The **MISSION** of the Rogers Family Foundation is to support organizations and pursue partnerships committed to the highest level of achievement and excellence. With a strategic emphasis on transforming public education in Oakland, California, we make grants, catalyze initiatives, and champion community collaboration to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn and achieve to their greatest potential.

Our **VISION** is that Oakland’s students will succeed in school, thrive in their careers, and engage in their community.
For nearly two decades the Rogers Family Foundation has maintained an unwavering, resolute, and deep-seated commitment to the young people of Oakland. Part of our original mission statement declared, “We hope to help young people to realize their full potential and be contributing members of society.” In our early years, our granting philosophy and activity reflected a hopeful, but naïve belief that we could best support our city’s youth by providing small annual grants to numerous organizations all over Oakland. We believed in the many wonderful organizations who make a positive difference in the lives of thousands of children and families and supported as many as we could. We quickly learned that while many of these organizations created very positive outcomes for young people, the impact was oftentimes short-lived and the overall success indicators of Oakland youth consistently remained at unacceptable levels.

In 2008, we stepped back and looked broadly at whether our investments of time and funds aligned with the magnitude of the social impact we sought to make as a Foundation. They did not. We prepared our first strategic plan with the goal of better connecting our investments and focusing with more intent on improving educational opportunity and achievement for Oakland’s students. For the better part of the last 12 years, we have stayed the course by working on big, community-wide goals such as advancing early literacy proficiency, investing in innovative school design, and turning every stone to uncover ways to increase the number of high-quality public schools in our city.

We are proud of the work that we have undertaken and believe that we have “gone out and done good!” We are appreciative of the talent, drive, and long-standing commitment to Oakland of our grantee partners. We continue to marvel at the promise and potential of Oakland’s students and believe in the power and hopefulness of their parents and family members. And yet, for generations the public education system has failed. We believe all students can and should be ready for kindergarten, can learn to read, can rise to the challenge of keeping pace academically year over year, and can graduate high school prepared for college or career. As we share this updated strategy in Fall 2020, Oakland’s students deserve our support now more than ever.
When the Rogers Family Foundation was founded in 2003, it was never designed to be a philanthropy in perpetuity. This is the Foundation’s last strategic plan. Within the next five years, we anticipate sunsetting our Oakland education grantmaking and operations with a clear vision, sense of purpose, and deep commitment to deliver a quality education for Oakland students.

Our team will stay grounded in our work and within the community, recognizing that we have a responsibility to continuously learn, reinvest in areas where we have made progress, and absorb and utilize the knowledge of those engaged in the hard work of education practice. At the same time, the Foundation also knows we have the opportunity to take risks on entrepreneurial organizations and ideas aligned with our strategy. We maintain our hope and desire that all Oakland youth will realize their full potential and be lifelong contributing members of society. We believe that this success happens when there is success in the classroom. With our finite limits in time and funding, we have infused our learnings from our past experiences and previous efforts into our updated plan in order to more effectively support students in their journey toward this goal. We therefore have made the strategic decision to primarily fund efforts which significantly and positively impact the student’s academic success. Our efforts will continue to be guided by available student data and what we have learned over the last dozen years.

We also acknowledge that there are elements of our strategy which we will seek to accomplish within the time horizon of this strategy and other elements where long-lasting change can only be possible beyond the timeframe of the Foundation’s existence. Reaching our vision for Oakland public schools will require more than our grantmaking and internal team’s capacity alone. To that end, we work with grantees, partners, and other education-focused organizations to push for change across schools and systems in the hope of ultimately reaching our vision.
The very nature of the field of philanthropy is to be optimistic that positive social change can happen. The Rogers Family Foundation shares this view and will continue to do so over the last remaining years of our investment in Oakland public education. Hopefulness, aspiration, and belief in Oakland’s students rest at the very center of our organizational culture. As has been the case the three previous times we have updated our strategy, our team has gained a great deal of knowledge about our work and uses it to inform the context of our investments in service of students. Our learnings include:

- We have all seen and know the data. There are vast disparities in the achievement of our students. And yet, students are much more than the associated rates and numbers. They are worthy agents of their own destinies. And they – and generations before them – have been failed by the systemic shortcomings of our public education system.

