



**GROWING
TOGETHER**

GROWING TOGETHER

2025 Annual Impact Report

Students dig in to plant during a garden class.

We believe that having a **direct, personal connection with the living world** is fundamental to healthy human life, and developing this connection should be a part of every child's education.

School gardens make that possible. We create vibrant green spaces on school campuses that weave together experiential learning and hands-on stewardship into during-school instruction, after-school enrichment, and family engagement.

2025 by the numbers

49 schools

across 4 school districts

9,200 lbs

of fresh produce grown for school lunches on school farms

150 trees

planted on school campuses, plus 280 fruit trees planted at students' homes

38 field trips

for 1,200 K-12 students

11,590 students

in regular garden, nutrition, & career-pathway programs

250,000 lbs

of farm fresh produce distributed to families

20,000 sq ft

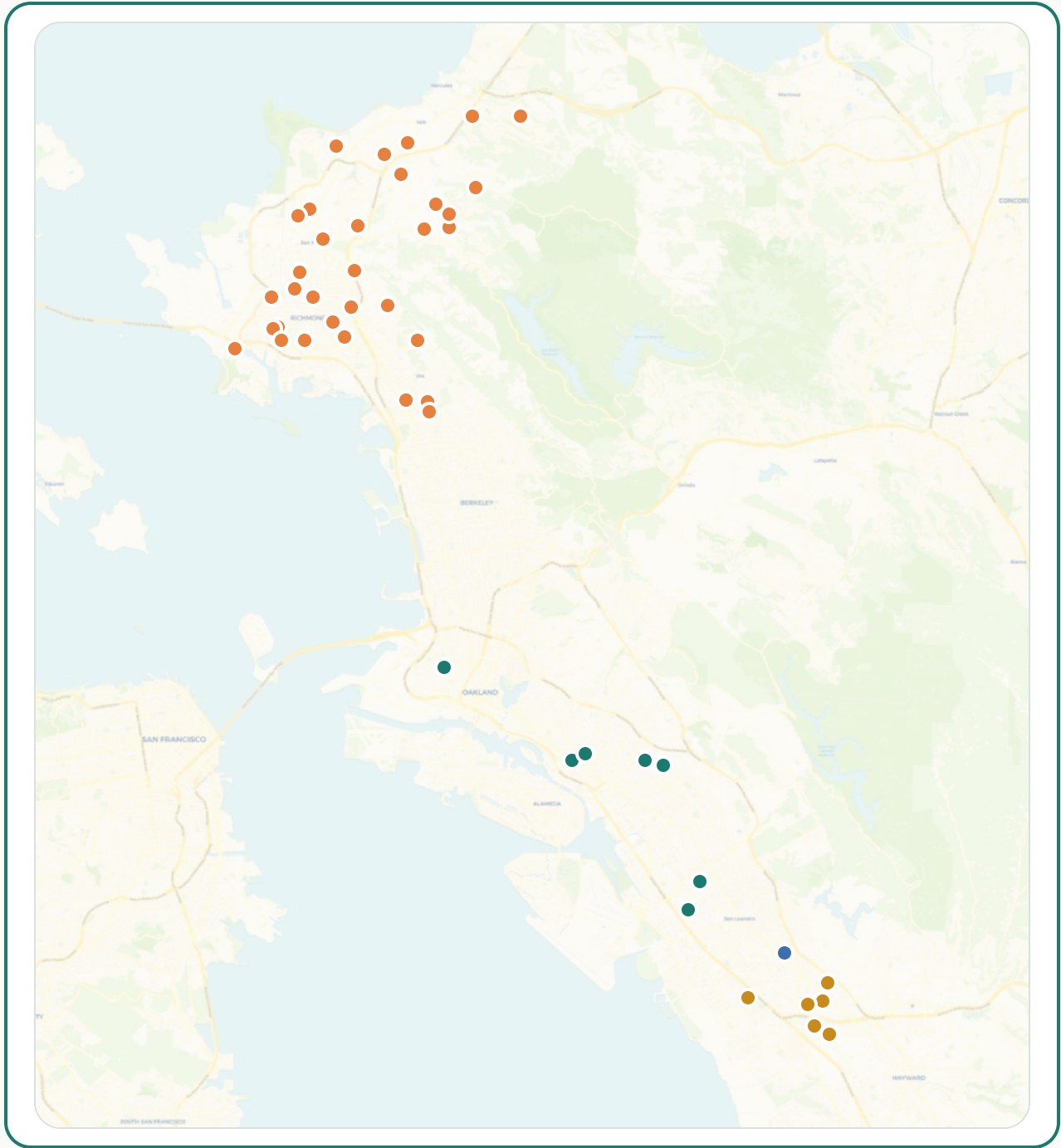
of asphalt & unused lawn converted to green schoolyards

