Family Connections Strategic Plan

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Executive Summary

Program Description. Family Connections is a tuition-free school operator and family support organization serving children from birth through high school in San Mateo County. Founded in 1993, the organization’s mission is to provide underserved children, their families, and their communities with the early childhood education and ongoing support they need to grow, dream, and achieve. Its vision is that whole communities thrive when children and parents—regardless of their circumstances—are educated and supported to reach their greatest potential. Family Connections serves nearly 200 families at its three locations: East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, and Redwood City.

Growth Goals. This five year strategic plan reflects Family Connections’ desire to deepen its impact with the children and families it serves and increase the scale of its work. After evaluating the trade-offs of three potential avenues of growth, the board and leadership team agreed that this strategic plan should focus on preparing to scale with quality. As such, the strategic plan includes five big goals:

- A rigorous evaluation of program quality, which will guide efforts to both track student progress toward high outcomes and improve program effectiveness;
- Greater organizational capacity for sustainable growth, primarily through the addition of development staff and expanded program capacity;
- A clear plan for scaling and integrating the Young Scholars Program;
- A sustainability plan, which will include a coherent fundraising and marketing approach and deeper analyses of potential earned income strategies; and
- A clear plan to invest in facilities to support the full potential of all of Family Connections’ programs.

The board and staff recognize that in the later years of the strategic plan, Family Connections may have the opportunity to grow its preschool program, either by adding an additional campus or by participating in San Mateo County’s Big Lift Initiative. Achieving these five goals will prepare the organization for successful growth.

Strategic Outcomes. If Family Connections is able to achieve the goals of this strategic plan, it will be well-positioned to demonstrate its quality and longevity to the field. Family Connections will be able to:

- Articulate a clear and compelling story of impact for funders;
- Demonstrate the effectiveness of its model to other preschools interested in learning how to implement its model;
- Interest new districts where Family Connections might wish to open new schools; and
- Attract and engage new partner organizations that might work with Family Connections to offer a wider range of services to families.

Path to Sustainability. In order to invest in its program and facilities and serve more children and families, Family Connections will need greater capacity to cultivate a broader range of funders, including high net worth individuals, foundations, corporations, and public and government funding. To begin, board and staff have decided to hire or engage development staff who can create a coherent plan for fundraising and messaging, guide the board in their roles as external ambassadors for the organization, and create capacity for the Executive Director to cultivate more funders and partners.

First Steps. This strategic plan implies a set of short-term activities for both board and staff. The chart below identifies those activities and who will lead them. In cases where both board and staff are marked as lead, the responsibility is shared and the work will be done in partnership.
Family Connections board and staff will begin the work by developing an implementation plan to guide the execution of each of these near term activities. The organization will form an implementation committee of board and staff that will be responsible for establishing year-to-year work plan that includes key outcomes, deadlines, and the individual or team leading the work to execute the strategic plan. The implementation plan will be completed by June 30th, 2015.

Strategic Planning Process. This strategic planning process included several components. Board and staff worked together to rearticulate Family Connections’ mission and vision, which guided conversations about growth and impact aspirations. They also identified and evaluated three potential avenues for growth – accelerating the growth of its Young Scholars Program, opening new schools, and “manualizing” and sharing the parent engagement model nationally. Board and staff then spent several board meetings exploring the trade-offs of each, and drew conclusions about how to best prioritize these opportunities. Finally, board and staff spent a significant amount of time addressing the twin needs of building organizational capacity for greater impact and planning a path to sustainability. This strategic plan synthesizes all of this work, and will serve as a guide as Family Connections strengthens its operations, finances, and program.
Introduction: The Problem We Confront

Having a high-quality preschool experience remains one of the single biggest influences on a child’s grade school readiness. Further, children who perform well in early grades have an increased chance of graduating from high school and college. We also know that getting a college degree matters. Children who complete college have higher rates of employment and lifetime earnings, higher engagement in civic activities such as voting and volunteering, and healthier lifestyles. In this way, a solid preschool education becomes the foundation for breaking cycles of poverty within families and communities.

Unfortunately, we know that not every child gets the early education and support they need to thrive in school. According to San Mateo County School Readiness data, children in Family Connections’ community are entering Kindergarten behind their peers, and staying behind. The demand for high-quality, affordable preschool in San Mateo County is significantly greater than spaces available. Family Connections expects this trend to continue since recent budget cuts have resulted in a reduction in subsidized preschool programs.

Family Connections plays an essential role in meeting the early childhood education needs of low-income families. It is the only tuition-free parent participation program for low-income families in the state of California. Family Connections consistently has a waiting list for preschool classes for older children. This year, it also added its Young Scholars Program, to provide continued support to preschool alumni and their families as they navigate their journey through K-12 education.

The Family Connections program provides children with the academic, social, and emotional learning they need to thrive in school, and helps parents embrace their roles as their children’s first teacher. The program goes beyond simply preparing children to meet or exceed the state of California’s Kindergarten readiness standards. It also seeks to break the cycle of poverty in low-income communities by engaging children and their parents early in the education process. The organization’s mission and vision follow:

Our mission is to provide underserved children, their families, and their communities with the early childhood education and ongoing support they need to grow, dream, and achieve.

