends cheering me on. One of the sections of the course was particularly difficult, but a great opportunity for teamwork. Two people began at different sides of a tightrope, each holding a long rope, which would stretch the distance of the metal cord. Each person walked towards the other, holding onto their respective ropes, and when they reached the middle, they had to step across each other. Falling wasn't something to be afraid of, because the harnesses were safe, and we knew what to expect from our partners, so we could thoroughly enjoy the challenges.

The ropes course is usually done at the beginning of the year, at Farm School, to bond the class, but we didn't have it then this year. We bonded instead over our Farm School trip as a whole, the production of our play, and our trip to Costa Rica. By the time we came to this rite of passage, we were already pros at teamwork and trust. This helped us throughout the course, because we already knew each other well enough to know what kind of encouragement would work for each individual. As a whole, the trip did not do for us what it has done in the past. We didn't make our first bond, we reaffirmed every one that we had made in the past year. ∞



Update from the Board of Trustees

by Cynthia Louie, Administrative Coordinator

We wanted to share with you the work we've done in the 2017-18 school year on the Strategic Plan, in particular, in the areas of communications and a master plan. After a year of brainstorming, revisiting core values, and many months of discussions, we are excited to unveil Synergy School's new mission statement:

“Our mission is to nurture the intellectual, creative, and emotional potential of every child in a community dedicated to diversity, inclusion, and social justice.”

The goal of the new mission is to more clearly and concisely communicate what we do and the importance we place on the whole child and our commitment to social justice. Beginning this past summer, the new language was incorporated in our marketing and development materials as well as the website.

Other strategic plan goals this past year included taking the first steps toward developing a master plan to address the need for more space and better use of our existing space. In the spring, we hired an architect who will work with the Buildings & Grounds task force on a plan to engage the community in this process, with the goal of completing the master plan during the 2018-2019 school year.

Another area of focus included an exploration of accreditation. Following a year of research into several accrediting agencies, trustees decided not to pursue it. The primary reason is that these organizations would require Synergy to eliminate the teacher co-op model and to hire a head of school, fundamentally changing who we are. The exploration into accreditation began as a means

of program evaluation, but we found that their evaluation measures parallel our own. In the area of teacher and staff sustainability, the Board implemented its new salary structure to better attract and retain talented teachers and administrative staff members. The salary schedule proved valuable as the co-op hired five new teachers for the 2018-19 school year.

Finally, we thank those of you who attended our Meet the Board events this past spring. We plan to hold them again in spring, so stay tuned for details. As always, we welcome your questions or feedback to trustees@synergyschool.org. ∞



Gay Men's Chorus Performing at Synergy



Gay Men's Chorus: A Conversation with 7th and 8th Grade

By Kelley White, Synergy Parent

After the chorus closed their performance with the most beautiful and inspiring mash-up of Cyndi Lauper's "True Colors" and Sara Bareilles' "Brave," most of the students were dismissed. The sixth and seventh grade students were invited to stay and chat with the chorus members. Everyone mingled for a bit, and then they settled in for a question and answer session. The questions, which students had submitted ahead of time, were wide-ranging. Chorus members took turns answering the questions that felt most relevant to them.

Students were interested in what it's like to be in the chorus. They wanted to know how much the chorus rehearses, what kind of commitment the chorus requires of its members, and what the members take from the experience. The

chorus members explained that they rehearse three hours a week, from 7-10pm on Monday

you love and support and make you feel like you're home.

One student asked about

"Chorus members took turns answering the students' questions that felt most relevant to them."

nights, and they start working on their holiday music in August. All the chorus members agreed that to be in the chorus, it's a lot to balance and requires a real commitment, but the effort is worth it. Not only is the chorus a place where you can be yourself and sing your heart out, but when you become a member, you join a big family of about 300 brothers who offer

other ways that chorus members engage in activism and advocate for the LGBTQIA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, and asexual or allied) community. We heard from one member who has spent years working to build strong community centers. Another member talked about how, in 1996, he adopted his son with his then-



Middle Students with Gay Men's Chorus

partner. They were the first gay couple to adopt jointly in New York state. Another chorus member, Andy, talked about how he is a trans-man married to a straight man. Andy married his husband before he transitioned, and their marriage endures. Andy has been doing interviews to demystify their relationship and help other people see it as normal.

