

POSITION STATEMENT

Presidio Hill School

SAN FRANCISCO, CA



HEAD OF SCHOOL SEARCH

START DATE: JULY 1, 2026





OVERVIEW

Located in one of San Francisco's loveliest and most desirable neighborhoods, Presidio Hill School thrives, both in terms of the history and development of the School as well as how it functions today.

Presidio Hill School's greatest strengths lie in its alignment of program, people, and purpose. The progressive roots of the School are unimpeachable, and the current program reflects a commitment to project-based and experiential learning as well as a deep commitment to student agency. With experienced, talented teachers at their side, students are encouraged to understand who they are and how they learn best. Learning is conducted with the support of a joyful, grounded community, characterized by palpable warmth and humility. Adults and children alike express a shared commitment to community life, stepping up without ego and pitching in wherever needed.

The School's location is remarkable and gives access to experiential learning in both urban and natural settings. Students have daily access to The Presidio of San Francisco, a national park treasure with multiple learning venues for outdoor classes from physical education to

science and poetic inspiration. Equally exciting is the School's access to all things noteworthy in the City, from service opportunities to cultural experiences. From San Francisco's Aquatic Park to City Hall, PHS students are a part of a rich and unique learning environment with its own "outdoor classroom" just steps from campus and a civic center a bus ride away.

PHS families reflect San Francisco's diverse and broad cultural fabric, and the School actively cultivates diversity and access. With approximately 218 students in TK-8, the School's size fosters deep relationships and a whole-child approach that is both personal and powerful. The faculty and staff at PHS radiate the promise of the mission and values of the School as well as their commitment to treasuring childhood for all students. Under the capable leadership of Head of School, Lisa Jeli, the School is both stable and flourishing.

In short, Presidio Hill School has both the strength and the capacity to take on the exciting years ahead under its new leader, and the Board of Trustees seeks to identify the School's next head of school for July 2026.

MISSION AND VALUES

Mission: Dedicated to progressive education since 1918, Presidio Hill School challenges young people to imagine, inquire, and create. Our students engage San Francisco and The Presidio as an extended classroom and become empowered learners who are responsible, committed to justice, and optimistic about the future.

Core Values: The Presidio Hill School ABC'S are the school's guiding principles and inform curriculum, social-emotional learning, and interpersonal interactions:

All are Welcome

We believe in equity, diversity, inclusion, justice, and belonging
We believe in the dignity of every person
We respect each person's right to be themselves
We treat all people fairly, safely, and with respect

Be Curious and Engaged

We are fully present and prepared
We approach our learning with a beginner's mind
We are on topic and on task
We make connections with our learning, with others, and with life
We work well with others while taking ownership of our learning and actions

Care for Self and Others

We are honest and act with integrity
We show empathy and compassion for others
We look for the good in ourselves and others
We create a safe and brave space for people to share
We respect the established rules and values of our community



Seek Understanding

We show interest and ask questions
We “try on” and lean into challenges as we seek solutions
We share, listen, and learn from others
We consider intent and impact and notice how we have affected others
We acknowledge, repair, and restore when needed

PRESIDIO HILL SCHOOL LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As a PHS community, we honor the Traditional Custodians of the unceded land on which we gather, and recognize their connection to land, water, all living creatures, and community. Our school is located on the traditional lands of the Ramaytush Ohlone People. We pay our respect to their community - past, present, and future.

HISTORY

Founded in 1918, PHS will celebrate its 110th anniversary in 2028. The oldest continuously running progressive school on the west coast, PHS was founded by two visionary women who “envisioned an institution where children learned by doing and thinking.” As schools in the east were being founded by educators like John Dewey and influenced by Maria Montessori, the progressive teaching effort was first established in the west by the vision of two San Francisco mothers, Helen Salz and Flora Arnstein, as the Presidio Open Air School which would become today’s Presidio Hill School. A noteworthy history.

