



# New School San Francisco

Where Curiosity Drives Excellence

## School Profile

**Name:** New School San Francisco

**Location:** San Francisco, CA

**Founding Year:** 2015

**Grades Served:** TK-8

**Enrollment:** 456

**Student Demographics:** 27% White, 38% Latinx, 17% Asian/Pacific Islander, 6% African American, 12% Multi-Race, 38% low-income, 16% English learners, 15% Students with Disabilities

## Results at a Glance (2023-24 SY)



### Excelling in Reading:

72% of students met or exceeded grade-level expectations in ELA, compared to 54% in the district.



### Match Achievement:

68% of students met or exceeded grade-level expectations in math, compared to 46% in the district.



### Growth Performance:

68% of students are meeting growth goals annually in math, showing strong skill gains through inquiry-based approaches.

**A**t New School San Francisco, learning starts with curiosity. The school believes that when students explore meaningful questions and make connections across subjects and across lines of difference, they achieve at high levels and grow as thinkers, creators, and community members.

Located in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood, New School San Francisco serves grades TK-8 through a model that combines academic rigor with inquiry and personalization. Students help generate and investigate big questions that drive their learning across disciplines, integrating academic standards, critical thinking, collaboration, and real-world application.



[See New School San Francisco in action](#)



**NewSchools**

Founded in 2015 by Emily Bobel Kilduff and Ryan Chapman, New School San Francisco is a diverse-by-design public charter school that draws students from across San Francisco. Its enrollment system ensures that at least half of students come from households that qualify for free or reduced-priced meals, creating a vibrant mix of backgrounds and perspectives. This intentional diversity shapes every aspect of school life – from classroom practices to family partnerships and staff development – building a community where everyone feels they belong.

## The Model

New School San Francisco’s approach rests on two pillars – inquiry arcs and individual learning plans – that together create personalized, rigorous learning experiences rooted in curiosity and community.

- **Inquiry Arcs:** Each arc invites students to explore a big question across multiple disciplines. For example, a unit on “How does a community change?” might weave together math data, historical research, scientific observation, and art. These interdisciplinary investigations culminate with expositions, where students share their learning with peers, families, and community members.
- **Individual Learning Plans:** Every student has personalized goals that track growth across academics, inquiry skills, and social-emotional learning. Teachers use these plans to differentiate instruction while maintaining high expectations and honoring different learning paths and timelines.

Professional learning mirrors the same philosophy. Staff engage in inquiry-driven professional development where they collaborate, reflect, and learn by doing. Teaching practices continuously evolve to meet student needs.

For three years straight, New School San Francisco has been recognized as a high-performing school by the State of California.

## Key Innovations

### Teaching & Learning

- **Hands-On, Minds-On Learning:** Students construct knowledge through direct experience, building structures to understand physics, analyzing primary sources to study history, and conducting experiments to explore scientific concepts. This philosophy fosters deep understanding across content areas.
- **Structured Inquiry Arcs:** Each grade organizes learning around 6–8 week inquiry arcs anchored in essential questions. Teachers use a common planning template that balances creativity and rigor and includes content standards, SEL goals, and formative assessments.
- **Exposition-Based Assessment:** Every arc culminates with a public exposition where students synthesize their learning across disciplines and apply it to real-world contexts.



## Belonging & Well Being

- **Graduate Aims:** New School San Francisco defines clear attributes that guide what every student will know and be able to do by graduation; thriving academically, thinking critically, solving problems creatively, and leading with empathy and purpose. These aims shape everything educators do, supported by learning conditions that promote belonging, safety, and agency.
- **Daily Community Time:** Students participate in daily community building circles where they share experiences, discuss issues, and set intentions. These moments help strengthen communication skills, empathy, and democratic participation.
- **Restorative Approaches:** When conflict arises, restorative circles help students understand impact, rebuild trust, and grow social-emotional skills through a process that involves reflection and repair rather than punishment.

## Family Engagement

- **Family Voice:** Through the Home & School Council, the English Learner Advisory Council, and the African-American Parent Advisory Council, families share leadership and provide input on priorities ranging from enrichment programs and recruitment to fundraising. These structures ensure that diverse family perspectives are embedded in decision-making.
- **Family Education Series:** Regular workshops, offered in multiple languages, help caregivers understand the school's focus on inquiry-based and social-emotional learning and provide practical strategies to support learning at home. The sessions strengthen alignment between school and home and build caregiver confidence.
- **Multilingual Communication:** Tools like ParentSquare and WhatsApp keep families connected across languages and work schedules, creating transparent, two-way communication that keeps everyone informed and engaged.

## Lessons Learned

### Lesson 1: Adapt Systems to Support Every Learner

As the school expanded to serve more students, it also began to see a greater variation in learning needs. The team noticed that while inquiry-based instruction engaged many students, others, including English learners and students with disabilities, needed more targeted support. Families also expressed concern that pulling students out of the classroom for interventions created stigma and disrupted the sense of belonging central to the school's model.

In response, the team reimagined its staffing approach. Lead teachers were paired with associate or resident teachers, specialists, or interventionists to co-plan and teach together. This shift allowed for flexible grouping, in-class interventions, and individualized support without removing students from inquiry-rich environments. Adopted before the pandemic and strengthened afterward, this co-teaching model has led to significant growth: In 2023, English learners and economically disadvantaged students improved in math by more than 30 points, while students with disabilities gained over 20 points.

### Lesson 2: Build Family Partnerships that Reflect the Community

Early efforts to engage families focused on traditional events like back-to-school nights and parent-teacher conferences. While these were well-intentioned, they didn't reach every family equally. School leaders realized that meaningful engagement required understanding different cultural norms and creating more varied and inclusive ways for families to participate.

To address this, the school formed family committees to help families navigate educational expectations, expanded multilingual communication systems, and created more flexible opportunities for involvement such as student showcases and family-led presentations that honor different participation styles. The school also established quarterly feedback surveys to assess whether all families felt welcomed and heard. These efforts deepened trust and strengthened the connections between home and school, helping ensure that every family felt they had a voice in their child's education.

### Lesson 3: Measure What Matters Most

Traditional tests alone couldn't capture the depth of learning taking place at New School San Francisco. Through inquiry arcs, students were conducting complex investigations, making connections across disciplines, and demonstrating understanding in ways that standardized assessments didn't reflect.

To better measure this kind of learning, the school developed Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs) that capture not only academics but include social-emotional competencies and inquiry-processing skills – core tenants of the school's model. ILPs give a fuller picture of student growth and ensure that accountability measures align with the school's educational philosophy. External researchers have validated the approach, confirming that it accurately captures both academic and deeper learning outcomes.



## Learning Starts with Curiosity and Belonging

New School San Francisco shows what's possible when a school places curiosity, community, and belonging at the center of academic rigor. Its story illustrates that inquiry-driven learning can lead to both exceptional results and deep engagements for students and teachers alike. By aligning professional learning with student learning and by treating diversity as a strength to be cultivated rather than a challenge to be managed, New School San Francisco is preparing a new generation of learners and educators to thrive in a complex and interconnected world.