Our vision is that whole communities thrive when children and parents – regardless of their circumstances – are educated and supported to reach their greatest potential.
Overview of the Family Connections Program

Family Connections offers three programs:

- Nurturing Families, an infant/toddler program (serving ages 0-3, two days a week);
- The Preschool Program (serving ages 3-5, three days a week); and
- Young Scholars Program, an education support program serving preschool alumni and their families from Kindergarten through 12th grade.

Nurturing Families & the Preschool Program: Curriculum & Assessment. The infant/toddler program focuses on relationships, bonding, and learning through play. The preschool program adds more academic content. The curriculum focuses on early literacy, math, science, and social/emotional learning. The program also offers a virtual Pre-K math curriculum, so that parents and children can work at home with concepts such as measurement, shapes, and number recognition.

Ten years ago, Family Connections started a portfolio-based curriculum that parents complete with their children. This portfolio is central to Family Connections’ approach to assessment. Family Connections also uses the Ages & Stages evaluation tool with parents to support student assessment. Using the portfolio and the outcomes of the screening tool, parents and teachers work together to set three goals for their children, which they work toward over the following four months. Children are screened twice a year. Goals might be accomplished within the Family Connections program or using external support. The intake specialist and teachers also use this assessment as a basis for aligning parent expectations with appropriate developmental goals.

Nurturing Families & the Preschool Program: Instruction & Faculty Professional Development. Teachers help children develop curiosity and a passion for learning through exploration and early exposure to science and math activities. Students learn through cooperative play, develop large and fine motor skills, are guided in ways to resolve conflicts, and learn to love books. All teachers have ECE (Early Childhood Education) and adult teaching credentials. Every year, teachers receive training from a variety of organizations, including Raising A Reader and the Ravenswood School District’s school readiness team.

Parent Participation. Throughout its history, Family Connections has recognized the importance of attending to the needs of parents and the whole family, in order to have optimal impact on the children in the program. Parents participate in classes with their children, giving them practical knowledge of their role in their children’s education. Additionally, Family Connections supports parents through the myriad stressors they may face. Family Connections offers a menu of services, including a domestic violence program, a maternal and paternal depression program, parenting support groups, and mindfulness classes. Family Connections sends a clear message to families that it is a trusted partner as they navigate their role as parents. These strong relationships with parents are essential as teachers guide parents through the challenges of parenting.

Community Partnerships. Family Connections leverages community partnerships to help expand the range of services it can provide to families. Here are a few of the organization’s partners:
### Figure Two: Family Connections’ Partners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abilities United</td>
<td>• Provides specialists who offer guidance to parents and teachers about how best to support children in an inclusive setting.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Golden Gate Regional Center                       | • Provides referrals for infant/toddler program  
• Provides specialists for children who need them, allowing them to continue to be included in a regular program.                          |
| Pre-to-Three by San Mateo County Health            | • Provides birth to three home visiting and other in-home support services.                                                                      |
| Raising A Reader                                  | • Provides teacher professional development.                                                                                                   |
| San Mateo County Office of Education               | • Provides teacher professional development.                                                                                                  |
| Stanford Pediatrics                                | • First year residents come to Family Connections to learn more about resources in the community.                                                
• Provides parent education about pediatric health issues.                                             |
| Star Vista                                         | • Administers Ages & Stages assessment  
• Provides topical presentations, such as depression and the importance of fathers  
• Provides home visitation training to Family Connections staff.                                       |

Source: Family Connections.

**Young Scholars Program.** The Young Scholars Program mentors preschool alumni students and their families from Kindergarten through their high school years, with the goal of ensuring that students are prepared for success in college. The program launched in Spring 2014, and currently serves 13 Kindergarteners. Families meet monthly, with an opportunity for parent education as well as student learning. The curriculum for the children focuses heavily on literacy and language acquisition, but includes math and science as well. Children also enjoy collaborative games and activities such as pumpkin carving, yoga, and dance. Activities and curriculum align to the expectations of the Common Core State Standards. Parent education strives to strengthen parent capacity to support learning at home. Additionally, Young Scholars staff provides weekly check-ins with families, either in person or over the phone, email, or text. Finally, Young Scholars children have attended field trips to CuriOdyssey, East Palo Alto Library, Engineering Day at San Francisco Exploratorium, and the play, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory.*
Family Connections identified three long-term growth strategies to pursue in order to achieve its mission. They include:

- Expanding and integrating the Young Scholars Program
- Opening more schools
- Packaging the model to share nationally

These opportunities are evaluated thoroughly in the Assessment Report of September 2014, which preaced the strategic plan. A summary of this evaluation follows in APPENDIX ONE – Growth Strategies and APPENDIX FOUR – Big Lift Communities & The Opportunity to Serve.

Given the opportunities, costs, and risks that each of these growth opportunities present, the board and staff agreed to prioritize and sequence growth this way:

**Figure Three: Prioritizing & Sequencing Growth**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Short-Term</th>
<th>Medium-Term</th>
<th>Long-Term</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strengthen program <em>quality</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Build organizational capacity for growth with program quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue to expand and integrate the <em>Young Scholars Program</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Create a plan for <em>sustainability</em> during growth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invest in <em>facilities</em> to support the full potential of the program</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Open <em>new schools</em>, potentially by participating in the Big Lift Initiative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Share the model</em> nationally</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Family Connections.