44 staff

plus 117 student apprentices trained as educators, chefs, & entrepreneurs

Where we work

49 schools across 4 Bay Area school districts: West Contra Costa, Oakland, San Leandro, & San Lorenzo Unified.



● West Contra Costa USD (33) ● Oakland USD (9) ● San Lorenzo USD (6) ● San Leandro USD (1)



Rainbow chard with vivid red stems in the Lupine Hills garden.

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Letter from the Directors

Growing Together began in Oakland as a volunteer movement, connecting neighbors by greening public spaces and planting fruit trees. By 2014 we started partnering with local schools, working with teachers, students, parents, administrators, and district leaders on campus greening projects while training and employing young people to plant trees and build gardens. As stakeholders saw how this work changed students, our opportunities grew, and we began to integrate outdoor, experiential learning into the instructional programs of more and more schools.

Much of that growth came from learning to work well with school districts and communities: building a team of allies and finding a shared path forward. The result is a set of strategies, shaped through school-community partnerships, that address some of the education system's hardest problems. This year's report is built around that idea. In the pages that follow, each program names a specific systemic challenge in public education and the strategy we've developed, alongside our school communities, to meet it. Last year's feedback surveys, filled out by over 500 teachers, students, parents, and principals, are worth pausing on:

- 100% of parents say garden education has **improved their child's health and wellness.**
- 100% of teachers say it **keeps students engaged and focused**, and 99% say it helps them learn science concepts.
- On a five-point agreement scale, stakeholders averaged **4.78** that our programming **should be a district priority** and **4.28** that it **increases student attendance.**



A student leans in close to a flowering pea vine.

Fortunately, these programs are taking root everywhere. In 2023 we co-founded the CA School Garden Coalition, now a network of over 80 community-based organizations running similar programs for more than 250,000 students across the state, some for over a generation.

Before we share a few stories from this year, take a moment to remember the first time you realized the world was truly alive, and what that meant for the rest of your life. As you read, remember that you are part of why these experiences are possible for so many children, and that through their lives they will keep shaping the world in good ways.

With gratitude,

**Allison O'Brien, Grey Kolevzon, Ozzie Guerrero,
Jessica Ozuna, & Charley Wang**



A class gathers in the outdoor garden classroom.

01

PROGRAM UPDATES

Environmental Education

We've seen that when children explore the living world, they're fully immersed in learning. In a school garden, they work together to steward the systems that sustain us, and they carry those experiences with them for the rest of their lives.

Our educators' hands-on, inquiry-based lessons bring standards to life and engage students who don't always thrive in a traditional classroom. That pays off in better attendance, stronger teacher retention, more family involvement, and a deeper sense of community.

Systems Challenge

Outdoor, experiential education is now widely recognized as essential to how children learn and to their physical and mental health. But logistical barriers put it out of reach for most public schools, and instructional time keeps shifting onto screens.

Our Approach

We provide everything a school needs to run an integrated garden/nutrition program:

- Build and set up outdoor learning areas and green spaces for play.
- Involve the whole school community in stewarding the space.
- Grow a team of expert instructors, rooted in the school community, who plan and lead lessons alongside classroom teachers.
- Secure and manage the funding needed for all aspects of the program.



Dover 1st & 2nd graders water seedlings in the garden.



