



**GROWING
TOGETHER**

ANNUAL REPORT





HELPING SCHOOL COMMUNITIES **GROW** **TOGETHER** IN 2024

WE BELIEVE

Every student deserves to learn from and connect with the living world as an essential part of their education.

MISSION

We transform schoolyards into vibrant living spaces where environmental stewardship, health, and education flourish. Our school gardens serve as community hubs — places where families gather, students learn, fresh food grows, and lasting positive change takes root.

46

Title 1 public schools served & campuses greened

10,698

students in regular, outdoor, experiential classes

10,200 lbs

fresh produce grown at schools for school communities

36

program staff & 72 paid interns

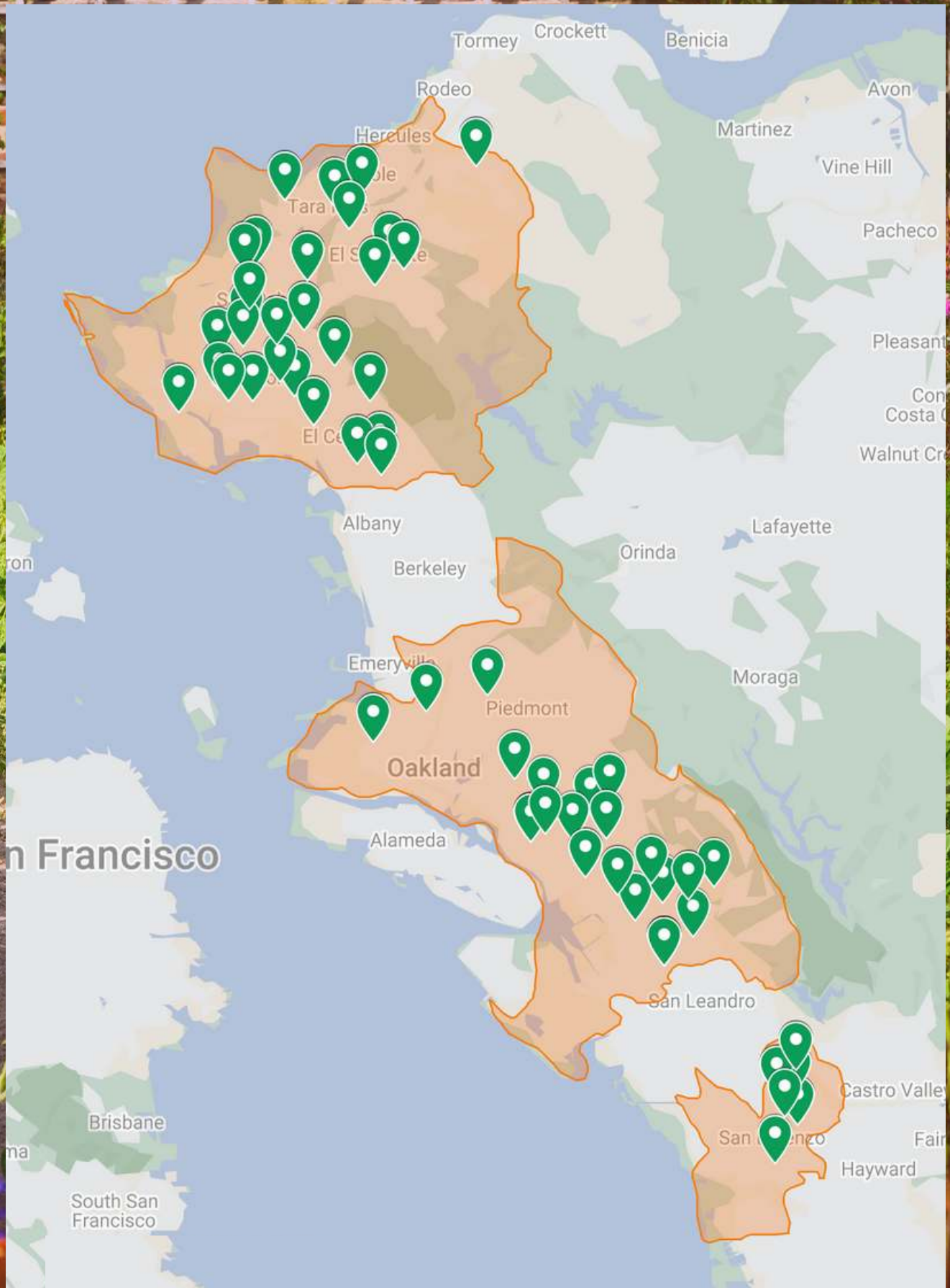


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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTORS

DEAR FRIENDS,

After several years of tremendous growth at Growing Together, 2024 was a year of deepening the relationships we have established across our schools and communities. This focus allowed us to enrich our existing partnerships and amplify the impact of our programs, doubling our student reach and total instructional hours from 2023.

