



**synapse  
school**



**2017-18  
Annual Report**





*I love Synapse because it is a place where people can learn the way brains were built to learn: with others, with their hands, with their feet, with their hearts, and their whole self. [Director of Performing Arts]*

*You cannot teach today the same way you did yesterday to prepare students for tomorrow.*  
—John Dewey

Synapse exists to make a positive difference in the world. We believe in our mission and values now, more than ever before. Our purpose—educating change makers—is real. It energizes all that we do with our students, our staff, and our parents. The higher the purpose, the greater the energy. Spend one day at Synapse and you'll feel our sense of purpose.

In this report, our second annual update, you will see how our passion and purpose manifested itself this year. Synapse worked towards its strategic goals, engaging with our neighbors and the broad world of education. We were free to expand our impact beyond our front door thanks to the generosity of our parent body.

We built connections with our neighbors in the North Fair Oaks community. We presented our program at education and innovation conferences from Hawaii to Atlanta. We partnered with Peninsula Bridge to extend the outreach of our financial aid program. For the first time this year's annual change maker, Dolores Huerta, visited our Interactive Lab, inspiring all of us to find ways to transform our communities into places of compassion.

Your support has allowed us to focus squarely on our vision and our most important ideas have flourished. We invested resources into financial aid, our innovation and maker programs, mission-based professional development, and most important, our people. We were able to support and celebrate our dedicated teachers and staff. We showed gratitude for the people and the place we love that inspire us every day.

We could not make an impact of this magnitude without your help. Your passion for our school and your commitment to our purpose will continue to change lives for years to come. And for that I am deeply grateful.

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Jim Eagen, Head of School

# ADMISSIONS & FINANCIAL AID

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jim Eagen  
Anabel Jensen, PhD  
Raja Kapadia  
Jennifer Kitt  
Damian Marhefka  
Ann McCormick  
George McCown  
Karen Stone McCown  
Mary "Pecky" Peters  
Joan Rossi  
Russell Rydell

## MISSION

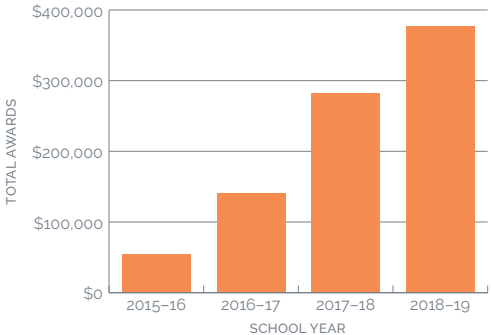
Synapse School combines social-emotional learning, leading-edge academics, and the practice of innovation to develop gifted learners into the change makers of tomorrow.

Synapse admissions attracts families up and down the San Francisco Bay Area peninsula. Our admissions team processed a record number of applications all the while maintaining our personalized and authentic approach to assessing applicant student and family fit. We reached enrollment of 255 students for the 2018–2019 school year.

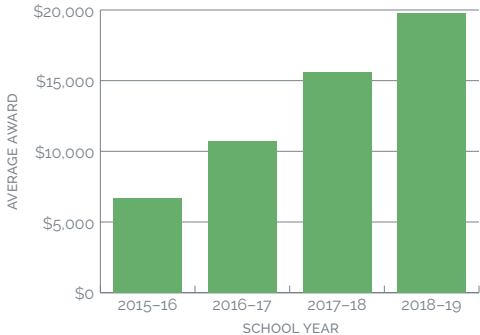
We also had our largest graduating class to date, moving on to a wide range of independent, boarding, charter and public high schools throughout the Bay Area and beyond. This year, the average award for financial aid was increased by 27% and our overall financial aid budget increased by 34%. Increasing aid to new and current families resulted in expanded accessibility for a more diverse group of tomorrow's change makers.

We extended our outreach in the area of diversity by partnering with Peninsula Bridge—a program that transforms the lives of highly motivated, low-income students by preparing them for academic success. The investment of our donors makes it possible for our young school to increase in *diversity*.