Students also wanted to know about the Gay Men's Chorus itself. Members explained it was created forty years ago, in 1978, during a time when there were laws being passed that, for example, prevented any openly gay person from being employed as a teacher. As the political movement against such laws started to gain momentum, gay and lesbian people began to feel heard and represented. This was the time that the chorus was born, and at

the first rehearsal, 100 people came to sing after seeing fliers that had been posted in the Castro. A few months after that first rehearsal, Supervisor Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone were assassinated. The Gay Men's Chorus' first performance was at the vigil held at City Hall on November 27, 1978. Currently, the Gay Men's Chorus members are exclusively people who identify as male or nonbinary, but membership could change in the future.

The chorus closed the session talking about what all the colors in the pride rainbow flag symbolize. They also encouraged the students to remember that anyone who does the art they love and works hard makes an impact, regardless of whether they're on television or are big stars. ∞

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4/5 Farm School: Exploring Nature at River's Bend

by Susanne DeRisi, Synergy Librarian and Synergy Parent

Synergy's 4th and 5th graders reveled in the cold, clear waters of the Navarro River and slept beneath the bright, starry skies for an entire school week. The occasion was Farm School, an annual outdoor education trip.

Bend, particularly the great weather and spending time at the river swimming, skipping rocks, and catching tiny frogs.

Our Farm School schedule was packed from morning to

Inglesis' Botany class! Afternoon choice activities included swimming in the river, weaving basket shaker instruments with parent Elsu Martin, creating collage art, and weaving yarn. Everyone took turns preparing meals, serving food, and cleaning. The large, sunny kitchen was a hub of activity for parents and teachers who helped coordinate eager prep crews, servers, and dishwashers. Parent Marcin Kowanetz, who spent the entire week at Farm School, was particularly impressed with the students, "It was great to see how independent the kids can actually be. I think the kids learned how to appreciate and respect nature."

The kids took full advantage of the large campus to spread out and have fun during the

"4th and 5th graders reveled in the cold, clear waters of the Navarro River and slept beneath the bright, starry skies..."

This was the students' first time at a new location, River's Bend Retreat Center in Anderson Valley, Mendocino County. This was also the last Farm School trip for retiring teacher Joan Pettijohn.

Although we miss the old Ocean Song campsite, there is much to love about River's

night with classes, activities, cooking & cleaning duties, and evening events. Teachers led morning classes in Botany, Poetry, Tile Mosaics, and Ecosystems. One student remarked, red-faced, that she "learned more than [she] wanted to know about plant reproduction" in teacher Rea



Students Working on Mosaics



Hiking in Hendy Woods

downtime between organized activities. Students could be found practicing skits on the bell deck, singing along with parent Julian Gross and his guitar, playing on the basketball court, hanging out on the play structure, or running around the lawns. One student said what he enjoyed most was, “spending time with friends playing basketball and throwing the frisbee”.

Our special evening events included relay races, the Rites of Spring celebration, hiking the Nature Discovery Trail loop at dusk, the Talent Show, and roasting marshmallows for S’mores. At night, students slept in shared tents that they pitched themselves at the edge of the meadow. A chorus of frogs and the sound of the running river serenaded weary heads to sleep.

On Thursday, instead of classes, we drove to Hendy Woods State Park for a hike

through a grove of towering, old-growth coastal redwoods. Teacher Rea reflected that, “it was special to be able to share Hendy Woods with the kids.”

School, the 6/7 camping trip, and culminating in the 8th grade trip abroad.

Research on outdoor education programs show that

“Students shared that their favorite part of the week was climbing the ancient, fallen redwoods in Hendy Woods.”

Several students shared that their favorite part of the week was climbing the ancient, fallen redwoods in the park. Our hike weaved through dense redwoods, some of them up 300 feet tall and 1,000 years old, and we stopped along the way to learn about their amazing biology.