Students show off dried-citrus ornaments.

A few testimonials from school stakeholders

"Growing Together has been instrumental in nourishing our students and staff at King Elementary. They nourish the minds of students through lessons in science and health, the stomachs through delicious and healthy treats, and the souls by providing a beautiful place of connection and wonder on campus. Our garden is an incubator of beauty, wonder, and connectedness."

A principal

"Our daughter loves being outside and in the garden. She often resists attending school, but garden day is rarely a struggle for us."

A parent

"We talk about the opportunity gap for low-income students, about how our education system doesn't offer them the same access as students of means. This program helps address that gap with real-world, hands-on experiences. Students love going to the garden. They ask when we're going next."

A teacher

"When I charted our attendance rates, the highest rated program the kids enjoyed was garden. Ms. Maya and the cooking teacher Mr. D have shown them things that usually children in a community like this wouldn't be able to ordinarily see."

An after school director



Lupine Hills students cheer with their carrot harvest.

10,500

students taking part in regular experiential learning & stewardship opportunities

21

schools with fully integrated, schoolwide programming, plus 27 more in development with partial reach

97%

of school staff said the garden program enhanced their school environment & culture

100%

of parents agreed the garden & nutrition education positively impacted motivation to attend school

Inquiry-based learning in the garden

We are committed to building our staff's ability to deliver high-quality educational experiences that support school instructional goals. Gardens offer unique opportunities for students to engage in social-emotional learning while investigating authentic scientific questions in a real-world setting. This year, we expanded professional learning opportunities that help instructors facilitate inquiry-driven lessons and access rigorous science and nutrition curricula designed for outdoor learning environments.

In August, our team gathered for a one-day professional development retreat at the Exploratorium, co-led by Alli O'Brien and Polly Diffenbaugh, Senior Clinical Associate at the Stanford Teacher Education Program (STEP). Together, they guided the team through inquiry-based teaching methods firsthand and facilitated brainstorming around concrete ways to bring that approach into garden science and nutrition lessons. Building on that foundation, three staff members joined six collaborating elementary school teachers from WCCUSD for a two-day workshop on inquiry teaching in the elementary classroom, led by the Exploratorium's Institute for Inquiry.



A student waters the garden at West County Mandarin Elementary

02

PROGRAM UPDATES

Greening Schoolyards

Students, parents, teachers, and administrators tell us all the time that their school garden, and the learning that happens there, is one of the things they cherish most about their school. But over the last few generations, schoolyards have been paved over with asphalt and concrete. Turning them back into living places for learning and play is harder than it looks.



Students dig in together to tend a raised garden bed.

Systems Challenge

Facilities departments are reluctant to install green schoolyards, mostly because of the ongoing cost and responsibility of maintenance. The benefits these projects bring to a school don't show up as income, so there's little incentive to make the investment.

Our Approach

When we use green spaces to deliver high-quality, standards-based lessons, we give school leaders a reason to invest in them. Our educators involve the whole school community in caring for the space and coordinate with district maintenance. That turns a liability into a win: it eases district concerns while bringing teachers, students, and parents together to beautify their own campus. Last year, 98% of school staff and parents agreed (82% strongly) that the garden enhanced their school environment and culture.

7

new greening projects
completed on WCCUSD
campuses

2,700

new students reached by
weekly outdoor education
programs

20,000

sq ft of asphalt & unused
lawn transformed into living
green schoolyards

This year, partnerships with WCCUSD and CalFire's Green Schoolyards program let us bring that community-led approach to a new scale, with district buy-in and real resources behind it. Our model rests on three commitments:

- Design each project around the school's specific goals and needs.
- Partner with small local contractors committed to schools long term.
- Build outdoor education programs that support classroom instruction, enrichment, and family engagement.

This past school year (25-26), we completed seven new school greening projects on WCCUSD campuses, reaching 2,700+ students with expanded weekly outdoor education programs.



Students paint habitat art in the schoolyard.