Financial Aid Awards 2015–2019



Average Financial Aid Award 2015–2019

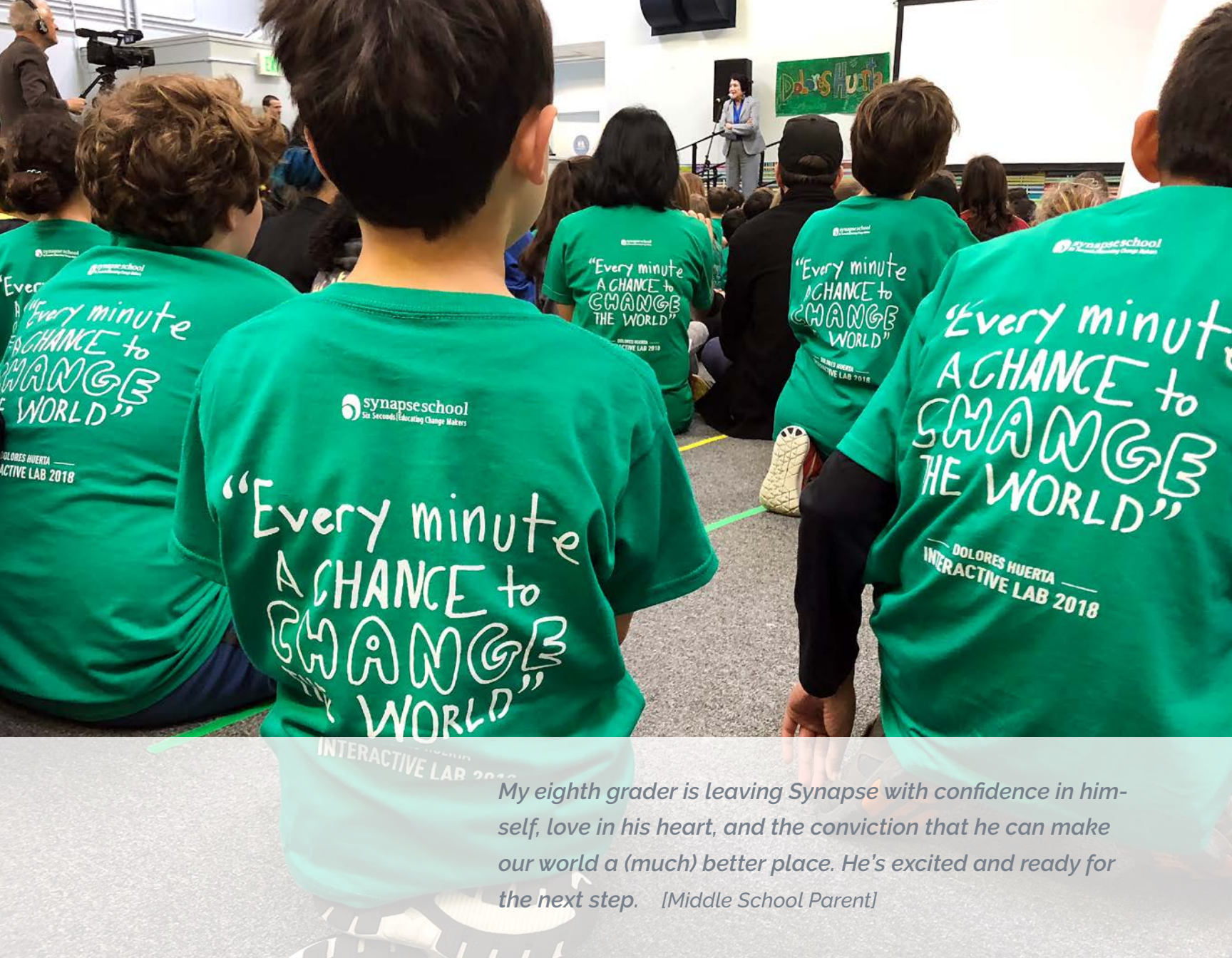






*I know that my teacher challenges me to do  
harder problems because she believes in me.  
[Level 2 Student]*





*My eighth grader is leaving Synapse with confidence in himself, love in his heart, and the conviction that he can make our world a (much) better place. He's excited and ready for the next step. [Middle School Parent]*

## PROGRAM IMPACT

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Synapse takes a mission-driven approach to teacher professional development. All Synapse staff are trained in Project Based Learning by the Buck Institute, Emotional Intelligence by Six Seconds, and Design Thinking by IDEO. Teachers are funded to attend workshops and conferences. Staff provide professional development to others by presenting at conferences across the country, including the NAIS conference in Atlanta. Finally, Synapse attracted visitors from 15 different schools from around the world who came to learn from our innovative approach to teaching and learning.