This deepening took many forms. We expanded physical footprints at existing schools, transforming asphalt and unused spaces into gardens, outdoor classrooms, & orchards. We increased instruction hours, and even pioneered new partnerships with food services departments to bring produce from student-managed farms directly into school cafeterias. When we did welcome new school partners this year, they came to us through word-of-mouth referrals from our existing school communities, a testament to the strength of these relationships.

Looking beyond our immediate impact, we took bold steps toward ensuring the long-term sustainability of garden education across California. Together with peer organizations, we helped establish the California School Gardens Coalition, an intersectional group of CA-based organizations focused on the goal of creating a permanent funding pool in the State Budget to support garden and nutrition education.

Finally, as we deepened our school partnerships and expanded our collaborative work across



California, we also turned our attention inward to strengthen our organizational foundations. By establishing a dedicated administrative team and reimagining our organizational structure, we've created new pathways for our program directors to access support, share knowledge, & lead with greater autonomy. This evolution from a hub and spoke model to a more networked and horizontal structure better reflects both the collaborative spirit of our team and the scale of our growing impact.

As we reflect on this year of deepening relationships and strengthening foundations, we're filled with profound gratitude for our team, our school partners, and supporters like you who make this work possible. The future of Growing Together has never looked brighter, and we're excited to continue growing, learning, and evolving together.

With gratitude and on behalf of our entire team,

Allison O'Brien, Osvaldo Guerrero
Incoming Co-Directors

Grey Kolevzon
Co-Director 2019-2025

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION



NURTURING YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDS

Our garden-based environmental education programs remain at the heart of Growing Together's work, connecting students with hands-on opportunities to learn from, and care for, the living world around them.

10,698

students reached in 23-24 school year

160,425

hours of experiential education (23-24)

DEEPENING OUR EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

This year, we focused on expanding the depth and integration of our existing programs. Many of our after-school enrichment programs evolved into comprehensive partnerships, where Growing Together educators now lead science curricula implementation during school hours and support interdisciplinary learning across grade levels.

19

new school partners

97%

increase in instructional hours from 22-23

SCHOOL FARMS: REIMAGINING SCHOOL FOOD SYSTEMS

Our school-based production farms have emerged as powerful models for transforming how students engage with their food system. This year, we launched an innovative pilot program in partnership with WCCUSD's Food Services Department that integrates students into every step of the farm-to-cafeteria journey. Students now participate not only in growing and harvesting but also in preparing and incorporating farm-fresh produce into featured Farm-to-Table dishes served in their very own school cafeterias.

This innovative model elevates the quality of school meals through ultra-fresh produce while dramatically simplifying the food services supply chain. Rather than coordinating with multiple local farms, the district can source high-quality produce



3 school production farms,
covering 4.25 acres

10K lbs of fresh produce
harvested at school farms

614 students learned about
food systems via farm site
classes & educational
experiences

25 elementary school field
trips to our school farms

directly from campus, where student farmers work closely with food services staff. Beyond improving school meals, the program creates meaningful opportunities for students to gain practical experience in sustainable agriculture and food systems, from soil preparation to harvest to kitchen operations.

Following the success of this pilot, we are slated to expand this program to a number of secondary schools across the district next year. This expansion represents an exciting opportunity to scale our impact on both student learning and local food systems.



GREENING SCHOOLYARDS



5

green schoolyard installations
completed in 2024, with 8
more planned for 2025

105,000

sqft of schoolyard space
transformed

TRANSFORMING SPACES, ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

At Growing Together, we offer schools an innovative, community-focused approach to schoolyard greening. Instead of managing multiple contractors, we offer a streamlined approach as a single trusted partner that handles everything from design to installation & ongoing education. Our pre-established presence and relationships also allow us to directly coordinate with the entire school community, from grounds managers to administrators, staff, & students--engaging school communities and students in every step of their school's improvement & transformation.