03

PROGRAM UPDATES

Fresh Food Access

Our fresh food access work grew out of the gardens themselves. As school garden spaces saw more use, and as some of our school farms began producing real abundance, we looked for ways to get that food to families. Over the years it's taken many forms, including large-scale produce and meal delivery during the pandemic, CSA-style produce boxes sold at school sites, and after school produce stands.

All of these fresh food programs have been building toward our most ambitious vision of a comprehensive farm-to-school food system. This year, we're partnering with West Contra Costa Unified's Food Services department to do exactly that: incorporate campus-grown produce, culinary job-training, and farm-fresh ingredients in scratch-cooked cafeteria meals.

Systems Challenge

In large districts, procurement systems and kitchen infrastructure push Food Services toward heavily processed, pre-packaged products from giant distributors. Cafeterias can't serve fresh food, even when kids and parents want it.

Our Approach

We build every piece of a complete food system at a school-by-school scale, which makes farm-to-table practical for the district.



Students at Soskin Middle School prepared this scratch-cooked salad with romaine mixed greens and edible flowers grown on campus, to be served in West Contra Costa middle school cafeterias.

Redesigning a school-based food system

1. School-Based Farming

In 2021, our School-Based Farming initiative launched at Betty Reid Soskin Middle School, where farmer Oscar Cervantes worked with students to turn an unused baseball field into a one-acre farm. Four years later, with major support from CDFA's Farm to School program, we run one-to-two-acre farms at three WCCUSD schools, supplying produce for scratch-cooked meals in their cafeterias.

2. Farm-to-Table Apprenticeships

In their career technical education classes, middle and high school students design menus, grow and harvest crops, and work alongside cafeteria staff to prepare the day's lunch, mentored by our culinary teachers. When students help plan, cook, and serve meals made from food they grew, the school lunch experience changes completely: better participation, more revenue for food services, and kids who actually want to eat fresh.

3. Farms to Communities

We source seasonal produce from 12 to 15 small local farmers for the Contra Costa/Solano Food Bank's "Farm 2 Kids" program, distributing 5,000 lbs a week to low-income school communities in West Contra Costa. Next year we'll use it as a steady supply for WCCUSD cafeteria meals, helping the district cook scratch meals for thousands of students while opening markets to small family farmers who couldn't otherwise reach them.

What student apprentices are saying

96%

made them more interested
in healthy eating and
healthy living

88%

more interested in this work
as part of a job or career

96%

said the program made
them feel happier about
their school

04

PROGRAM UPDATES

Planting Trees

Our trees program began in 2019 with the imagination of a fourth grade class at Korematsu Discovery Academy and their teacher, Dana Hinchliffe, who wanted to reforest their neighborhood and bring their school community together doing it. Students made the case to their families and neighbors to plant a tree at home, while our staff taught an intro class about trees and led planting demonstrations on campus. That first effort, Oaktown Trees, was the precursor to the program we run today, which has helped over 1,000 households plant trees in their own homes, often in areas where urban reforestation is the most difficult and beneficial.

Systems Challenge

Street-tree projects tend to have low survival rates in neighborhoods where residents trust public institutions less, often the same places with the most pollution and the greatest need for shade.