### INTERACTIVE LAB

For our annual Interactive Lab, students transformed our school with exhibits, many hands-on, to share with our community. It was a showcase that highlighted the process of student learning at Synapse and featured our annual theme of Transformation and our change maker, Dolores Huerta, who joined us in person! We were humbled by her words of wisdom, passion, and lively spirit. Dolores spoke to students, taught us to hula dance, toured student work while asking poignant questions, and then spoke to our parents. We ended the day feeling inspired and motivated to be change makers!

### CHANGE MAKER LAB

At Synapse, we have established a community-driven maker culture, inspired by empathy, which brings together cross-disciplinary and collaborative problem-solving. Synapse has developed two Maker Spaces for students, staff and parents to experience innovation through MAKING! Our Mini Change Maker Space offers opportunities to create using glue guns, paint and recycled materials. The larger Change Maker Space offers more advanced opportunities using power tools, wood, 3D printers, laser cutters, sewing machines and more. Both spaces are modular and flexible.

Josh Rothhaas and Katie Richmond, founders of Project Ember, joined us this year to train teachers and students and to build out the Change Maker Space. With their guidance, Middle School teachers and students prototyped unbelievable projects!

### CHANGE MAKER PROTOTYPES

**The following are just some of the projects that took advantage of our Change Maker Lab:**

- **Grades 5–8: American Ninja Warrior obstacles for physics in STEAM**
- **STEAM Elective Projects: furniture building, skateboard design, museum exhibits, musical theater sets, and more!**
- **Visual Arts & Design: Gen Z Sculpture Garden**
- **Grades 5/6: Writer's Workshop play props**
- **Grades 5/6: SI prototypes to solve social issues**
- **Grades 7/8: STEAM Transformation of Agricultural Technology prototypes**





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all-school Nature Days



24

graduating 8th graders  
in 2018



255

enrolled students 2018–2019







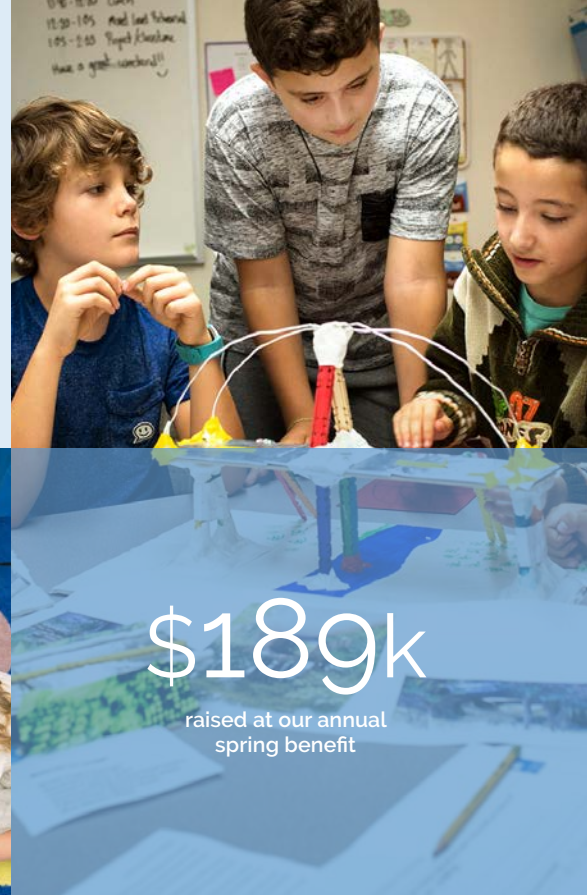
# 5600

books in school library



# 100%

annual fund participation



# \$189k

raised at our annual  
spring benefit



*Members of our community have several ways to participate philanthropically. Every gift to Synapse School is essential to the growth and vitality of our school. As we reflect on the 2017–2018 school year, this report outlines the gifts you have made to Synapse. We are grateful for your generosity and thank you for your incredible support!*

**Lena Chane,**  
**Director of**  
**Advancement**

## FUNDRAISING ACTIVITIES

**Thank you!** We are so grateful to have such an engaged and supportive community. Community members have several ways to support our school philanthropically.