- Improvement happens when students are at the center of instructional, cultural, and organizational shifts. Students, parents, teachers, and administrators must be engaged to sustain these shifts over time.

- The best instruction is data-driven and culturally relevant for the student receiving the instruction.

- When thoughtfully deployed within a comprehensive school improvement plan, blended and personalized pedagogical strategies can absolutely support increases in student achievement.

- Strong literacy outcomes for students are a clear measure of a quality education.

- Quality schools are dependent on their superintendents/CEOs, governing boards, and teachers’ unions creating and upholding policies and practices that ensure personalized, dynamic, and inspired teaching.

- Sharing, building relationships, and learning from each other is deeply valuable. A successful public school system – a system that by law includes both district and charter schools – demands collaboration.

*We have learned that a coherent, aligned system that puts students at the center, not only in name but in action, is the only path to quality education for all Oakland children.*
Our Oakland Education Strategy places students at the center.

Each student is held and influenced by interconnected and complex experiences that are both unique (for instance, their particular family dynamic and history) and shared (societal factors including socio-economic status, race, and ethnicity as well as neighborhoods and communities). Each student learns inside their own densely woven fabric of relationships and circumstances.

We believe that to produce effective, long lasting improvement in student learning outcomes, our strategy must act across the nested systems and relationships that directly shape a student’s life – these include parents/caregivers, individual schools, charter management organizations, the school district, as well as public education as a whole (and its many actors) in Oakland.

Our strategy pushes on both the skill-building (capacity) aspects as well as the relationship development (conditions-enabling) aspects of this work. Student learning will not improve without both these tactics. As a community, we must be poised and receptive to new ways of working for lasting structural, equitable practices to take root and flourish.

Our strategy focuses on three areas of investment: Schools, Building Capacity, and Enabling Conditions.

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1 Adapted from the Building Equitable Learning Environments (BELE) Framework
2 Informed by and modified from The Six Circle Model developed by Steve Zuiback (and further adapted by the National Equity Project to include an equity lens).
Investing in public schools aligned with our strategic goals remains a key strategy for the Foundation. Quality may emerge from different kinds of schools and models, and we support traditional public schools and charter public schools. In granting to schools, we strive to live our value of “Ready, Go, Set” with schools implementing plans and then further learning from those implementations what it takes to improve outcomes. Students have varied needs within and across subgroups, which is why we look to school teams and communities to define their own improvement work. Living our value of “Learn, Learn, Learn” is often a form of innovation in and of itself and will require openness to new ideas, and taking risks to further shift adult behavior and practice in service of higher student outcomes.

Our values, experience, and Oakland’s immediate and on-going responses to the remote, distance, and/or various hybrid forms of learning make plain the importance of partnering with local schools directly and deeply. We are guided by the principle that strong school leadership teams and effective teachers are two of the most important levers for school improvement, and also to ensure that schools operate in tremendous service of our most vulnerable students and families in times of acute crisis and beyond. Representation matters, and faculty and leadership teams at our partner schools strive to reflect their students’ backgrounds. Our team’s experience, and those of our closest schools partners, tells us that public school systems need a diversity of leaders in positions of authority, including the principalship, and this is something we monitor across our grantee schools. Oakland public schools do not receive the financial resources needed to provide a quality education for each student, and the funding received is often restricted. Our philanthropic support can be most impactful when the school leadership team, educators, students, and parents are empowered to decide together how best to support students. We know that improvements stemming from such collaborations are more likely to endure over time, and that empowered teams are better suited to navigate uncertainty and flex grant-related resources to meet emergent needs.
By listening to and staying close to schools we are better positioned to learn where investments best help schools improve. These learnings inform our other strategic areas of **Building Capacity** and **Enabling Conditions**. When a school knows of an organization or program that effectively builds the capacity of their staff and/or effectively supports families and students to advocate, participate, and voice opinions, those are solutions in which we want to invest to strengthen or share with another school. We plan to invest in schools with:

1. **Bold and tailored plans** that seek to realize dramatic improvements for students. This means a school’s plan clearly and explicitly pursues a course for children that honors their potential and capacity for excellence. In these cases, the school community acknowledges how it plans to dismantle the status quo and build on the inherent strength of their students and families. We are not looking for incremental plans or tinkering.