Our Approach

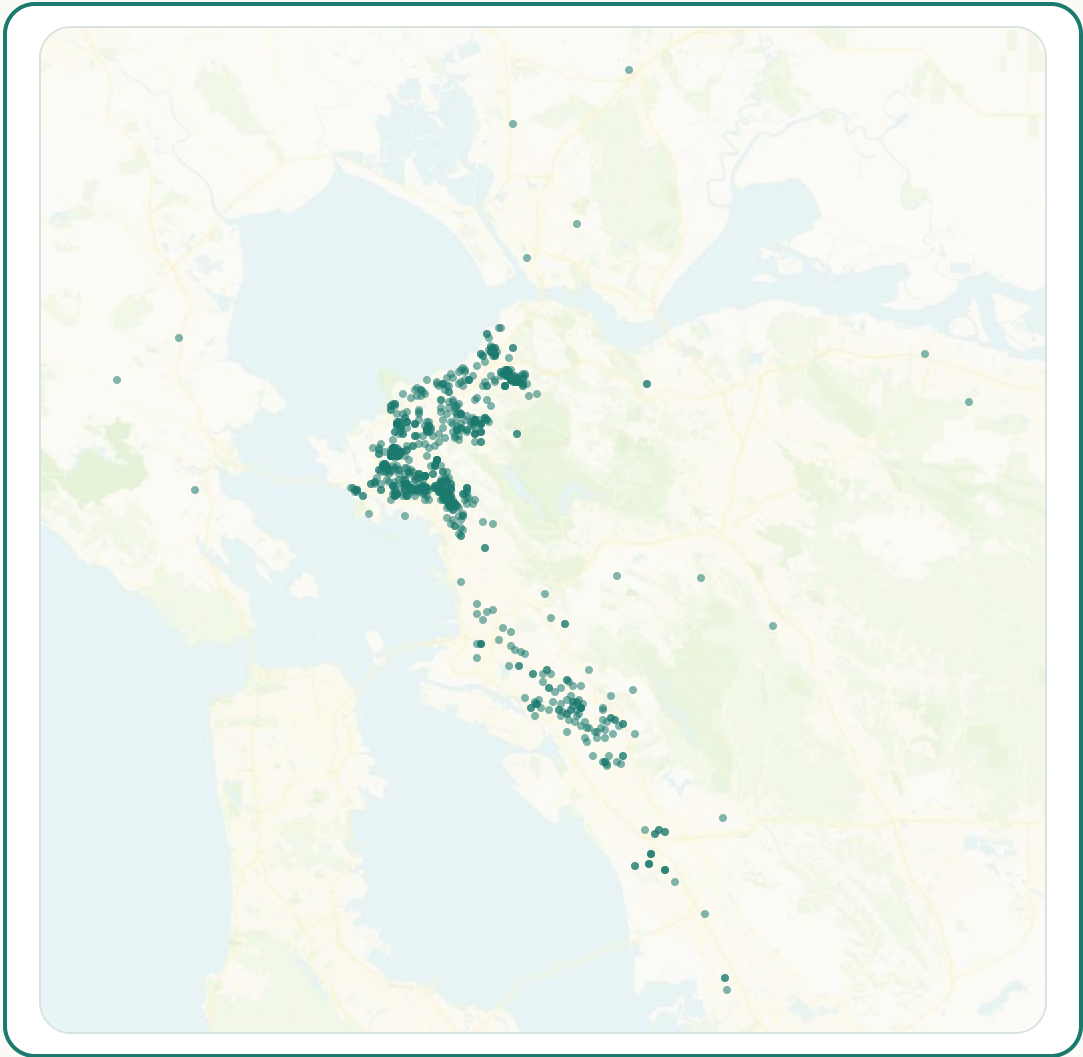
Our trees programs offer families the opportunity to plant a free tree together, they can choose the kind of tree they want, and pick it up at school to plant & care for in their own yards. We leverage our network of schools to turn tree planting into an exciting lesson for students and a long-term stewardship role for families. The result is a low-cost, results-driven model for neighborhood reforestation.



Scaling our approach & tools beyond our organization

In the years since starting our Trees program, we've both expanded our reach and refined our operational systems. Several years ago, we developed a text-based multi-lingual messaging system through which we communicate post-planting care recommendations directly with families and provide advice from professionals on request, to maximize tree survival and also track long-term impact. This year, with support from CalFire and Green Schoolyards America, we're writing our practices into an operations guide and launching a technical assistance program so other schools and organizations can run it in their own communities. What started with one class of fourth graders in East Oakland could take root across California.

Every tree we've planted from 2022 to 2025



● Each dot is a tree planted with a family · 829 of 1,129 mapped, 2022–2025

05

PROGRAM UPDATES

Movement Building

After years in this field, we've connected with many community-based organizations that share our goals and methods. Not one of them could point to reliable, sustained funding. In February 2023, Growing Together and Ten Strands launched the California School Garden Coalition to change that, with a shared goal: dedicated state funding for the whole network of organizations running school garden programs across California. The coalition now represents over 80 organizations serving an estimated 200,000 K-12 students statewide.

