



STEP ONE CONNECT



A Message From Susana

Dear Step One Community,

As I reflect on last year, I would be remiss not to mention that with great appreciation, and many tears, we said goodbye to our wonderful founder and Executive Director, Sue Britson. While bittersweet, a highlight was the opportunity to gather as a community to celebrate and honor Sue and connect with decades of alumni and their families.

The 2022-2023 school year was a year of transition and change in many ways beyond Sue's retirement. I was thrilled to accept the role of Executive Director, after working as Program Director for 9 years.

It was an exciting year to be making this shift, as we were slowly coming out of the surreal experience of two years of "pandemic preschool". While I know that Step One children experienced all of the joy and love that Step One has to offer, even during the pandemic, we were all craving regular life: without masking, Covid-testing, and social distancing. As we navigated a cautious Fall, we looked toward the Spring with the hope that we would all be able to get back to doing things "the old way". We slowly began to gather and

celebrate together again, inviting our families and community back on campus to learn, eat, play, and dance.

On behalf of the students, teachers, and staff, thank you for all of the ways that you support the Step One community!

Best,
Susana Casher
Executive Director

Mission Statement

Step One School nurtures children's love of life and learning in a community rooted in respect for self and humanity.

Vision Statement

Step One's vision is to be a model of excellence in early childhood education, thus inspiring our larger society to an elevated commitment to its young children. The vibrant educational community of Step One provides the healthy foundation children need to reach their full potential as learners and human beings.

Board of Trustees

Susana Casher,
Executive Director

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Board Chair

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Mike Ouye

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Anne Perkins

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Raquel Jacquez Sharp

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Letter from the Board Chair

Dear Step One School Community,

I am writing on behalf of the Step One School Board of Trustees. For those whom I haven't met, I've been on the Board since 2017 and a part of the Step One community since 2016, when my oldest child started as a two-year-old. Next year, my youngest child will enroll at Step One and I can't be more thrilled to soon be returning as a parent.

Step One holds a dear place in the hearts of so many of the families who have attended the school over the years; it is truly a special community. Our collective efforts have enabled the school to reach significant milestones, and build resiliency and financial security. A few of our key accomplishments over the last five years include:

- **The Step Two Capital Campaign:** We raised \$1.6 million in the school's first major capital campaign, helping us build the multi-purpose room, a faculty lounge, and conference space.
- **Maintaining School Operations and Teacher Pay During Covid:** During the Covid-19 pandemic, our community came together in the face of the unprecedented need to close the school and, later, reopen in the midst of a global pandemic. Our dedicated teachers and staff returned to work as essential



workers to ensure that children could return to school as quickly as possible, and the generous contributions from our families and alumni helped keep teachers' salaries intact until the school could fully reopen.

- **The Sue Britson Changemaker Fund:** In honor of founding Director Sue Britson, we raised \$800,000, to provide full Financial Aid to 4-5 qualifying families per year over the next 10 years.
- **Securing the Future – ED Transition and Strategic Plan:** Upon Sue Britson's retirement after more than 30 years, we welcomed Susana Casher as the school's next Executive Director, after an extensive search process. We also developed the School's current strategic plan with the input of Step One teachers and staff, parents, and alumni. We are pleased to share our progress with you in this newsletter.

In all of this, we are emerging from the pandemic years in a solid spot, and are well-positioned for the future. Each accomplishment we make together underscores the strength and dedication of our extraordinary community.

Friends forever,
Jenny Herbert Creek
Parent of Step One alums Charlotte (age 10) and Miles (age 7), and of Isaac (age 2)

The Strategic Plan's Priorities

During the 2021-2022 school year, the Step One Board invited our community of families, alumni, faculty and staff to help us envision the next set of strategic goals for the school. The resulting 2022-2025 Strategic Plan is grounded in our school's mission to "nurture children's love of life and learning in a community rooted in respect for self and humanity." We are excited to share the pillars of the new plan with you.

Learning Stories:

Connecting the Community and Supporting Professional Development

- Launch Learning Story professional development program to make children's learning visible to caregivers and the community.
- Deepen the professional development and mentorship for teachers within a developmentally appropriate and anti-bias framework.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging: Sharing and Strengthening Step One's Commitment to Inclusion

- Articulate Step One's DEIB philosophy, language, and curricular approach with children and families, as well as with the larger Early Childhood Education community.
- Implement the Sue Britson Changemaker fund -providing full financial aid to 4-5 families per year over 10 years.

Financial Resiliency: Ensuring the Future of Step One

- Undertake scenario planning to balance enrollment, class size and hours, and teacher salaries, to inform enrollment and program development.
- Continue to build upon the momentum and capacity of the community for supporting major campaigns through intentional stewardship and robust Annual Fund management.

Safe and Sustainable Spaces: Adapting to Our Changing Environments

- Develop and implement a "Sustainability Audit" for the school.
- Reduce environmental footprint on campus and in school operations, assessing resource use.