### ANNUAL FUND

The Annual Fund that fuels the engine of our school program represents the largest source of non-tuition revenue for the school and is the backbone of our fundraising efforts. It provides funds that sustain our exceptional program—from teacher salaries to financial assistance, supplies for classrooms to sports transportation. Synapse reached 100% participation in our 2017 Annual Fund. This is a testament to the profound support we have received from our Board, staff and parents. We want to express our deep appreciation to everyone who contributed.

### SPRING BENEFIT SUPPORTING FINANCIAL AID

Each year, the spring benefit event brings the entire community together to celebrate our special school and to raise funds to support a worthy initiative. This year's goal was to raise an additional \$125,000 towards financial aid. We believe that socio-economic diversity enriches the educational experience for all students. It is our goal that prospective families not let the cost of a Synapse education deter them from applying and that sufficient aid be available to support current families.

Our 2018 Spring Benefit "Back to the '80s" was a totally tubular success. The event was attended by over 250 Synapse community members and surpassed our goal, raising \$189,000.

### MATCHING GIFTS, GIFTS-IN-KIND, CORPORATE DONORS

Alex Chase Salon  
Amgen Foundation  
Apple  
Adobe  
Bank of America  
Chan Zuckerberg  
Initiative

ChoiceLunch  
Daniel Mancilla  
Dinner-Licious  
Gentry Magazine  
Google, Inc.  
Growfit  
Halo Blow Dry Bar

Hi-Five Sports Camp  
Hint Water  
Insight Float  
Intel  
KOOP, LLC  
Lascaux Art Academy  
Legarza Camps  
McKesson

Microsoft  
Monica Foster  
Salon  
Mountain Camp  
Woodside  
NVIDIA  
Orange Theory  
PayPal

Project Ember  
Riekes Center  
Rock Salt Pilates  
SkinSpirit  
SportsHouse  
Susie Fox Jewelry  
YogaSource





*Synapse enables students to have the ability to take a look at a problem, and say, "I'm going to fix this, right now." [8th Grade Student]*



*The most meaningful aspect of a Synapse education is teaching students to be at the center of their own learning and how to use inquiry as a tool. [Director of Innovation]*



## 2018 FINANCIALS

Synapse School ended the fiscal year with a balanced budget. Revenue sources for the school include tuition and philanthropy. Thanks to strong leadership by our Head of School, CFO and Board of Directors, expenses were carefully monitored, such that Synapse concluded the year with a surplus, which was allocated to replenish reserves. Synapse underwent its first annual financial audit for FY2017. The audit was completed with no management comments or findings.

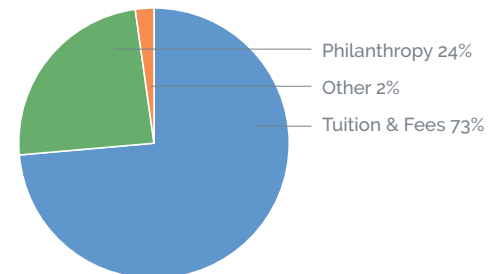
Synapse is thriving with a solid balance sheet, and the Board will continue to partner with the Head of School to preserve the financial health of the school. Thank you to our entire community for your unwavering support and generosity.