The scope of this strategic plan includes the first five of these seven components of growth. Specifically, Family Connections will need to evaluate the quality of the program and establish a system for measuring its outcomes in a rigorous and ongoing way. It will also need to build its operational capacity so that future growth is both sustainable and effective. Family Connections will develop its Young Scholars Program so that it is an integrated part of the organization. A clear sustainability plan will help protect its longevity. Finally, Family Connections will need to invest in high-quality, long-term facilities that will support the full potential of its program. Opening new schools and sharing the model nationally are medium to longer-term possibilities, which rely on the success of the short-term goals.
Focus Area 1: Strengthening Program Quality

Family Connections’ vision for its program is that it educates children from birth to pre-Kindergarten, and then supports and coaches them along their entire K-12 educational journey. It engages parents as essential partners along the entire way. To date, the organization has understood the success of its program through internal surveys, student assessment practices, and the anecdotal feedback of its partners and of the families it serves. However, as Family Connections contemplates growth, it will need to gain greater clarity about the effectiveness of its programs, from a more rigorous evaluation of program quality and student outcomes.

The Big Lift Initiative and Race to the Top are providing initial funding for potential partners to participate in an external evaluation of program quality using the California QRIS scale. Family Connections will participate in early 2015, and expects to gain a new perspective on the quality of its program. It will use the results of the evaluation to establish new ways to monitor the effectiveness of the program and identify areas for program improvement. The leadership team anticipates that the evaluation will indicate opportunities to improve campus facilities and strengthen curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices.

Focus Area 2: Expanding Operational Capacity for Growth

Operational capacity can be viewed through six often-overlapping lenses. There are:

- Board capacity;
- Staff capacity;
- Development capacity;
- Facilities capacity;
- Scalable program quality; and
- Back office systems and processes.

Family Connections might bolster its organizational capacity in each of these areas.

**Board Capacity.** Family Connections currently has a small board of just nine members. The board is contemplating a larger membership, to help share the work of fundraising and external communications. Further, the mix of skills on the board should match the strategic needs of the organization. This year, the board will renew its efforts to recruit new board members with the diversity, skills, and fundraising connections necessary to support the organization as it grows. The board may also improve the current committee structure to better support its work.

**Staff Capacity.** In partnership with the board, Executive Director Renee Zimmerman and Education Coordinator Ruth Pinkus-Resnik have reexamined the roles and responsibilities of staff, including implications for full-time, part-time, contractor, and volunteer staffing. A potential organization chart for growth follows, with contractor and consultant roles identified by dashed lines:
This staffing model creates new development roles to strengthen fundraising and marketing, combines the Community & Volunteer Development and Preschool Outreach Coordinator roles, and creates a new Program Manager role. This Program Manager oversees all of the preschool and infant toddler program teachers and takes on the intake specialist responsibilities. Other roles see changes to title, responsibilities, and structure, and the use of contractors and volunteers changes. A description of roles and responsibilities follows in APPENDIX TWO – Staff Roles & Responsibilities. Finally, Family Connections – like all early childhood programs in San Mateo County – struggles to find a pipeline of high-quality early childhood educators in a high turnover field. Offering market-based benefits might help Family Connections attract, motivate, and retain high-quality staff.

**Development.** In order to articulate a path to sustainability, Family Connections will need to engage a Director of Development who can lead both fund development and marketing/messaging. Additional development staff frees the Executive Director’s time for more strategic work, such as relationship building and public speaking. This person would be responsible for building a larger base of support – including individual, corporate, and foundation giving as well as public grant opportunities. This person would also translate the outcomes of the QRIS evaluation into clearer messages of program effectiveness. This person could be full-time staff or a long-term consultant. Family Connections will also hire a Development Associate who can ensure the tactical aspects of fundraising and marketing are attended to.

**Facilities.** Current facilities are leased, in some cases, with short terms. This creates a disincentive for investing in space that support a high-quality program. Family Connections urgently needs to improve the quality of its facilities. For this reason, facilities investment is a separate focus area, described in greater detail below.

**Scalable Program Quality.** As previously discussed, participating in the QRIS evaluation process will provide Family Connections with concrete opportunities for investing to improve the campuses
and refining the quality of the infant/toddler and preschool programs, including curriculum, assessment, and approaches to parent engagement. The outcomes of the QRIS evaluation could result in changes to the school year, length of school day, location of the infant/toddler and preschool programs, and teacher roles.

**Back Office Systems & Processes.** A thorough review of operating capacity could include systems and processes for supporting the program. For example, Family Connections might explore a Salesforce database to replace its current fundraising platform, eTapestry by Blackbaud.