2. A **clear track record of partnership** with the Foundation producing durable improvement. If not already fully in place, this often requires at least a year of building and strengthening a genuine relationship between staff at the Foundation and the potential school partner. During this time, staff at the potential grantee school are responsive, seek help, and comfortably provide honest critique and feedback to the Foundation. Potential grantees confidently report Foundation staff have been demonstrably helpful or suggest ways in which our team can be of greater assistance.

3. **Enthusiasm across the organization** for further, renewed funding. Our collective work is too hard, has too much need, and has too little resources available from the Foundation for us to pressure any grantee into accepting continued support. Terms must be such that the grantee is enthusiastic about continued partnership.

Given the Foundation’s finite resources and time horizon, we cannot invest meaningfully in all schools. At the same time, we remain open to the promise of both new schools and redesigned transformational school programs. We expect to build new track records and relationships with non-grantee schools as they participate in our strategic investments in **Building Capacity** and **Enabling Conditions**.
Building Capacity (skills) and Enabling Conditions (relationships), like our direct work with Schools, centers the student experience today and in the future, and ultimately seeks to create the conditions that ensure equitable access to high quality education.

- Building Capacity is the work of developing skills and knowledge across all groups: students, parents, educators, and leaders.
- Enabling Conditions is the work of nurturing and building the relationships necessary to let those skills and that knowledge take root and transform our schools and ultimately public education.

Building Capacity and Enabling Conditions work must happen simultaneously and work synergistically; lasting change is otherwise impossible. This strategic area happens through our partnerships with talented nonprofits, who bring a concrete set of skills and deep knowledge that can be passed on to those participating in their programming. These partners approach perceived obstacles as opportunities, and lead with this lens. In most cases, they are led by leaders who reflect the community in which they work. Oftentimes these organizations are identified by our school grantees; a number of these organizations will work directly with the schools we support in our Schools strategy area.

While the strategic work in which we invest will be centered on student success, grantees might also work with adults – families, teachers, principals, system leaders – in support of students. This work will ensure that these adults have an unflinching belief and commitment that their students can learn, succeed, and fulfill their dreams.

On the ground, this work could look like:

- projects that develop students as advocates of their own education.
- work that builds parents’ skills as advocates of equitable access to high quality public schools.
- training for teachers and leaders around standards-aligned, grade level, culturally competent instruction.
- efforts to attract, support, and sustain teachers and leaders of color.
- teachers developing high-impact literacy practices.
- continuous learning and collaborative inquiry opportunities for educators.
- initiatives that promote collaboration and sharing between schools and across systems of governance.
- programs and projects that aim to improve and better align professional development and teaching across the school district through more effective communication.
We will track progress across these strategy areas by looking at quantitative data as well as listening to the experiences of our grantees and partners related to student academic progress, student Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), and elements of school culture. Student SEL – complemented by adult SEL – is an integral pathway for schools to support their students’ agency. How we will track progress reflects our internal definition of student success which focuses on Strong Academic Foundation, Social-Emotional Competencies, and School Culture and Climate, which have a combination of established and emergent measures. We believe students need to demonstrate success across each of these indicators in order to enjoy future successes in adulthood.