From the outset, the School was committed to social and cultural diversity in addition to learning that included creativity and poetry. Avant-garde thinkers and writers like Pierre Salinger and Art Hoppe flourished under the philosophy and program at PHS. Social activism and a commitment to civil liberties was central to the School’s development, and Pete Seeger and Paul Robeson and other popular folk singers in the 50’s and 60’s came to the School for Saturday afternoon sing-a-longs and gatherings. At times over the School’s development, the traditional classroom was turned into “clusters” to group students by age rather than grades. PHS has always been a school dedicated to responding to the needs of students: nimble, responsive, and brave. The spirit of the School’s founders still lives.

Learn more about the history of PHS here: [History of PHS](#)

PROGRAM

The Presidio Hill website provides a comprehensive view of the [full PHS program](#). A few noteworthy features:

Curriculum, Benchmarks, and

Assessments: The scope and sequence of the PHS program, from Transitional Kindergarten through Grade 8, focuses on establishing the exact right level of learning challenge for each student. The well-defined focus on differentiation distinguishes the program. Curriculum is approached as “living and breathing” to allow for the individual strengths of each student to flourish and for teachers to develop bespoke curricular units and topics.

Benchmarks at all grade levels and content areas are clearly delineated. Examples of the variety of authentic assessments include the use of student portfolios, physics demonstrations, public presentations, visual projects, written compositions, Readers Theatre, and promotion speeches. Learn more here: [Curriculum](#)

PHS Workshop: Perhaps the most vivid illustration of the “learning by doing” philosophy in the PHS program is embodied in the PHS Workshop, an opportunity for students at every grade level to ideate, create, and build wood-working projects. Learn more here: [PHS Workshop](#)



Student Support Services: PHS provides a wide array of student support services and fully embraces philosophically and programmatically the commitment to support for all students. Social-emotional curriculum is well integrated into the PHS experience. There is nothing “cookie-cutter” about PHS.

Social justice: Presidio Hill School weaves social justice into the fabric of its mission, emphasizing that education should prepare students not only to understand the world but to improve it. Through curriculum, community practices, and engagement with real-world issues, PHS actively cultivates socially conscious learners who are empowered to contribute meaningfully to a more inclusive society.

Progressive education: The Center for Progressive Education (CPE) at Presidio Hill School, which opened in the fall of 2015, is building on the School’s legacy of progressive education to strengthen and expand the community dedicated to its philosophy and

practices. The CPE serves as the hub for information sharing and discussion regarding progressive education philosophy and practice among local Bay Area and West Coast educational institutions, brings like-minded educators together in order to learn from each other and expand the depth and reach of progressive practices; develops and administers a teacher apprentice program to provide novice teachers training and hands-on experience with progressive education philosophy and practices, and supports the mission and vision of the Progressive Education Network of which the CPE is a regional affiliate.

COMMUNITY

Students: The School has enrolled 218 students from TK-Grade 8 for Fall 2025. (The Conditional Use Permit will allow a student enrollment of up to 230.) Admissions are competitive, and students arrive from approximately 26 different zip codes and 20 preschools. Primary entry points are TK, Kindergarten, and 6th Grade. Sixth-grade entry students hail from approximately 12 elementary schools, and transfer students arrive from independent and public schools.

With approximately 51% students of color in the student body and 37% of all students receiving some level of flexible tuition, the School reflects its goals of attracting and supporting a diverse student population.

PHS students are recognized for being “confident and self-aware.” They know how to advocate for themselves and others, explore identity, collaborate, and engage meaningfully with the world around them. Graduates of PHS find places at a variety of competitive high schools in San Francisco and are considered “students of choice” locally. High schools report PHS students to be avid participators, often in leadership roles and the “glue” for community building in their grade. They are recognized as “exemplary citizens.”





Faculty and Staff: Currently there are 33 in the teaching faculty at PHS with six senior administrators and nine members of staff. Retention of faculty has been high at nearly 90% with an average tenure of 8 years.

Educators are drawn to Presidio Hill's culture of freedom and creativity. Experienced and committed, the faculty is sustained by the ability to teach with integrity and innovation, and expectations are high. Faculty members meet weekly to discuss students and ensure that each student is well served. The commitment to providing a dynamic learning experience for each student is also top of mind. The school-home partnership is described as strong and positive.