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**Focus Area 3: Scaling & Integrating the Young Scholars Program**

Although the first year is still in progress, the Young Scholars Program staff and board committee recently convened to reflect on the program’s successes and challenges to date. There has been a lot to celebrate in Young Scholars’ inaugural year. The staff believes that the curriculum has been both engaging and effective, and that parents are not only building the capacity to support their children’s education in elementary school but also strengthening their relationships with each other. Volunteers have been committed and engaged. The Young Scholars Program staff and board committee have identified the following six strategic priorities for the program:

- Build Systems for Scale
- Develop and “Manualize” the Program Model
- Develop a Staffing and Volunteer Model for Successful Scale
- Identify the Costs to Support Successful Scale
- Identify Potential Partners for Successful Scale
- Program Evaluation

**Building Systems for Scale.** The Young Scholars Program team will need to develop systems and processes that scale with rapidly growing enrollment and increasingly diverse student needs. For example, currently data collection on student performance and family experience is a labor-intensive effort. The Young Scholars team is exploring ways to make data collection more efficient so that it does not become unduly burdensome when the number of families reaches full enrollment. Similarly, staffing needs will accelerate as enrollment grows. The Young Scholars team will develop a staffing model that clearly identifies the roles and responsibilities of both staff and volunteers and a hiring process that is replicable each year.

**Develop and “Manualize” the Program Model.** Young Scholars will spend the next twelve to eighteen months planning for two dimensions of growth: increasing enrollment and extending the program for additional grade levels. First, the number of students it serves will grow by about 15 students each year. This assumes that the program will be offered to all three sites, starting in the 2015-16 school year. Second, Young Scholars will add curriculum for an additional grade and new developmental stages each year. Growth, assuming modest amounts of attrition, could roll out as follows:
As the chart shows, in each of the next twelve years, the Young Scholars staff will need to roll out a new curriculum for children advancing to the next grade, while offering consistently excellent curriculum in grades it already serves. In order to give the development of new curriculum the effort and focus it deserves, Young Scholars staff will need to make the existing curriculum as easy to replicate from year-to-year as possible. The staff will need to clearly identify the scope and sequence of its work, and document lesson plans and activities, etc. Further, as curriculum evolves to meet the needs of older children, other programmatic structures may change. For example, a project based learning curriculum for middle school students might require that children meet weekly, rather than monthly.

**Develop a Staffing and Volunteer Model for Successful Scale.** Like the Nurturing Families and preschool programs, Young Scholar’s biggest expense is staffing. Currently, the program is delivered with one staff person and several volunteers. The size of the staff is determined by the caseload of families that each teacher can effectively serve. Further, caseload will likely change as children get older. For example, one teacher might be able to effectively serve just 15 students when they are in Kindergarten to 3rd grade, but could serve 30-50 students when the children are in middle and high school.

**Identify the Costs to Support Successful Scale.** As enrollment grows, the cost of delivering an excellent program will grow. The most significant categories of spending include staffing costs, program development, program materials and supplies, field trip expenses and transportation, and facilities costs. Additionally, the staff and board may elect to fundraise for other education costs, such as application fees to selective high schools and universities, scholarships and other tuition assistance, and funds for additional tutoring and extracurricular activities.

**Identify Potential Partners for Successful Scale.** As children in the Young Scholars Program grow, their needs and their relationships will change as well. Anticipating that the program might need to offer a broader range of support, staff will begin to build relationships with other nonprofits that can provide additional resources appropriate to different developmental stages. For example,
specialists can support children and parents as they navigate challenges that come with adolescence, such as puberty, peer relationships, access to drugs, and other risky behaviors.

**Program Evaluation.** Family Connections will set clear metrics and milestones for student performance so that it can begin to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of its programs. A coherent approach to evaluation will give the organization the longitudinal data necessary to demonstrate the effectiveness of each of the programs. This evidence will be invaluable for external messaging and fundraising efforts.

### Focus Area 4: A Sustainability Plan

The RAND Corporation’s recent report, “Financial Sustainability for Nonprofit Organizations,” provides a survey of current research on sustainability, and helps to frame our thinking. At the highest level, experts describe five key components for sustainability for nonprofit organizations. They are:

- A coherent approach to mission, vision, outcomes, and operational efficiency, to ensure that program goals and execution are aligned;
- A meaningful investment in leadership – both staff and board – so that they sustain a vision, inspire their staff and external stakeholders, innovate, and provide direction;
- A point-of-view about a target mix of funding sources;
- Clear and consistent marketing and communications; and
- Evaluation studies to demonstrate program impact and support reliable, long-term funding.

There are four general categories of funding: individual giving, corporate giving, foundation giving and public or government funding. Generally, their attributes can be described as follows:

#### Figure Five: Funding Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Often unrestricted</td>
<td>Smaller dollar amounts</td>
<td>Program &amp; Organizational Capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainable, once the flywheel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>starts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate</td>
<td>Moderate to light due diligence</td>
<td>Smaller dollar amounts</td>
<td>Events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>process</td>
<td></td>
<td>Program capacity, such as volunteer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation</td>
<td>Larger dollar amounts</td>
<td>Often restricted</td>
<td>Discrete initiatives that advance the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Temporary</td>
<td>mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public/Government</td>
<td>Larger amounts</td>
<td>Often restricted</td>
<td>Discrete projects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: general knowledge.
A long-range model that describes the financial implications of building organizational capacity and achieving sustainable growth is attached in APPENDIX THREE – Long Range Financial Model. Currently, the model shows a heavy reliance on foundation and high net worth funding in order to close the funding gap. However, it also leaves room for potential earned revenues from other sources to help offset the costs of the program. Potential strategies include implementing a registration fee; serving higher income families that can pay some tuition to defray the costs of the tuition-free families; and “manualizing” the programs to sell to other school and family support organizations nationally. When Family Connections hires a development professional, he or she will refine the fundraising strategy to set clearer targets. Based on the current long-range model, a potential funding mix could include 50-60% from individual giving and 40-50% from foundations and corporate partners. Government or public funding could be used for episodic program opportunities.