2024 was a year of major growth for our schoolyard greening work. We had the privilege of completing substantial installations at four sites in West Contra Costa Unified, thanks largely to funding from the CalFire Green Schoolyard initiative and our partnership with Art Garden Design and Salvia Eco Landscapes. These projects breathed new life into school spaces, with freshly planted trees, vibrant native plant areas, enhanced outdoor classrooms, and thriving edible gardens. At Lupine Hills, we also embarked on a special native habitat restoration, made possible by the support of the Phillips 66 Foundation. Throughout it all, the involvement of students and community members was the heartbeat of our work.

FEATURED SCHOOLYARD: KING ELEMENTARY

King Elementary, one of our first WCCUSD partners, exemplifies the remarkable evolution of our schoolyard greening work. What began in 2019 as a modest garden and shade tree project blossomed into a comprehensive partnership. Over the years, we've brought environmental education to all 415 King students, integrated garden lessons with classroom curricula, and even delivered fresh produce to families during the pandemic.

By 2023, King's flourishing program had simply outgrown its original 4,000 sq ft garden space. With support from both our CalFire grant and the school's budget, we were able to complete a major transformation of the space, doubling the outdoor learning area to an impressive 8,000 sq ft, expanding the fruit tree orchard, and installing new native perennial areas. We also planted playground shade trees and enhanced the school's bioswale, recruiting the help of 25 local high school students eager to leave their green thumbprint.

The result, unveiled for the 2024-25 school year, is a testament to the power of our collaborative approach: a transformed green schoolyard from which the seeds of environmental stewardship and hands-on learning will continue to grow for years to come.



“ GROWING TOGETHER HELPED US CREATE A GARDEN AT KING THAT IS A MAGICAL PLACE WHERE STUDENTS MARVEL AT THE CREATION AND GROWTH OF FLOWERS, FRUITS AND VEGETABLES, WHERE THEY CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE BEAUTIFICATION OF THEIR HOME AWAY FROM HOME. TIME IN THE GARDEN WAS FILLED WITH WONDER AND EXCITEMENT. STUDENTS WHO STRUGGLED IN THE CLASSROOM FOUND PEACE IN THIS SPACE. ”

- King Elementary Principal Joey Sundberg

FRESH FOOD ACCESS

SCHOOL GARDENS AS FOOD HUBS

2024 marked the conclusion of our two-year Farms to Communities program, which transformed nine Title 1 schools into weekly fresh food hubs. Through this CDFA-funded initiative, we provided families with affordable access to carefully curated bags of seasonal, local produce. Each 12-14 pound bag featured culturally relevant fruits and vegetables, available for online pre-order and after-school pickup. By working directly with local farmers and delivering produce from farm to family within the same day, we were able to offer exceptionally fresh produce at prices significantly below market rates.

In addition to supporting local farmers with consistent, high-volume demand, our school-based distribution model directly addressed the two biggest barriers families face in accessing healthy foods - cost and convenience.



FARMS TO COMMUNITIES OUTCOMES (2022-2024)

1,597

families purchased fresh produce (45% purchased 4+ times)

185,796

lbs of fresh, local produce distributed to school communities

12

partnerships with small Bay Area farmers to procure produce

“ I ENJOY BRINGING MY KIDS TO SEE ALL THE PRODUCE. I AM HAPPY BECAUSE WE DIDN'T EAT MUCH FRUIT OR VEGETABLES AT HOME BECAUSE THEY WERE EXPENSIVE, AND I DIDN'T HAVE THE TIME. BUT THANKS TO THE VEGETABLE BAGS THEY SELL OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL AT AN AFFORDABLE PRICE AND VARIETY, MY WHOLE FAMILY CONSUMES MORE PRODUCE OF HIGHER QUALITY. ”

- Carmina Huchin,
Farms to Communities customer & parent
of two students at Hillside Elementary



NEW INITIATIVES

Building on the success and learnings from Farms to Communities, we launched two new initiatives to expand fresh food access across our school communities. We established year-round farm stands at Soskin, Valley View, and Vista schools, where student entrepreneurs gain hands-on experience managing small food enterprises while providing their communities with affordable access to farm-fresh produce — much of it grown right on campus. Additionally, we became part of the new “Farms Together” initiative, partnering with the Contra Costa/Solano Food Bank to leverage our network of small farmers in supplying fresh, seasonal produce to school-based distribution sites. This program now reaches over 5,000 children weekly, ensuring that high-quality, local produce is accessible to families who need it most.