Senior Leadership: As is often the case in smaller schools, senior leaders at PHS wear many hats and contribute generously in multiple ways to school life. The PHS Head of School is involved in the day-to-day experience of Lower and Middle School operations. Currently, the primary responsibilities of Lower School leadership are assigned to the associate head of school, and the head of school has taken on some responsibilities for Middle School leadership in partnership with an experienced team member who manages student life and high school guidance.

Families: Parent volunteers are an integral part of the life of the School. From chaperoning field trips to planning community celebrations to staffing for special events to supporting classroom activities, the parents of PHS are

present and much appreciated for their multiple contributions to School life. Leadership of the parent organization promotes the participation of all parents in the daily life of the School. PHS parents are wonderful ambassadors for the School.

GOVERNANCE AND BOARD OF TRUSTEES

For part of its earlier history, PHS operated as a nursery and elementary school. Eventually the nursery division separated from the School, and over the years the elementary division grew and the School added on grades 5 through 8. PHS now has a distinct Middle School program for grades 6-8, thoughtfully aligned with the Lower School for grades TK-5. In the foundational years, the School was run by a ten-teacher cooperative, the director, and a Board of Directors, with the full parent body and full-time faculty members also serving as members of "the Corporation" of PHS. The school and its governance model evolved significantly from those early years.

In the 2024-25 school year, new bylaws were implemented to further support the Board's work of ensuring the School's mission alignment, hiring the School's head of school, safeguarding the resources and facilities, and engaging in periodic strategic planning. The Board maintains the appropriate distance from the day-to-day operations of the School and classroom experience. The current head of school serves as a full voting trustee and up to two faculty members may also serve as full trustees. The importance of having a voice at PHS that matters remains ingrained in the School's culture for all students, faculty and staff, and parents/guardians.

FINANCES, FUNDRAISING AND FACILITIES

The financial picture at Presidio Hill is stable. The yearly operating budget hovers around \$10M with operating reserves of \$1.5M. The current endowment is \$2M and reflects a relatively recent commitment to growing those funds. Currently the School awards just over \$2.8M in financial assistance which represents approximately 29% of gross tuition, a number that is slightly above the average percentage of financial support and will probably gravitate to 22-23% in coming years.

The School carries debt of \$8.5M that was used to purchase and renovate a second building adjacent to the campus, a positive move which improved and expanded both classroom and yard spaces, as well as having positive impacts on the schedule and allowing the School to increase enrollment. Managing this debt will be an important factor going forward for the long-term financial sustainability of the School.

PHS continues to focus on cultivating a culture of philanthropy in line with the overall ethos of the School. Currently the School raises approximately



\$650K - \$750K annually, \$600K of which is for the Annual Fund. Some significant major gifts in recent years have been enormously helpful in growing their endowment. Parents are involved in helping the School with community and school events with generosity of time and spirit.

The facilities at PHS are bright, cheerful, and well-maintained. The neighborhood is quiet, safe, and green—and the campus outdoor spaces are nicely surrounded by buildings, fences, and trees in a courtyard-like setting. Still, the restrictions of a city campus, especially for elementary students, requires constant attention to any issues that may arise in the neighborhood. There are usage restrictions and traffic patterns to measure and report. The age of the buildings will require watchful maintenance. The counterbalance, of course, is the proximity of The Presidio and public transportation. The School has access to its own roof yard and fields in the Presidio for P.E. classes and some athletic practices, as well as limited use of a community gym for some practices and games including volleyball, basketball, and futsal. The Presidio serves as the ultimate cross-country practice space, as well, although there is a desire for more athletic facilities for the older students.