Learning from school and nonprofit grantees and partners will guide how we understand shifts and emerging needs across our strategy areas. Wherever possible, data will be collected, disaggregated, and analyzed to track progress across student ethnicity and other demographic factors. Ongoing progress will be understood and measured by:

**Strong Academic Foundation:** Students learn to read, meet grade-level standards in English Language Arts and math, and complete A-G coursework. Understanding progress will be informed by student outcome data as well as other sources:

- student outcome data
  - Third to fifth grade students read above standard.³
  - Third to eighth grade students meet standards in English Language Arts and math.
  - High school students graduate eligible to apply to the University of California and the California State University systems.
- grantee and partner feedback on successes and challenges around making academic progress
- understanding curriculum and pedagogies used by schools where students are improving academically

**Social-Emotional Learning:** Student learning and progress is supported by strong SEL skills which are encouraged and fostered by the adults in their school. Understanding progress can be informed by:

- grantee and partner feedback on efforts to integrate SEL practices throughout the school day, as well as learnings from implementing SEL focused practices, curriculum, and pedagogies within schools
- survey responses from students on SEL measures
- adult participation in formal and informal learning spaces focused on building SEL knowledge and skills

**School Culture and Climate:** Students are motivated to attend and achieve in school as a result of high expectations from adults, engagement with culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogy, and a network of adults (teachers and parents/guardians) who are supported and empowered. Understanding progress can be informed by:

- chronic absenteeism rates
- grantee and partner descriptions of their efforts to build supportive school cultures with high expectations for students
- survey responses and feedback from teachers and school staff on school culture
- rubric-generated data on the implementation of culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogy

³Reading is one of three components measured by the English Language Arts Smarter Balanced Assessment, along with Writing, and Research/Inquiry. Performance is reported as Below, Near, or Above Standard.
We know tracking and measuring progress will be imperfect. Traditional academic indicators are more readily measurable and provide important, meaningful information, and yet we acknowledge their limitations. It is important to look at the results from academic tests to track the progress of our educational system, or in many cases the lack of progress. Like many of our grantees and others in our field, our team grapples with the fact that some of the most important aspects of what students need to succeed in school are hard and messy to measure. We do not shy away from these areas – nor do we want our grantees to – simply because it is hard to measure progress. We see this as part of the work. We will partner with grantees to understand the best way to track progress within the context of their work.

Measuring progress is essential to understanding the landscape in which our grantees work, find places from which to learn, and look for opportunities for partnership and funding.
Since our inception, the Foundation’s approach has been place-based and it will continue to be so as we work toward the end of our timeline. This approach is guided by a core belief that in order for Oakland to be a great and vibrant city, every effort must be made to ensure its students have the opportunity to learn and thrive in great and vibrant public schools. Our contribution to this effort is both through grantmaking dollars and the capacity of our team.

**Grantmaking: Balancing Strategy with an Openness to New Ideas and Opportunities**

While we have defined strategy areas, we continue to be open to new ideas and opportunities that show promise for positive, impactful change. As stated in our values: “We don’t see risk as a barrier to success.” We want to connect with those working in Oakland to ensure that we are always learning and checking our blind spots: are we missing a critical area of work, emerging opportunity, or area of need?

When making a grant we strive to align our funding approach (e.g., grant size, grant terms, and grant type) to the needs of the organization or project. Whenever possible we provide MYGOD grants (multi-year general operating dollars) as we know that these provide nonprofits with more reliable and flexible funding. When MYGOD grants are not the right approach, we structure grants in collaboration with grantees to provide the best possible support.

**Team Capacity: Building Relationships and Going “Beyond-the-Grant”**

Relationships are fundamental to our daily work. We strive to break down traditional funder-grantee dynamics where power, trust, and leverage favor us, the funder. We value our time in community and partnership with local leaders and do our best to forge relationships built on trust, transparency, and mutual respect. To continually push our work and aspire to building true partnerships, we will make every effort to do our best to align with the key principles from the Trust-Based Philanthropy Project.

We recognize that our deep placed-based funding approach affords us many opportunities to work with and alongside our grantees and partners in complex and meaningful ways. We have built our team such that we can bring capacity to the community, not just grant dollars. Extending our capacity in terms of time and talent, often referred to as “beyond-the-grant” in the world of philanthropy, allows us to work side-by-side with our partners to push for changes as well as keeps us grounded in the central issues and challenges we face collectively as a community.