98%

families reported "eating much more fruits & vegetables" on weeks that they participated in our fresh food programs

86%

families reported cooking more often on weeks that they participated in our fresh food programs

“ THE PRODUCE HAS BEEN AMAZING - SO FRESH WITH A LOT OF NEW VARIETIES OF THINGS, WHICH IS AWESOME. IT'S BEEN SUCH A BIG HIT THAT WE NEED TO INCREASE OUR ORDER FROM 100 TO 150 BAGS TO ENSURE ALL OUR FAMILIES HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO ACCESS FRESH PRODUCE ”

- Khan Manivan, Grant Elementary Site Director, requesting an increase in weekly produce bags from Farms Together due to vocal and enthusiastic demand from both day school and after school program families

PLANTING TREES



URBAN REFORESTATION IN SCHOOLS & BACKYARDS

In 2024, with support from One Tree Planted, we dramatically expanded our school-based tree education program from a handful of sites to 15 Title 1 schools across all three of our districts. Through this initiative, students participated in hands-on tree planting days on their campuses, learning proper planting techniques while enhancing their school environments. This knowledge then traveled home as students helped their families select and plant fruit trees of their choice - including Cherry, Apple, Peach, Pomegranate, and Oak trees - in their own yards.

This program does more than just distribute trees; it creates lasting environmental change in neighborhoods that historically lack tree cover and green space. By combining education with action, and supporting families with seasonal text message check-ins and care guidance, we're cultivating both a greener urban forest and a community of tree stewards for years to come.

15

Schools hosted tree planting days & free fruit tree distribution

483

Trees planted in schools & backyards (23-24 school year)

MOVEMENT BUILDING

INTRODUCING THE CALIFORNIA SCHOOL GARDEN COALITION

In 2024, Growing Together helped launch a statewide initiative by partnering with TenStrands, a policy and advocacy organization focusing on CA environmental education, to establish the California School Garden Coalition. Together, we assembled over 35 organizations dedicated to garden-based education across California, uniting our voices to advocate for sustainable funding solutions for this vital work.



Our goal is to establish a permanent funding source for garden education programming in schools across the state, allowing organizations like ours to plan longer term and deepen our impact, instead of piecing together patchwork funding to operate year after year. Our coalition has drafted legislation that would secure funding for this sector from the State budget, and we're actively engaging with legislators to introduce this bill in the upcoming legislative cycle. Join us in this movement to ensure every California student has access to high-quality garden-based education — learn more and get involved at caschoolgardens.org.



A photograph showing several children engaged in a garden activity. One child in a yellow shirt is holding a leafy plant, while another in a blue shirt is reaching into a black container. A blue plastic basket filled with green leafy plants sits on the ground. The scene is outdoors with dry leaves on the ground.

CASE STUDIES

INTEGRATING NEW SCIENCE STANDARDS INTO OUTDOOR EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

OPPORTUNITY

California's Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) emphasize hands-on, inquiry-based learning that aligns naturally with garden-based education. For example, when students study plant life cycles through direct observation and care of garden plants, they engage with NGSS standards like MS-LS1-4 (constructing scientific explanations for how environmental factors affect plant growth) in a tangible way. This alignment creates an opportunity to support K-5 teachers in meeting NGSS requirements while engaging diverse learning styles through experiential education.

SOLUTION

Growing Together responded to a need for supporting science instruction by integrating outdoor experiential learning with WCCUSD's adopted TWIG science curriculum. At Lupine Hills Elementary, Program Director Elizabeth Merritt collaborates with teachers across all grades (TK-5) to deliver coordinated science instruction. Students receive bi-monthly garden lessons — 40 minutes for younger grades and one hour for older grades — that directly complement their classroom curriculum.

The impact extends beyond standard curriculum integration. Upper-grade students are leading a native plant restoration project in front of the school, combining scientific observation with community engagement. Students track their assigned plants throughout the growth cycle and write interpretive essays that will be accessible to visitors through QR-coded plant labels created in partnership with the school's Fab Lab. This project transforms the school grounds into a living laboratory while creating lasting educational resources for the broader community.



CASE STUDIES

BUILDING CAREER PATHWAYS IN OUR COMMUNITIES

OPPORTUNITY

Garden-based and outdoor experiential education represents a growing sector in our economy, yet faces unique workforce development challenges. With few established training and mentorship programs in this emerging field, organizations often struggle to find and retain qualified educators who understand local communities and can authentically connect with students. This creates a pressing need to develop alternative pathways that can cultivate educators who are already rooted in and committed to serving their communities.