Systems Challenge

1. Half of California school districts have school gardens, but only 9% of those gardens are used regularly to teach students.
2. Most garden education programs depend on outside funding, which makes access unequal from school to school.

Our Approach

This year, Senator Sasha Renee Perez is championing a \$25 million budget request for garden and nutrition education. If the Senate, Assembly, and Governor approve it, it would be the first state funding ever dedicated to garden-based instruction in California, giving 500,000 students the chance to grow, harvest, prepare, and eat fresh local food while learning in green spaces on their own campuses.



The California School Garden Coalition

\$25M

proposed first-ever state budget for garden-based learning

If approved, it would put garden and nutrition education within reach for half a million students across California. Want to help? Join us at caschoolgardens.org.



A selection of the 80+ organizations in the California School Garden Coalition.

Near-Peer Mentorship in San Lorenzo

This year, we expanded our elementary field trip program in San Lorenzo Unified, welcoming more 4th grade classes to San Lorenzo High School's half-acre Native Plant Forest.

In the winter months, students walk a mile through their neighborhood to learn about indigenous plant uses and Ohlone natural history from an unexpected kind of teacher: teenagers. High school docents from the Druids Environmental Club guide their younger neighbors through hands-on lessons, identifying tule and its role in boatmaking, explaining why hunters selected elderberry for arrows, and taking turns at the bow drill to make friction fire. For elementary students in dual immersion programs, the docents teach these lessons in both English and Spanish.

For the 4th graders, this isn't a field trip to a distant museum. They walk to a native plant forest in their own neighborhood and learn from people who look like them, who come from the same community, proof that you don't have to be an adult to be an expert. For the high schoolers, many of them first-generation college-bound, it's a chance to step into leadership and discover that the knowledge they've been building actually matters.

This is what programming looks like when it comes full circle: career and technical education for secondary students that creates experiential, place-based learning for elementary students. The docents are becoming educators, naturalists, and stewards. In the process, they're showing younger kids in their own neighborhood what's possible.



VIDEO: San Lorenzo High School docents lead fourth-grade field trips at the Native Plant Forest

Financial Statements

In 2025, our income and operating budget stayed stable, and we completed our second organizational audit.

Revenue • \$3,565,809

Government grants		\$1,515,007
Fee for service		\$1,260,144
Sales of product		\$515,834
Foundation grants		\$230,000
Individual donations		\$44,824

Expenses • \$3,370,372

Environmental education		\$2,104,007
Green schoolyards installation		\$538,659
Fresh food access		\$455,068
Administrative staff time		\$147,382
Overhead (insurance, audit, accounting, fees)		\$96,436
CA School Garden Coalition		\$22,500
Trees		\$6,320

Our 2025 funding mix matters to us for two reasons. First, it shows we've built a resilient organization where no program leans on a single source, which mattered this year as nonprofits nationwide absorbed sudden federal funding cuts. Second, it reflects the trust we've earned at every level of public education, from PTAs to principals to districts to state agencies, all of whom have seen enough alignment between their goals and our work to become long-term, trusted, repeat partners.

93%

spent directly on programming for students

We spend about 93% of our funding directly on student programming, which gives our program directors real responsibility and agency in their school communities. That said, many of our boldest programs started as experimental partnerships funded by flexible or unrestricted dollars, so we're always looking for partners who can help us grow that kind of funding.

Note: Our fiscal year runs July 1 to June 30; figures here reflect calendar year 2025 for the purpose of this report.



Looking Forward



A Mira Vista student studies a water droplet on a leaf.

Looking back at 2025 makes us more excited about 2026. The last few years were about building models that work. Now it's about scaling them with partners across the field.

Education

Fresh off our Partner of the Year award in West Contra Costa Unified, we are positioned with the experience, capacity, and credibility to build district level partnerships in addition to working with individual school communities.