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To make name or address corrections, email marisa@steponeschool.org or call (510) 527-9021.

Sue Britson Changemaker Fund

We are so excited to share that we have implemented the Changemaker Fund for the 2023-2024 school year by awarding 5 families full tuition. One of the recipients was selected to receive their tuition award in honor of Alexis Walters, Step One alum and beloved teacher, who we lost to cancer in 2021.

A very big thank you to Jim Van Huysse for his exceptional leadership and his big heart in supporting Step One and chairing this campaign. Thank you to our committee members for your time and energy in truly making this a community effort.

A heartfelt thank you to the donors who made the Changemaker Fund possible! "Friends Forever" has never felt truer as foundations, current families, alumni families and students, grandparents, friends, and teachers from every decade of the school helped us surpass our goal.



Financial Update

During the 2022-2023 school year, Step One School continued to operate within a balanced budget, even as we emerged from the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. We commend our teachers and administrative staff for their productivity and efficiency. They were an integral part of our high enrollment rate and cost control during the year. We would also like to thank everyone who contributed to our 2023 Annual Campaign. Budget highlights include:

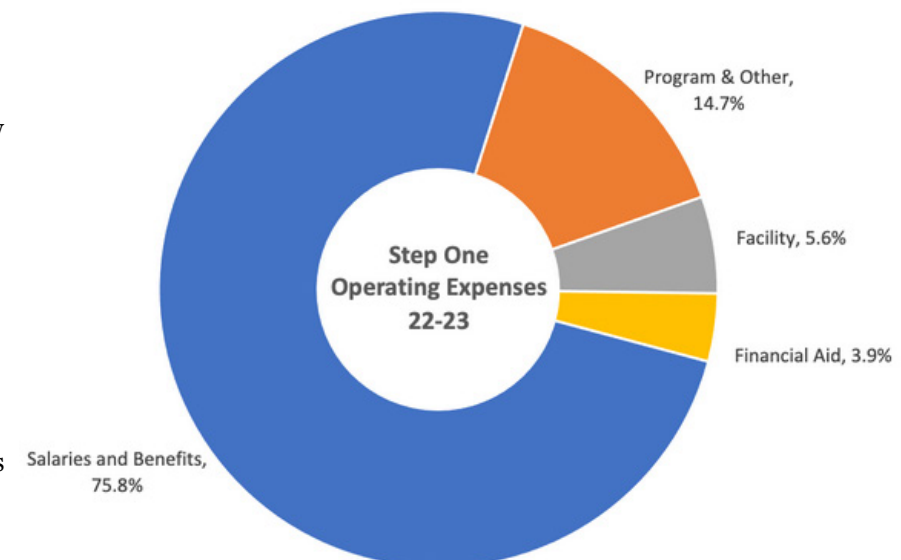
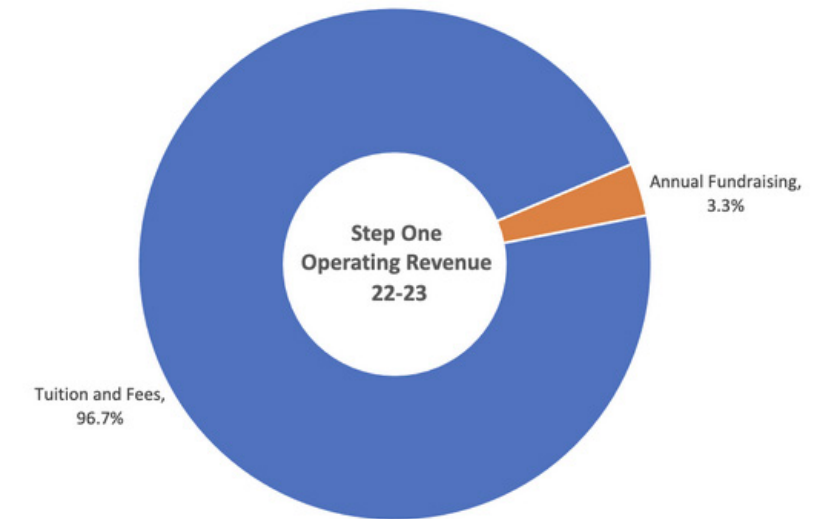
- More than 75% of tuition goes directly to support teacher and administrative staff salaries and benefits
- Our Annual Fund campaign is the primary source of financial aid funding for the school (annual fundraising is 3.3% of revenues and financial aid is 3.8% of revenues)

The School continues to be in strong financial health and the Finance Committee is confident in the School's management of resources, including its reserves and capital investments. Investments the school has made over the last three years include:

- Expanded the school's reserve funds to 4 months of operating expenses
- Paid off the mortgage on the School property at the end of the mortgage term (the School is now debt-free)
- Took on new projects at the school facility, including installing upgraded HVAC systems and installing new asphalt and a shade structure in the yard

We are also proud to report that we met our fundraising goal for the Sue Britson Changemaker Fund. Together, we raised \$800,000, which enables a new program to provide 100% financial aid for an average of 5 children each year over the next 10 years. This is in addition to our existing financial aid funds. We look forward to keeping you posted on our efforts to increase access for families who would not otherwise have the opportunity to enroll their children at Step One.