At Synergy School, outdoor education is both a tradition and critical to our curriculum, starting with the K-3 Camping Trip, continuing with 4/5 Farm School, Middle School Farm

they increase students’ academic performance, are associated with better physical and mental health, support social-emotional and behavioral development, have a positive effect on environmental attitudes, and increase parent involvement in school. Most of all, learning outdoors is really fun for both students and teachers! For me, it was a joy to experience being outdoors with the students and learning about the natural world around us. ∞



Nayeli Rodriguez with Tanya Baker at Graduation



8th Grade Graduation Speech

by Nayeli Rodriguez and Jessica Schott-Rosenfield, Class of 2018

Friendship

Nayeli: This is our class. The class of 2018. I've have made many friends throughout the years I have been here. My group of friends has grown to so many more people than I ever thought it would. That is one of the beautiful things about Synergy. It presents opportunities for us to stretch out of our comfort zones, and makes the connections necessary for lifelong changes to our character. Whether it was playing the same character in a play, shopping at Costco together for Farm School groceries, or being in a bus for 10 hours, Synergy always bought us closer together.

Jessica: I'd like to take a moment to speak about the girls' varsity futsal team of this year, and our prestigious record-breaking

accomplishment of zero games won. We would have loved to win a few games, or one, but after they were over, it wasn't that which mattered. Our group of girls was bonded through the games we played, not the games we won, and the ever enthusiastic support our coach gave us.

Synergy

Nayeli: Synergy is the weirdest place ever to get an education, but that's a good thing. I have learned and done things I would never have thought I would experience anywhere else. For example, who would make me sleep all alone in the wilderness? Who plans adventures for the 8th grade to do after hours? Where else would my class and I be able to write our own play that doesn't make any sense? Synergy. What is a waveout? Synergy knows. Who has raised all of us

to be the smart independent people we are? Synergy.

Jessica: We, as a class, are very proud of the time we have spent here, and we are also very proud to be one of the last classes who will remember our founders, and many of the oldest Synergy traditions. Harvest Day at Deergnaw and holiday art are only some of the cherished memories we have of the old Synergy. And those who came in fifth or sixth grade will be able to hold memories of Farm School and Costa Rica. I believe that at Synergy, tradition, and rites of passage will never fade. They build community and support of our peers. I learned that in past years at Farm School, the papier-mâché masks, which are crafted every year, were images of each student's spirit animal. Although this years masks did not take the form of animals,

Tech Visioning

On a Saturday morning this Fall, more than 20 Synergy parents and staff met to tackle the age old question of school technology: Where to next?

Using design thinking the participants came up with some great ideas helping build a roadmap to guide Synergy. This will help plan the next five years of technology integration.

This meeting was long overdue. The last meeting was in 2011 before a full time Director of Technology position was created. The first meeting was in 2006 when Synergy was just in its tech infancy. And the iPhone had yet to be created.

A very big thank you to Kai Haley, parent to Zev and Viviana, who helped structure and moderate this successful visioning meeting.

The final report will be presented to the Board of Trustees in 2019.

*by Russ Curtis,
Director of Technology*



Jessica Schott-Rosenfield with Mahala Bundy

they clearly represented each student's personality.

Nayeli: Synergy creates these traditions to help the students discover who we are and who we might become. Through these traditions, we learned about those who would teach us for many years to come. The bond that Synergy lets us form with our teachers makes it so much easier to learn because you are learning from someone that's your friend. Synergy had taught me so much about community and caring for everyone around you. They've taught me about the meaning of family and supporting each other. Synergy is place that leads by love, and one of the most important things I will need that Synergy taught me is how to love. We all love each other, from the teachers to the students, and with this love we have become such a strong community and such a great team.

Jessica: There are a handful of people in this class who have been at Synergy since we were

babies. We knew many of our teachers before they taught us, and we were hiding in lobbies before we had backpacks to hang up. Synergy lets children not only learn, but teach others as well, because of the wide range of ages which are bonded together as a community. Having alumni return, and having babies sitting on your lap is a big part of Synergy's philosophy. We've literally grown up at Synergy, so if anything went wrong with us, it's on you all.