Trees

With support from CalFire & Green Schoolyards America, we're turning our best practices into an operations manual and toolkit that we can share with school communities nationwide.

Green Schoolyards

2025-26 was the first full school year where we have both a contracted facilities partnership and a licensed contractor on staff, letting us take on major construction and deliver our fullest vision of schoolyard greening: design, installation, education, and stewardship, embedded within each school community.

Policy

If our coalition passes its \$25M budget request, it would be a groundbreaking achievement for outdoor experiential education: recognition for a grassroots movement a generation in the making, and a path to doubling the number of CA students with access to programs like ours from 250,000 to 500,000+ students.

This work exists because students, teachers, families, and partners like you keep supporting us, and many other organizations, to do it. With all our hearts, we thank you for making this possible.

Our Partners

State of CA Parks Department	City of Richmond,	Mira Vista Elementary PTA
CA Dept of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire)	Fund for Children and Youth	Madera Elementary PTA
CA Dept. of Food and Agriculture, Farm to School	East Bay Asian Youth Center	Fairmont Elementary PTA
Food Bank of Contra Costa/Solano	YMCA	West County Mandarin School PTA
City of San Pablo	BACR	Ohlone Elementary PTA
East Bay Regional Parks District	LoveLearnSuccess	Harding Elementary PTA
Alameda County Public Health Department	Freedom Schools	Family Resource Center
Oakland Fund for Public Education	El Cerrito High School garden volunteers & benefactors	Trust for Public Land
Phillips 66	Roots Y Ramas	Richmond Outdoors Collaborative
Student Conservation Association	Plant to Plate	WCCUSD Facilities Dept.
Troper Wojcicki Foundation	Asian Family Resource Center	WCCUSD Food Service Dept.
ACESO Foundation	Satellite Affordable Housing Association	WCCUSD Maintenance Dept.
Rose Foundation	Washington Elementary PTA	WCCUSD Career Technical Education Dept.
		WCCUSD Expanded Learning Dept.

Plus partner departments, schools, parents, and staff in the West Contra Costa Unified, Oakland Unified, San Leandro Unified, and San Lorenzo Unified School Districts, and dozens of individual donors who make this work possible, month after month.



Program director Sabrina Ferreira-Clifton leads a Día de los Muertos lesson at Washington Elementary.

Our Team

Our 44-person team across programs and administration.



Cherry Arellano



Rita Avalos



Aida Baron



Claire Boudreaux



Cierra Cardenas



Maya Carson



Oscar Cervantes



Nick Clark



d'Artagnan Connor III



Rosa Echeverria



Sabrina Ferreira-Clifton



Jim Fisher



Erin Gamboa



Ozzie Guerrero



Vera Hammond



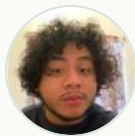
Kylie Hansen



Eric Jijon



Maggie Johnson



Esteban Juarez



Gabriela Judd



Grey Kolevzon



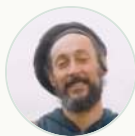
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EJ McCloud



Elizabeth Merritt



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Kevin Perdomo



Diego Perez



Glen Prieto



Traver Riggins



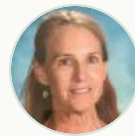
Jose Luis Rodriguez



Emily Ruebl



Lisa Samudio



Wendy Silkworth



Stephen Suttle



Mateen Van Dongen



Charley Wang

Get Involved

We rely on partners and supporters to make this work possible. Here's how you can help.

Donate

Individual donations are currently 1% of our revenue. We'd like to grow that, because it's the most flexible funding we have. Visit growingtogetherprojects.org/donate.

Sign on with the California School Garden Coalition

California hasn't funded school gardens since 2007. Help us change that at caschoolgardens.org.

Partner with us

If you lead a school, a district, a foundation, or an organization doing related work, we'd love to talk. Email hello@growingtogetherprojects.org.

Share this report

If what you read here matters to you, share it with someone who might care too.



A student shows off tomatillos fresh from the harvest.

Contact us

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A wheelbarrow brimming with marigolds from the harvest.