Revenue Sources





Anti-Bias and Emergent Curriculum

At Step One, our curriculum is designed using a play based emergent curriculum philosophy. Emergent curriculum is a collaborative process, initiated by children's strengths and interests. Teachers listen to conversations among children and observe their play to inform curriculum. This child-led approach is balanced with the adult's own specific goals in mind, such as meeting developmental benchmarks and learning foundations. Our teachers also use an anti-bias framework to: nurture the identity of each child, promote empathetic interaction between friends from diverse backgrounds, foster children's capacity to identify bias, and to cultivate the ability to stand up for one's self and others.

Last year, teachers in several classrooms decided to go deep into an area of interest and curiosity that is common for children at this age: the desire to create, make art, and use multiple mediums to express themselves. Teachers watched as children connected to various photographs and books of artwork, many of which featured Black artists, both historical and current. One preschool classroom immersed themselves in the work of Kehinde Wiley. Kehinde Wiley's works are deeply rooted in the Black experience and draw from the history of classical portraiture. In 2017, Wiley was chosen to paint the official portrait of former President Barack Obama. The children were fascinated by the bold colors and florals in Kehinde Wiley's

pieces, as well as the striking poses of the people in each painting. Each child went through multiple stages of creating their own Kehinde Wiley-inspired self-portraits.

First, the children looked through many examples of Wiley's work and spent time deciding which one spoke to and inspired them: the colors, the shapes, and the poses of the models. Then, the children were asked to pose just like the people in the portraits. Finally, the children went through the process of cutting themselves out and gluing themselves onto the original, colorful backgrounds.

Teacher Amalie describes the process in this way:

I wanted the students to have the experience of taking on the personality of the portraits, which is why I had them pick an image that spoke to them and pose in that way. They became a part of the art, which made the experience more powerful.



The children not only had a chance to practice their fine motor and artmaking skills, but they were also moved to think critically about art and their own identity and to admire the beauty and creativity of their friends. The children became incredible works of art themselves and their portraits were displayed on the windows of Room 2 for the community to admire.

The Annual Fund

On behalf of the children, teachers, staff, and Board members at Step One School, thank you for supporting the Annual Fund. The Annual Fund is critical to ensuring that we fulfill our mission of nurturing children's love of life and learning in a community rooted in respect for self and humanity, both today and well into the future. Gifts to the Annual Fund directly support:

- Financial Aid: The Annual Fund provides half of the Financial Aid we award each year.
- Our teachers and program: The Annual Fund provides funding for professional development for our staff and enhancements to the curriculum.

A HUGE thank you to our Annual Fund Chair, Mike Ouye for the time and energy he put toward making last year so successful. And... to our room representatives, thank you for keeping your rooms engaged! Thank you, Steve Webb, & Emma Starks Webb, Annie Fujimoto, Helen Liu, and Mike Ouye. A very special thank you to Raquel McKinney for leading the charge with staff giving.



Your gifts speak volumes about the collective impact of the Step One community, where current and alumni families, staff, and friends come together in support of our core values.

“*The Annual Fund is critical to ensuring that we fulfill our mission of nurturing children's love of life and learning in a community rooted in respect for self and humanity, both today and well into the future.*”

Alumni Highlight

Gianna Gunier attended Step One from 2003-2006. When Gianna was a senior at Berkeley High School, she took a Law and Social Justice class that sparked her interest in and passion for learning about the justice system, specifically how the justice system interacts with social and public health. After graduating from Berkeley High, Gianna attended UCLA, where she discovered the Carceral Ecologies Lab, a lab devoted to projects that research the injustices of the prison industrial complex as they intersect with environmental injustices. Gianna says that this lab was the “best thing I experienced at UCLA.”

Gianna's time working with the lab grew her passion for advocating for real change and disrupting and dismantling unjust systems. Gianna worked on multiple projects with the lab, including the Autopsy Analysis project, which explored the role that medical examiners at LA County Jail play in perpetuating police violence. Gianna graduated from UCLA this spring and is excited to begin to explore work in the world that will allow her to continue to learn, grow, and contribute to positive change. Whatever she decides to do next, we know that Gianna will embody the Step One values of listening to her heart and helping others!



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Step One Alumni and Alumni Families

There are several ways to connect with us, get in contact with fellow classmates, and/or be involved at Step One!

Visit steponeschool.org/stayconnected to

CONNECT

Follow Step One on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)!

SHARE

Update your contact info and tell us what you are doing now.

MAKE A GIFT

Alumni and alumni families are invited to make a gift to our Annual Fund!

BE A CLASS REPRESENTATIVE

Be an ambassador for Step One by staying in touch with your former classmates and connecting with them about Step One reunions and events.





Step One
School

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