Sustainability is a shared project of board and staff. An excellent program that can demonstrate sustainable long-term outcomes is essential to cultivating potential funders. A board that is both willing to actively participate in the fundraising process and has a strong network of potential donors is also essential to helping a nonprofit achieve financial sustainability. Finally, effective development staff that can coordinate the various efforts of marketing, communications, and funder cultivation can help maximize the effectiveness of board and staff.

**Focus Area 5: Facilities to Support a High-Quality Program**

Currently, none of the Family Connections programs are housed in secure, long-term facilities. Because facilities are not owned, there is a disincentive to invest in a space that supports the quality of the program. The status of Family Connections’ three current facilities is as follows:

- **Redwood City** – currently housed in a single family home owned by the Sequoia Union High School District. This is a two year lease of $1, paid annually.
- **Menlo Park** – currently a portable owned by the Ravenswood school district. The district has a facilities master plan, and it is not clear that Family Connections is on the radar. This portable is in substandard condition and urgently needs renovation.
- **East Palo Alto** – Currently located on the Eastside College Prep campus. This is a year-to-year lease. The school is interested in developing the property as they expand the school, so this location is at risk.

The board and staff will lead the development of a plan for long-term, high-quality facilities. To begin, the board will recruit additional members with commercial real estate experience and reform its facilities committee. Staff will develop a set of criteria for facilities that support a high-quality program, to guide the search for new property.
Metrics & Milestones

Family Connections has a system in place for evaluating the quality of its program each year. Currently, faculty and the Executive Director set goals and focus areas for the curriculum. Strategies to achieve the goals are planned, including teacher professional development. At the end of the year, faculty and the Executive Director evaluate their performance against the goals. Sources of data include formal parent surveys, individual Kindergarten-readiness assessments, operational data such as class participation, student attendance, parent attendance in parent education sessions and parent night meetings, and an alumni survey. Feedback is used to inform future goals and continuously improve the programs.

Additionally, Family Connections is partnering with experts in the research and evaluation field to improve its current evaluation tools and to prepare for a future controlled study. For example, the organization is partnering with the John Gardner Center at Stanford University. The Center is maintaining a Youth Data archive, to which Family Connections will contribute and from which Family Connections can receive aggregated benchmark data.

As part of this strategic plan, Family Connections will explore ways to introduce greater rigor to the process, so that it can demonstrate more clearly its student outcomes and program effectiveness.
## Risks & Mitigation Strategies

Increasing the number of students it serves and the length of its relationship with each student introduces significant risks that the staff will need to monitor and manage. Here are a few:

**Figure Seven: Risks & Mitigation Strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Mitigation Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Quality</td>
<td>Family Connections may discover its program quality has room to improve on the QRIS scale. This may require significant investments in new curriculum, more elaborate authentic assessments, and/or additional professional training for staff.</td>
<td>The long range model budgets for increases in program investment, to support continuous improvement of the programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adding Development Staff</td>
<td>It seems that every nonprofit is searching for a strong development person. It may prove difficult to attract and retain the high-quality staff that Family Connections needs to grow.</td>
<td>Board and staff are exploring other ways to build this capacity, including hiring a long-term consultant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned Income Strategies</td>
<td>Family Connections’ first effort to support its growth will be to expand its fundraising efforts with foundations, public/government grants, and high net worth individuals. However, board and staff may discover that its fundraising capacity is insufficient to achieve sustainability. Developing a viable earned income strategy may be necessary for Family Connections’ long-term sustainability.</td>
<td>Board and staff will explore other earned income options to help offset the costs of the program, including registration fees; serving higher income families that can pay some tuition to defray the costs of the tuition-free families; and “manualizing” the program to sell to other preschools nationally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Scholars Program</td>
<td>Family Connections may discover that it does not have the expertise to effectively coach children and families beyond 3rd grade.</td>
<td>Board and staff are actively exploring partnerships with other organizations that can provide the support children need at various points in their development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costly Facilities Investment</td>
<td>Family Connections may discover that one or more of the facilities require costly renovations – or campuses must move – in order to support a high-quality program.</td>
<td>New development staff may prioritize fundraising for one or more facilities. Innovative nonprofit facilities options may be...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Mitigation Strategy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Similarly, board and staff may determine that effective fundraising with foundations and/or high net worth individuals requires a new facility that showcases the full potential for the program.</td>
<td>explored.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board Tenure</td>
<td>The Family Connections board is small, and as a result of its limited bandwidth, it is tactical in its efforts. For example, its work has emphasized short-term projects (such as the Night of Dreams event), rather than strategic, big-picture planning. As a result, the organization has seen individual board members burn out quickly, and turnover has been high.</td>
<td>The board will work to increase its size to share the work. Additionally, the organization will transition more of the execution of big events to staff and volunteers, and hire new staff to support fundraising and marketing work. This will allow the board to focus its efforts at a more strategic level.</td>
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</table>
Learning Agenda

There are certain areas of growth that are unknowable at the beginning of an organization’s growth. This section identifies the areas of growth that Family Connections cannot predict with certainty, the hypotheses that will guide its decision making, and how it will learn the answers to these questions.