### STATEMENT OF REVENUES AND EXPENSES (For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2018)

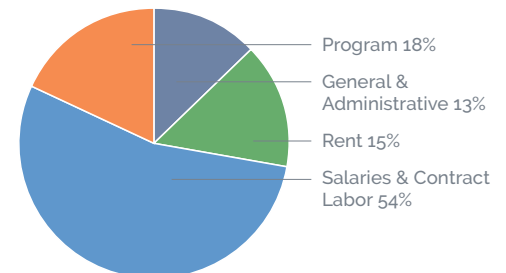
	Forecast	Expense %
<b>OPERATING REVENUE</b>		
Tuition & Fees	\$7,359,461	73%
Philanthropy*	2,453,062	24
Other	243,601	2
<b>TOTAL REVENUES</b>	<b>\$10,056,124</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>OPERATING EXPENSES</b>		
General & Administrative	\$1,152,105	13%
Rent	1,313,585	15
Salaries & Contract Labor	4,788,924	54
Program	1,540,780	18
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$8,795,394</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Revenue sources for the school include tuition and philanthropy. The school was audited for the first time based on results from the 16/17SY. That audit indicated no material weaknesses and showed the school is in good financial standing. The Head of School, Board and CFO continue to work together to strengthen the financial position of the school.

### OPERATING REVENUE



### OPERATING EXPENSES



## VOLUNTEERISM

Synapse could not function without the dedication of our parent volunteers. We are so grateful to all of you who chaperoned field trips, brought morning munchies, joined in Thanksgiving festivities and the countless other caring acts that make our community so special.

*Our volunteer leaders set the example for us all. Thank you.*

### **SYNC (SYNAPSE PARENT-TEACHER ASSOCIATION)**

**Executive Board Chairs:** Amy Baggott, Will Gordon

**Secretary:** Audrey DiFrancesco

**Treasurer:** Diana Whittier

**Room Parents:**

**Level I:** Jennifer Booker, Diane Tang

**Level II:** Vanessa DellaPasqua, Susmita Ramani, Laura Tebbe

**Level III:** Neelu Akkannapragada, Patricia Wong, Harry Yates

**5th/6th:** Gwyn Gordon, Sally Chess, Tracy Desmond

**7th/8th:** Genevieve Bennett, Rob Davis

**Family Camp Chairs:** Neela Jacques, Sonya Hanna

**Give Back Chairs:** Carmen O'Shea, Leigh Pyle

**Potluck in the Playspace Party Chair:** Kristina Patrick

**Social Chairs:** Brenna McNab, Libby Dabrowski

**Teacher Appreciation Week Chair:** Marisa Bauer

**Thanksgiving Chairs:** Jennifer Kirmse, Maggie Kemper

### **ANNUAL FUND**

**Chairs:** Rebecca Li, Christina Alataris

**Ambassadors:**

**Level I:** Christine & Steve Maxwell, Katia & Michael Ostrovsky, Euni & William Valentine

**Level II:** Laura & Chris Demetriou, Abbi Ball & Mike Dickey, Lauren & Michael Angelo

**Level III:** Stacey & Raja Kapadia, Elana & Jonathan Manson, Lara Hoffman & Nishad Chande

**Middle School:** Amanda Bower & Alexander Flint, Susan Solinsky & Paul Duryea, Amy Cramer & Scott McGaraghan, Basil Hashem & Ghina Morad, John Carman & Julie Carman

### **SPRING BENEFIT**

**Chairs:** Sabina Kroes, Susmita Ramani

**Solicitations Committee:**

**Level I:** Jennifer Yu, Euni Valentine

**Level II:** Judy Shu, Lydia Mazzie

**Level III:** Mandy & Don Gullick, Christine Maxwell

**5th/6th:** Paige Parenti, Sara Schnell

**7th/8th:** Christina Alataris, Susan Solinsky

**Technology support:** Janet Goldenstein & Kristin Casado

**Party Team:** Neelu Akkannapragada, Angela Ghuloum, Hillary Glass, Jennifer Kirmse, Elana Manson, Brenna McNab, Lauren Meltzer, Louise O'Reilly, Kevin Richardson, Neha Shah, Carrie Shaked, Danielle Wood





*Our middle school students have time to pursue their passions in and outside of school because our teachers believe in intentional and relevant homework, not mindless repetition and busy work. [Middle School Parent]*





Synapse School  
3375 Edison Way  
Menlo Park, CA 94025  
[www.synapseschool.org](http://www.synapseschool.org)

Synapse School admits students of any race, religion, color, sexual orientation, national and ethnic origin. All students are entitled to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sexual orientation, national and ethnic origin in administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, financial aid, and athletic and other school administered programs.