SOLUTION

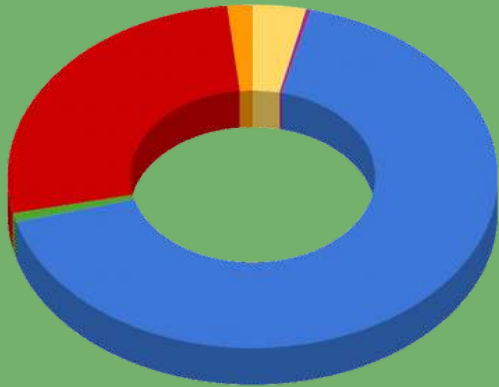
Growing Together is building a robust pipeline of environmental educators through intentional recruitment and one-on-one mentoring of young people interested in this growing field. This strategy has proven remarkably successful — of our 31 instructors and staff leading school-based education programs, ten began their journey as middle or high school interns in our programs.

Our approach combines hands-on experience with structured training opportunities. For example, at San Lorenzo High School, our Druids Internship program provides intensive training in land stewardship, native plant restoration, and environmental education. In 2024, seven graduates from this program secured paid positions with the Student Conservation Association and East Bay Regional Parks District, while another alumnus joined our team to support native forest stewardship at their former school.

Across our school farms, dozens of students receive paid training in sustainable agriculture, from planting and harvesting to managing sales at produce stands and farm events. Building on these successes, we're expanding our apprenticeship and internship programs from two schools to six in the coming year, adding opportunities at four elementary schools where high school and college students will learn to lead garden lessons and outdoor activities for K-5 students.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

* INCOME: \$3,474,313



●	Fee for Services \$931,100
●	Sales of Product \$57,877
●	Individual Donations \$10,593
●	Government Grants \$2,323,588
●	In-kind Donations \$28,908
●	Corporate & Foundation Grants \$122,248

2024 marked significant financial growth and maturity for Growing Together. We completed our first organizational audit while expanding our programs and reach. Our operating budget grew from \$2,117,760 in 2023 to \$3,470,904 in 2024, representing 64% growth.

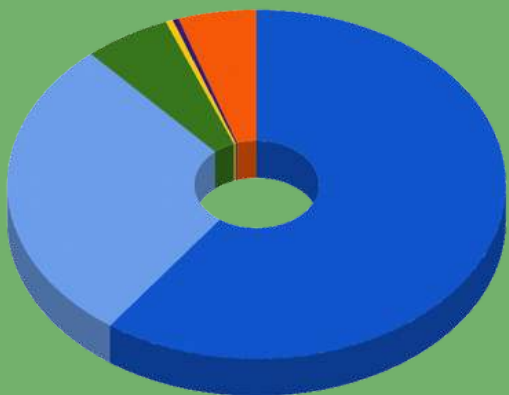
Government grants comprised two-thirds of our 2024 income, with earned income from fee-for-service contracts accounting for 27% of income. These contracts were primarily with school district partners for in-school and afterschool outdoor education programs.

This year's budget growth was driven primarily by a major CalFire Green Schoolyards grant. This grant funded the design and installation of 13 Green Schoolyard projects across West Contra Costa Unified School District, accounting for \$1.1M towards contractor and supply costs while enabling expansion of our environmental education programs.

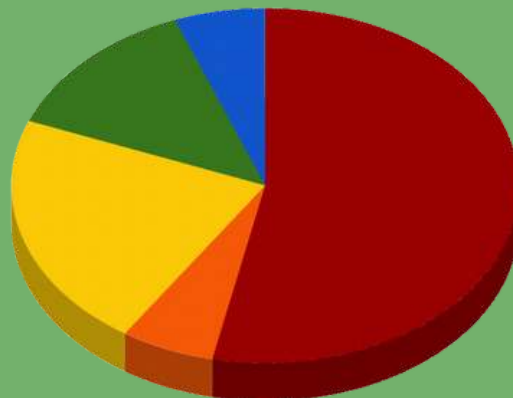
Program personnel wages made up just over half of our expenses, with contractors accounting for about one-fifth and program supplies representing 13%. Administrative costs, including staff roles and operational expenses, totaled \$200,428, just 6% of our total operating expenses. This exceptionally low administrative percentage reflects our efficient operating model: a network of highly skilled directors leading program development at their schools, with support from an experienced administrative team.