Figure Eight: Learning Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunity for Learning</th>
<th>Starting Hypothesis</th>
<th>Means of Discovery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the quality of the Family Connections program?</td>
<td>The leadership team believes that the program quality will earn a mid-level rating on the California QRIS scale, and expects to see room for greater improvement.</td>
<td>Participate in the external QRIS evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can progress toward our mission be objectively measured?</td>
<td>The leadership team expects to use the QRIS rating scale to inform the metrics it currently uses to measure program effectiveness.</td>
<td>Participate in the external QRIS evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Review external research on the milestones of early childhood progress toward school readiness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Review external research on the milestones of K-3 progress toward middle school, high school, and college success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the funding capacity of different donor types for Family Connections’ mission?</td>
<td>The leadership team and board believe that there are many untapped sources of funding for Family Connections’ mission. The greatest opportunities are with high net worth individuals and foundations.</td>
<td>Hire a development professional who will design, coordinate, and lead the process of marketing and fund development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What messaging is most effective for potential new donors?</td>
<td>The leadership team and board believe that clear and vivid mission and vision statements supported by evidence of program effectiveness will be most compelling to foundation and corporate donors. Further, a clear description of program need in San Mateo County could inspire high net worth individuals in the county to donate to the program.</td>
<td>Hire a development professional who will design, coordinate, and lead the process of marketing and fund development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Revise marketing and communications approach to talk about all of Family Connections’ programs in an integrated way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the most efficient and effective way to scale the Young Scholars Program?</td>
<td>The process of scaling will evolve as the Young Scholars program learns from its growth experience. Its current hypothesis is that, as a relationship-based program, scale</td>
<td>Research effective organizational designs for scale and benchmark its approach with the field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Additional discovery will happen as the program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for Learning</td>
<td>Starting Hypothesis</td>
<td>Means of Discovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do the outcomes from the Young Scholars Program tell us about the effectiveness of all of the programs?</td>
<td>There is compelling evidence that Family Connections’ approach to early childhood education and family support is very effective. The board and staff expect future outcomes to affirm its quality as well as highlight ways to continue to improve.</td>
<td>Participate in a variety of data collection and evaluation efforts, including the John Gardner Center at Stanford and the QRIS evaluation. The outcomes of this work will help inform Family Connections’ approach to self-assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the options for accessing and funding high-quality, long-term facilities for the programs? Further, if Family Connections were to consolidate facilities, how would it positively or negatively impact enrollment?</td>
<td>The leadership team and board believe that there will be both a positive and negative impact on enrollment. Some families will not want to attend a school too far from their neighborhoods. However, others will be attracted to a nicer facility with greater amenities. The board and leadership team do not have a hypothesis about what the net impact may be.</td>
<td>Explore facilities options and options for funding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Family Connections has identified three long-term growth strategies to pursue in order to achieve its mission. They include:

- Young Scholars Program
- Opening more schools
- Packaging the model to share nationally

These opportunities are evaluated thoroughly in the Assessment Report of September 2014, which prefaced the strategic plan.

I. Young Scholars Program

**Description.** The mission of the Young Scholars Program is to support and partner with Family Connections’ low-income families and to help their children realize their dreams of completing college and becoming successful citizens who positively impact their community. While the Family Connections preschool program sets children on the right path, many of families are looking for added support, guidance, and advocacy as their children go through elementary and secondary school. Parents dream that one day their children will attain a college degree. The Young Scholars Program will continue to build on the foundation set in preschool and help families and children achieve their dreams.

In this inaugural year, the Young Scholars Program supports 13 low-income students who reside in the Ravenswood School District area, which include the communities of East Palo Alto and Belle Haven. The Young Scholars Program provides students with the resources needed to succeed personally and academically from kindergarten through college via a program that incorporates academic support, mentoring guidance, and parent engagement. The Young Scholars Program offers weekly one-on-one meetings with parents and parent education classes and extracurricular activities every other month to guide families through the various educational stages. The program addresses key academic benchmarks and character development skills. It also includes ongoing evaluation and data collection to inform the program’s evolution.

One of the Big Lift Initiative’s key priorities is for preschools to work with the K-12 system to ensure that children transition seamlessly into elementary school, so that their preschool gains are not lost. This aligns nicely with the goals of the Young Scholars Program.

**Intended Impact.** The Young Scholars Program will continue to build on the foundation set in preschool and help families and children achieve their dreams. This data driven effort provides longitudinal evidence of the impact of the other Family Connections programs. Measures will include academic, social/emotional, character development, as well as program satisfaction.

**Start-Up Resources & Obstacles to Surmount.** Start-up funding was provided by board member, Andrea Ballard, and her husband Andy. Additional start-up funding will be necessary to grow this program, so the Young Scholars Program will be included in a broader development, marketing, and communications strategy.

**Risks & Mitigation Strategy.** The main risks and their mitigation strategies are:

- The connection between Family Connections and its alumni may weaken as children grow. Inevitably, new organizations will also serve alumni families as their children grow and their
needs change. The relevance of these organizations may increase in families’ lives, potentially crowding out the role that Family Connections would like to play. Family Connections might build the capacity of YSP cohorts to provide peer support.