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Working together, our vision for Oakland students is possible. Our team remains hopeful, inspired, and driven. We have seen what can happen when dedicated, innovative school teams rethink what education can and should look like. We have seen the power of parents to call out the failure of the system and demand and design a better way forward. We have seen youth voices get elevated to a new level and engage in conversations about decisions that impact them directly. We know this is not enough. Our team is committed to working for transformational change in the limited amount of time we have left. Over the next five years we will continue our work with grantees and partners to build the education system we know our students deserve – they are counting on all of us.

Thank you to the following schools for the photos included in this document: ASCEND Elementary, Korematsu Discovery Academy, Learning Without Limits, Roosevelt Middle School, Urban Montessori Charter Schools, and Urban Promise Academy.

Photographers: Carrie Richards and Stephanie Secrest

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4 MYGOD: A term coined by Vu Le from Nonprofit AF as a way to encourage funders to provide less restrictive funds to nonprofits as a way to build and support their long-term capacity.
All students can learn. Their potential and capacity for excellence deserve more investment.

Improvement happens when students are at the center of instructional, cultural, and organizational shifts.

The best instruction is data-driven and culturally relevant for the student receiving the instruction.

A comprehensive school improvement plan, that includes blended and personalized pedagogical strategies, can absolutely support increases in student achievement.

Strong literacy outcomes for students are a clear measure of a quality education.

Quality schools are dependent on the superintendent, school board, and teachers’ union creating and upholding policies and practices that ensure personalized, dynamic, culturally relevant, and inspired teaching.

Sharing, building relationships, and learning from each other is deeply valuable.

Grants to Schools and Nonprofits
Schools with:
- Bold and tailored plans to realize dramatic improvements for students the public education system has failed.
- A clear track record of partnership with the Foundation producing durable improvement.
- Enthusiasm across the organization for further, renewed partnership.

Nonprofits supporting youth voice and students advocating for their education, as well nonprofits improving the capacity of adults – families, teachers, principals, and systems leaders – in support of students through:
- Developing skills and knowledge across students, parents, educators, and leaders (Building Capacity).
- Nurturing and building relationships necessary to let those skills and knowledge take root and transform schools and ultimately public education (Enabling Conditions).

Beyond the Grant Support
- Providing support to grantees in a range of areas including introductions to leaders, instructional technology, collaborations, advice on funding sources, and use of RFF space.
- Participating in collaboratives, partnerships, and working groups with grantees and partners.

Communications
- Promoting and highlighting successful work of grantees and partners.

Evaluation and Learning
- Building a culture of learning centered on understanding the progress of our grantees and deeply informed by their experience and the experience of students.

Social Emotional Learning
Student progress in academics and beyond is supported by strong social-emotional learning skills which are encouraged and fostered by the adults at their school.

Climate and Culture
- Teachers and staff feel their schools provide a supportive and inviting place to work, while grounded in mutual trust, respect, and participatory decision-making.
- Teachers demonstrate clear evidence of culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogy.
- Parents and guardians know and demonstrate their power as advocates on behalf of their students.
- Students are motivated to attend and achieve in school as a result of high expectations from adults.

Strong Academic Foundation
Students learn to read, meet grade-level standards in English Language Arts and math, and complete A-G coursework.

Students receive an equitable education through access to support, resources, and opportunities to succeed in school, thrive in their careers, and engage in their community.

Strong SEL skills built for students and the adults who support them.

High expectations of students from school staff.

Use of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy.

3-5 grade students meet standards in ELA and math.

Low K-8 chronic absenteeism rates.

High school students graduate A-G ready.

Parents and students empowered as advocates.

*From our strategic plan: Like many of our grantees and others in our field, our team grapples with the fact that some of the most important aspects of what students need to succeed in school are hard and messy to measure. We do not shy away from these areas – nor do we want our grantees to – simply because it is hard to measure progress. We see this as part of the work. We will partner with grantees to understand the best way to track progress within the context of their work.