* EXPENSES: \$3,470,904

Programs: \$3,270,001
Administration: \$200,903



●	Environmental Education \$1,679,354
●	Green Schoolyards \$1,126,362
●	Fresh Foods \$222,896
●	Trees \$18,093
●	Advocacy \$16,000
●	Administration \$200,903



●	Wages \$1,851,467
●	Fringe \$207,297
●	Contractors & Professional Fees \$750,474
●	Program Supplies \$460,764
●	Organizational Administration \$200,503

Note: While our fiscal year runs July 1 to June 30th, this report reflects income and expenses for the calendar year of 2024.

LOOKING FORWARD

DEAR FRIENDS,

As we reflect on 2024, our team is filled with deep gratitude for the opportunity to serve our school communities, and pride in the meaningful impact we've created together. Every garden lesson taught, tree planted, and meal shared represents our commitment to fostering healthier, more sustainable schools.

Looking ahead to 2025, we're excited to expand our successful Farm to Schools program, establishing new food hubs at secondary schools across West Contra Costa Unified School District. These hubs will feature more produce grown in school-based farms in Farm-to-Table meals, deepening the connection between student farmers and their school communities. We'll also break ground on eight major Green Schoolyards installations while advancing our policy work through the California School Garden Coalition, pushing for legislation that creates sustainable funding for garden education statewide.

Just as we nurture growth in our gardens, we're excited to cultivate greater organizational capacity, investing in our internal infrastructure to allow our program directors and educators to focus on what they do best — being present and abundant in their work, deeply rooted in their school communities.

As our work grows, we remain committed to the values that guide us at each school site: fostering student leadership, environmental stewardship, and community well-being. We look forward to stewarding these initiatives collectively, growing our impact while staying true to our roots.

Sincerely,

The Growing Together Team



PARTNERS

OUR WORK TO CREATE HEALTHIER, MORE SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL COMMUNITIES IS ONLY POSSIBLE THROUGH THE DEDICATION AND SUPPORT OF OUR MANY PARTNERS.

To our funders, school district collaborators, local farmers, and community supporters: your commitment enables us to connect thousands of students with hands-on environmental education, fresh food access, and greener schoolyards. Thank you for growing with us in 2024 — we look forward to cultivating an even greater impact together in the years ahead.

To all of our partner district schools, parents, staff, & supporters:

- West Contra Costa Unified School District
- Oakland Unified School District
- San Lorenzo Unified School District

Funders:

- American Heart Association
- City of San Pablo
- CA Dept of Food & Ag - Farm to School
- CA Dept of Food & Ag - Specialty Crops
- CA Dept of Forestry and Fire Protection
- Green Schoolyards America
- Numi Foundation/Wells Fargo
- One Tree Planted
- Philips 66
- Richmond Outdoors Collaborative
- Rose Foundation
- State of CA Parks Department
- Troper Wojcicki Foundation
- Trust for Public Land



PTAs

- Fairmont Elementary
- Madera Elementary
- Mira Vista Elementary
- Washington Elementary
- West County Mandarin School

Community Partners

- After school agencies:
 - BACR
 - LoveLearnSuccess
 - YMCA
- El Cerrito High School garden volunteers & benefactors
- Roots Y Ramas

TEAM



Cherry Arellano



Rita Avalos



Daniel Ayala



Claire Boudreaux



Maya Carson



Oscar Cervantes



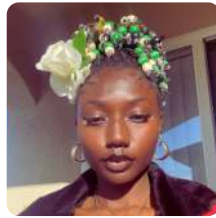
Nick Clark



Rosa Echeverria



Ozzie Guerrero



Vera Hammond



Eric Jijon



Cesar Jijon-Xolio



Gabriela Judd



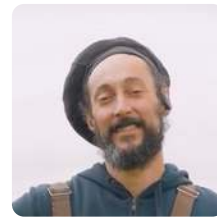
Esteban Juarez



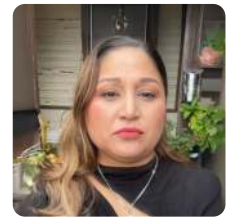
Grey Kolevzon



Debbie Lai



Matthew Linzner



Maria Martinez



Leura Mathur



Rowan Maze-Conway



EJ McCloud



Elizabeth Merritt



Mallika Nair



Alli O'Brien



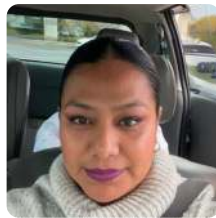
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Diego Perez