- Young Scholars Program children need new types of support that Family Connections is not equipped to provide. Other nonprofit organizations might serve as YSP partners to bolster the program.

- Young Scholars Program is unable to find suitable space for the coming school year. Family Connections staff has developed a list of potential facilities that might offer appropriate space at a low cost. Staff will reach out to these organizations immediately to begin to find suitable space.

**Learning Agenda.** The learning agenda describes the currently unknowable issues that Family Connections will learn more about as it embarks on this growth opportunity. The learning agenda for the Young Scholars Program strategy is:

- What are the obstacles that children in the Young Scholars Program face over the course of their school career?

- How successfully is Family Connections preparing its children for success in Kindergarten and elementary school? How does their experience inform the way the Family Connections early childhood program should evolve and improve?

- What aspects of the infant/toddler and preschool programs have the biggest impact on K-12 success?

- What are the most effective academic, social, emotional, and character supports that Young Scholars Program should provide its children?

- How does the caseload for staff evolve as children grow?

- How should curriculum evolve to support the developmental and academic needs of the children in the program?

- What messaging for the Young Scholars Program is most compelling for potential funders?

- What is the highest and best use of volunteers?

II. Opening More Schools

**Description.** There is enormous need for early childhood education and family strengthening support in the Bay Area. Family Connections explored opening additional locations in San Mateo or the broader Bay Area to serve more families.

The Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco asserted in their 2012 paper, “Suburbanization of Poverty in the Bay Area,” that poverty is increasing in the Bay Area, and it is migrating from the major cities into surrounding suburbs. They conclude that this challenges social service providers to rethink their models, because there are often fewer social services available in the suburbs, as well as lower access to public transportation. They offer a map, reprinted below, that illustrates concentrations of poverty in the Bay Area, with areas that have seen an increase in their poverty rates outlined in red:
Family Connections’ most immediate opportunity is to grow as part of the San Mateo County Big Lift Initiative. Currently only 58% of third graders are reading at grade level. The initiative’s goal is to get this number to 80% by 2020, by addressing both literacy and Kindergarten readiness. As part of this work, the San Mateo County board of supervisors has allocated $10 million of the Measure A half-cent sales tax to fund preschools over two years. They hope to impact four key aspects of early childhood education: literacy, attendance, “inspiring” summers, and family and
community engagement. Further, the initiative’s goal is to increase both the quality and access of San Mateo County’s preschools. The initiative will use the California QRIS rating system. Participants will need to be rated at a Level 3 or higher (on the QRIS 5 point scale), and will need to meet or exceed the standards set by the California Childcare Licensing Code (Title 22). The Big Lift Initiative will provide two important areas of capacity for Family Connections: data systems and longitudinal evaluation.

**Intended Impact.** By opening more schools, Family Connections could fill an unmet need in the community. Conversations with families, other nonprofit partners, and the San Mateo County Office of Education suggest that Family Connections is well-regarded for the quality of its program and its expertise in parent engagement.

**Start-Up Resources & Obstacles to Surmount.** The most significant costs and obstacles to opening new schools are:

- The need for additional investment in the quality of the program, including curriculum, assessment, and professional development for the teachers
- The dearth of appropriate early childhood facilities in San Mateo County
- The dearth of qualified early childhood educators
- Public funding is scarce for non-licensed facilities

**Risks & Mitigation Strategy.** The main risks and their mitigation strategies are:

- **Difficulty finding funding to sustain additional schools.** There are two mitigation strategies here, both requiring focused effort on fund development. First, Family Connections could engage in additional fundraising activities. Additionally, Family Connections might consider licensing one or more of its facilities so that it can access state and federal funding opportunities.
- **Difficulty licensing existing or additional facilities.** There are several programs that have recently been through the licensing process that would be happy to share strategies for moving through process efficiently. Additionally, conversations suggest that Kristen Anderson, the Redwood City Childcare Coordinator, is eager to help facilitate the process for programs interested in growing in Redwood City.

**Learning Agenda.** The learning agenda describes the currently unknowable issues that Family Connections will learn more about as it embarks on this growth opportunity. The learning agenda for a new schools strategy is:

- What are the trade-offs of operating a full day versus partial day program?
- Can Family Connections translate its parent cooperative model effectively for a full day program?
- What are the partnership opportunities that might support additional schools?
- Does greater access to funding offset the increased burden of licensing a facility? How will licensing impact the program, for example?
- How can Family Connections demonstrate its quality and impact?
III. Package the Model to Share Nationally

Description. There is enormous demand nationally for high-quality early childhood education. Further, the field lacks effective parent engagement strategies that are integrated with the program.

Intended Impact. By codifying and sharing some or all components of its model, Family Connections can contribute to improving the quality of care that underserved infants, toddlers, and preschoolers receive across the nation.

Planning to Plan. Sharing the Family Connections model nationally will involve starting a whole new area of work for the organization. In order to do so in an intentional way, the following nine questions must be answered and planned for:

- What significant need does Family Connections meet for the field?
- Who will Family Connections serve?
- Where should Family Connections be on the “control” continuum?
- What are the economics of replicating the model?
- How will Family Connections determine the “readiness” of potential clients?
- What is the simplest way to create value?
- What measurable impact is possible from replication?
- What are the strategies and obstacles of replication?
- What local partners will be necessary to succeed?