Memories

Nayeli: Throughout these 9 years, Synergy is a place which is filled with memories. During Midnight Madness, we went through each room and talked together about what we remembered from our years here, and for every year, the memories all of a sudden came back. We remembered in kindergarten the games we would play in the little plastic kitchen and the first friendships. In first grade, we remembered the egg shaped chair, our



Synergy Teacher Jesse Kitses with 8th Grade Graduates

crushes, and Antonio dancing on tables saying, “No teacher party!”. In second grade, the paperboy story that Jesse would read every year, and then tell us his childhood experience as a paperboy, and doing our projects like Global Village, and making volcanoes.

Jessica: We did this in every room, and for every grade until we reached middle school, when this group of people came to be. Dominic told us in our sixth grade year that the three years we would spend there would go by so fast. And he was right, they did. He also told us that throughout those years we would have moments. We all made fun of him for that, but it’s true, we did. I don’t know if the moments we had were the ones he was thinking of, but we will remember them for quite a long time. For instance, on those ten hour bus rides in Costa Rica, we made a concoction of the various foods we had purchased at a store called Super Snacks. We also

formed a religion around a hammock.

Nayeli: At Farm School, we bonded over everyone’s mutual love of kazoos, at which time the musical stylings of Biggie E and Biggie C were born. We’ve made a million memories, and are still able to recall each one. It’s really surreal that we are graduating, because many of us have been here for 8-10 years. It feels like I am leaving home in a way, or being sent off to college. Synergy is changing, and becoming something new, and we are glad to be graduating with the spirit of the old Synergy with us.

Jessica: On a closing note, we’d like to thank all of our teachers, and the staff here who helped us get to where we are now. We have been very lucky to learn from every one of you. ∞

Congratulations!

Class of 2018

Last year’s eighth grade class was accepted to a wide range of public, parochial, charter and independent high schools:

Abraham Lincoln High School
 The College Preparatory School
 Drew School
 Gateway
 Immaculate Conception Academy
 Jewish Community
 Lick-Wilmerding High School
 Lowell High School
 Mid-Peninsula
 Mission High School
 Redwood High School
 Ruth Asawa School of the Arts
 Sacred Heart Cathedral
 Preparatory
 St. Ignatius College Preparatory
 George Washington High School

Class of 2014

Our 2014 alumni will matriculate to the following schools:

California State University Chico
 Chapman University
 City College of San Francisco
 Colorado College
 Menlo College
 Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design
 San Diego State University
 San Francisco State University
 Scripps College
 Seattle University
 Smith College
 University of Arizona
 University of California Santa Cruz
 University of Puget Sound
 University of Southern California



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Thank you for your support.

We are grateful for the generosity of our donors who helped to raise \$327,600 for the Synergy Annual Fund in 2017-18. Our Board participation in the Annual Fund was 100 %, and Synergy families' participation was 94%.

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1387 Valencia St
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In Honor/Memory

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Fund-a-Need

Thank you our donors for your donations the Music Program and Performing Arts Fund-a-Need. With your support, we raised \$42,200

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Donors who made gifts to the school between September 1, 2018 and August 31, 2019 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.



Synergy School

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Mission Statement

Synergy Times is published twice a year by the Development Office of Synergy School. Feedback and story ideas are welcome. Editors: Cynthia Louie, Liz McDonald, and Talia Uribe
Photography: Russ Curtis, Liz McDonald,

Our mission is to nurture the intellectual, creative, and emotional potential of every child in a community dedicated to diversity, inclusion, and social justice.

Synergy School was founded in 1973 and is a non-profit educational 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



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 to more than a third of our community.

Every gift counts. Donate online at www.synergyschool.org/giving

Every Gift Counts

If you have any questions about donations, please contact Liz McDonald, Director of Development, at liz@synergyschool.org.

Thank you for your support!