Glen Prieto



Adriana Ramirez



Traver Riggins



Jose Luis Rodriguez



Emily Ruebl



Abby Runte



Lisa Samudio



Sam Sandoval



Stephen Suttle



Charley Wang

GET INVOLVED

Growing Together is at an exciting inflection point. After a decade of steady growth and impact across Bay Area schools, we're ready to strengthen our organizational foundation to better serve our communities. As we look to the future, we're seeking passionate individuals to help us deepen and expand our impact in two key ways:

1 JOIN OUR BOARD

We're seeking new board members who share our commitment to experiential outdoor education and public schools. Ideal candidates bring expertise in nonprofit management & fundraising, public school administration, or public health, and are based in the Bay Area.

2 SUPPORT OUR GROWTH

While our programs are primarily sustained through government grants and school district contracts, currently only 3.5% of our budget comes from foundation support, and less than 0.3% comes from individual donors. As such, we're seeking to diversify our funding streams to further increase our operational capacity.

Any donation amount is deeply appreciated, and we welcome conversations for partnerships and larger philanthropic gifts.

If you're passionate about **helping young people build lasting connections with the natural world and grow into healthier, more sustainable communities**, please reach out via email, or consider donating to our mission directly via our website:

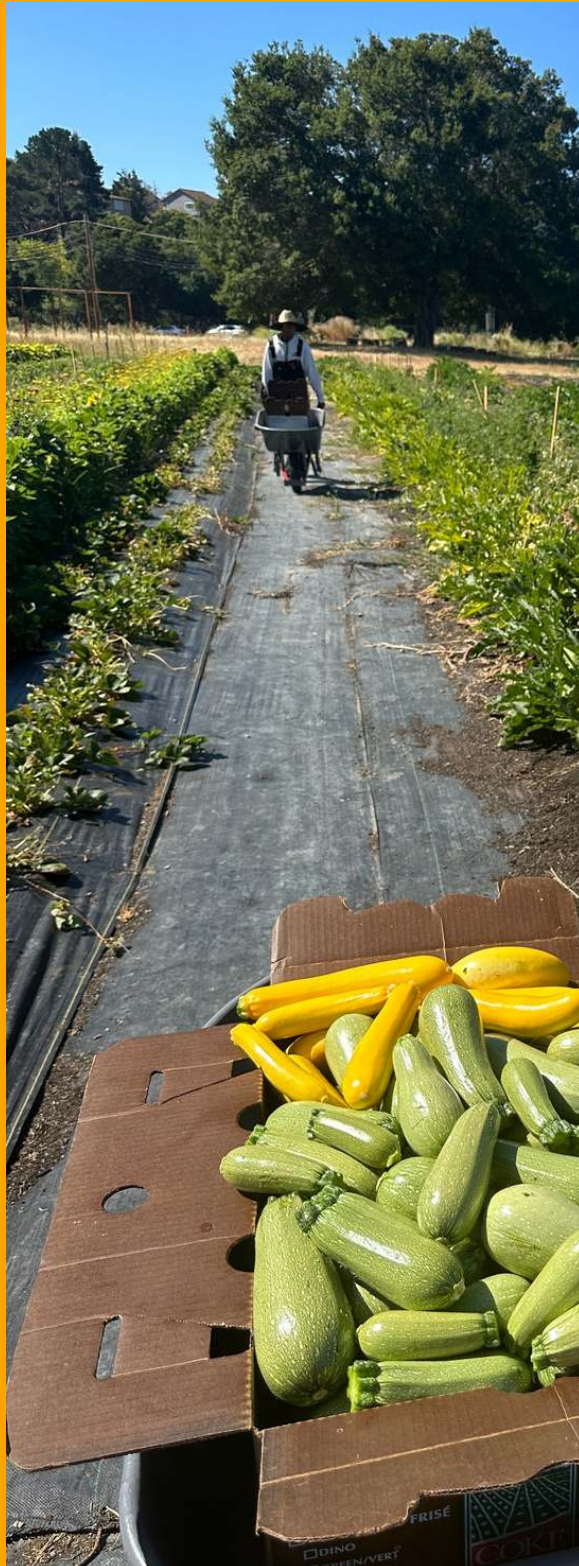


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