Please see the document, *Family Connections National Replication Strategy, October 2014* for further details.
APPENDIX TWO – Staff Roles & Responsibilities

To support the organizational growth chart in *Figure Four*, the leadership team has articulated the following staff roles and responsibilities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Role</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Board                                          | • Steward mission and vision  
• Take leadership role in fund development  
• Oversight and support of Executive Director  
• Lead and support strategic priorities through partnership with staff |
| Executive Director                              | • Leadership and oversight of internal operations  
• External face of the organization |
| Administrative Assistant                       | • Office management  
• Assistant to Executive Director  
• Support for special events |
| Program Director                                | • Program development  
• Oversight of Program Managers  
• Parent cultivation & support |
| Program Manager, Nurturing Families & Pre-K     | • Oversight of Nurturing Families and Pre-K teachers  
• Intake responsibilities |
| Program Manager, Young Scholars                 | • Young Scholars Program development  
• Young Scholars Program family & student cultivation  
• Young Scholars Program case work |
| Teachers                                        | • Teaching and other student support  
• Family support |
| Program Assistant                               | • Assistant to program staff  
• Reports to Program Manager, Nurturing Families & Pre-K |
| Director of Development                         | • Support and partner with board and Executive Director on fund development and marketing/communications, including *Night of Dreams* event |
| Development Associate                          | • Ongoing marketing efforts, such as updating website, messaging, creating newsletters  
• Donor and volunteer communications  
• Technology support |
| Grant Writer                                    | • Respond to grant opportunities, with Executive Director support |
| Volunteer Coordinator                           | • Outreach for volunteer support, etc.  
• Cultivation of corporate partnerships (e.g., Comcast beautification projects) |
| Human Resources & Finance                       | • Oversight of operations, budgeting, benefits/payroll, etc.  
• Development of systems for scale |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consultant or Volunteer Roles</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facilities</strong></td>
<td>• Rapid response when campuses have a facilities need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>Reports to Human Resources &amp; Finance</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Events</strong></td>
<td>• Logistics and execution for <em>Night of Dreams</em> event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>Reports to Director of Development</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marketing &amp; Communications</strong></td>
<td>• Creation of new messaging and graphic design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support the development of marketing &amp; communications strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• <em>Reports to Director of Development</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX THREE – Big Lift Initiative Communities & The Opportunity to Serve

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISTRICT</th>
<th>Communities DistrictsServe</th>
<th>2013 STAR (1) % Prof/Adv</th>
<th>Estimated 3 &amp; 4 (2) yr olds</th>
<th>Low SES Kinder &amp; 1st graders 2012-13 (a)</th>
<th>Estimated 3 &amp; 4’s Eligible for State Preschool 2012 (4)</th>
<th>Current # of Spaces in State Pre &amp; Head Start (5)</th>
<th>Gap, or New Quality Spaces Needed (6)</th>
<th>Percent Eligible Children Not Served (7)</th>
<th>Preschool Programs in these Districts with state or federally funded spaces now</th>
<th>Child Signature Program Classrooms (8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PACIFICA</td>
<td>Pacifica</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>762</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>City of Pacifica State Preschool</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO</td>
<td>South San Francisco &amp; part of Daly City</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>1,426</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>SSFUSD, HUSD Head Start, Peninsula Family Service, Friends to Parents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JEFFERSON</td>
<td>Daly City</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>1,140</td>
<td>884</td>
<td>481</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>Jefferson SD State Preschool, HUSD Head Start, Peninsula Family Service</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRISBANE</td>
<td>Brisbane &amp; part of Daly City</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>See Jefferson (7)</td>
<td>See Jefferson (7)</td>
<td>See Jefferson (7)</td>
<td>See Jefferson (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CABRILLO</td>
<td>Half Moon Bay &amp; Central Coast</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>HUSD Head Start, Coastside Child Development Center, Coastside Children’s Programs, Coastside Parents Nursery School</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAN BRUNO PARK</td>
<td>San Bruno</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>SBPSD, Skyline College CDC</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REDWOOD CITY</td>
<td>Redwood City &amp; part of Menlo Park</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>2,112</td>
<td>1,557</td>
<td>1,196</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>RCSD, Redwood City Child Development Program, HUSD Head Start, Footsteps Child Care</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAYSHORE</td>
<td>Daly City</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>See Jefferson (7)</td>
<td>See Jefferson (7)</td>
<td>See Jefferson (7)</td>
<td>See Jefferson (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA HONDA / PESCADERO</td>
<td>La Honda, Pescadero &amp; South Coast</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>-44%</td>
<td>LIIPS State Preschool</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAVENSWOOD</td>
<td>East Palo Alto &amp; part of Menlo Park</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>1,042</td>
<td>963</td>
<td>977</td>
<td>754</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>Ravenswood SD, HUSD Head Start, Creative Montessori, City of Menlo Park, Family Connections</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL In Target Districts</td>
<td></td>
<td>11,282</td>
<td>5,763</td>
<td>4,414</td>
<td>2,843</td>
<td>1,571</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>23 organizations (Districts, Non-Profits at Cities), provide quality, accessible preschool in the target communities</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>