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Presidio Hill School is both proud and humble—a combination that defines its culture and presents exciting possibilities for growth under new leadership. The opportunities and challenges ahead include:

- **Clarifying and further implementing the School's progressive pedagogy:** While Presidio Hill deeply values its progressive educational roots, the School would benefit from a clearer articulation of what “progressive education” means today, and how it distinguishes PHS in a crowded landscape of schools using similar language. The next head will have a demonstrated commitment to progressive pedagogy and will help define, embed, and communicate this pedagogy with confidence and clarity.
- **Strategic vision and voice:** The School is ready for bold leadership that can articulate a compelling vision for the future, one that builds on strengths and invites the wider community into a shared journey for the future. At the same time, the School wants its strategic vision to hold fast to its core principles and commitment to cultivating and supporting a diverse and inclusive student population and adult community.
- **Financial and enrollment sustainability:** Though enrollment is currently strong, flexible tuition demand is rising and the School holds debt. Managing the financial health and enrollment strategies of the School in alignment with the School's mission and values will be important.
- **Curriculum and program leader:** The next head will ensure a track record of successful instructional leadership in progressive programs with special attention to a student's ability to assess and advocate for themselves. The next head will also ensure an appropriate level of academic challenge for all students as an essential component of successful instructional leadership. It will be important to negotiate the balance of what is central to PHS values and the “push” from technology and AI in today's educational landscape.
- **Engaged and dynamic recruiter of teaching talent:** Identification and support for a top-tier faculty is essential to the implementation of the PHS mission, and the School's next leader will have the experience and know-how for supporting a cohesive team of faculty.
- **Community outreach and engagement:** The next head of school will build upon robust relationships with feeder schools as well as local high schools to ensure that Presidio Hill attracts a diverse and talented applicant pool and that PHS graduates continue to have a significant success rate in gaining admission to their preferred high schools.
- **Leadership structure and capacity:** A recent administrative reorganization has resulted in a lean leadership team. The next head of school will assess the current leadership model to ensure strategic capacity, effectiveness, and sustainability.
- **Continue to build a culture of philanthropy:** While the community is generous, the culture of philanthropy is still maturing. The next head will help deepen this culture and prepare the School for future fundraising, whether for facilities, endowment, or access.
- **Facilities and long-term planning:** Facility limitations (including lack of a gym) remain challenges. Zoning agreements and neighborhood covenants restrict expansion, requiring creative problem-solving around future growth and space use.
- **Governance evolution:** The Board has made strides in professionalizing its structure and continues to evolve. Implementing recently updated bylaws and strengthening trustee recruitment, orientation, and evaluation are areas of ongoing focus.

THE SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE

The next head of school at Presidio Hill will be a visionary and inclusive leader who believes in the power of progressive education and leads with clarity and curiosity, humility and heart. The ideal candidate will bring the following mindsets, skills, and experience to the position:

- An instructional leader who understands and deepens the progressive roots and impactful pedagogical practices for academic excellence in student-centered learning in the PHS program.
- A community builder who honors and deepens relationships among all constituencies.
- A compelling communicator who articulates the programmatic strengths and values of PHS—internally, in the Bay Area, and beyond—to further enhance the School's reputation.
- A track record of success in building and inspiring constructive relationships with the professional community of faculty and staff.
- An educator committed to culturally responsive teaching and cultivating belonging for a diverse population.
- A hands-on leader who can manage (and relishes) the complexities of a small school where many decisions land on the head's desk. Someone who models a spirit of "all hands on deck."
- An inspiring leader who can champion our bold vision for the future of the School.
- Excellent executive management skills to implement the systems and organizational structure needed for the School.
- A track record of success in bringing clarity to systems, processes, and long-term planning while embracing the creativity that fuels the School.

SALARY RANGE

The anticipated salary range for this role is \$425,000 to \$500,000 commensurate with experience. Additionally, the School will provide \$50,000 for an annual housing allowance. PHS offers a competitive benefits package, including a retirement plan with employer contributions, comprehensive insurance benefits, and support for professional growth.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Presidio Hill School has retained Resource Group 175 (RG175) to support the search for its next head of school. Interested candidates should prepare a cover letter, an updated resume, and a writing sample(s) as part of the application materials. Five references are also a required component of the application materials.

The application deadline is October 15 for a start date of July 1, 2026. Candidates are encouraged to submit their materials in a timely manner at <https://rg175.com/candidate/signup>.

For any questions about this exciting leadership position and to register your interest, please contact the RG175 consultants directly:

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