



**Position Statement  
Head of School Search  
Urban School of San Francisco**

**San Francisco, California  
Start Date: July 1, 2025**





# Head of School

## Position Statement



### OVERVIEW

“Urban School believes there is a better way to educate high school students.”

Imagine leading a school with a clear sense of purpose and an almost 60-year track record of developing students’ deep critical thinking skills. Urban School, a Grades 9-12 independent school located in the historic Haight-Ashbury section of San Francisco, is just such a school, and it is seeking a new Head of School for July 2025.

Founded in 1966, Urban is a joyful learning community where young people are empowered to take charge of their own education, while being nurtured in their commitment to service, equity, and inclusion in the world around them. Urban is a school that has long been seen as a national leader in its commitment to academic innovation and social justice; it is one of the only schools in the country with a four-year service learning curriculum. Among Urban’s 420 students, 48% of identify as people of color, as do 38% of faculty and staff and 60% of trustees.



This is an exceptional school and a leadership opportunity that is well-worth exploring. Current Head, Dan Miller, will be leaving Urban after a highly successful tenure at the end of June 2025. The next Head at Urban will lead a school where learning is engaging and purposeful. Candidates will be expected to demonstrate that they possess the expertise, empathy, and energy to ensure that Urban School provides students with a distinctive and transformative education for many years to come.

### MISSION AND HISTORY

Since its founding in 1966, Urban School has been committed to the life of the mind and the collaborative and trusting nature of relationships among students and teachers. Student voice and engagement have primacy in the daily life of the school. Central to the ethos of Urban has been a compelling commitment to innovation, high standards, and reflective improvement. Programs have been implemented with care and deliberation.



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The school has woven its commitment to developing the hearts and minds of young people with an extraordinary engagement with the city of San Francisco. Urban has carved out a remarkable reputation for its integrity, its values, its rigor, and its forward-thinking; indeed, the school stands out among peer independent schools locally and nationally.

The mission of Urban is focused and powerful: “The Urban School of San Francisco seeks to ignite a passion for learning, inspiring its students to become self-motivated, enthusiastic participants in their education – both in high school and beyond.”

From the outset, when “Gumption” was carved in wood and placed above the entrance to the school, Urban has cultivated a pioneering spirit at its heart, both in terms of program and expectations for students. The core values of the school, true to the original vision of Urban, guide daily life on campus. Urban’s growth has been steady, driven by demand for its exciting blend of academic rigor, independent thinking, and progressive values.

## LOCATION AND FACILITIES

Urban is located adjacent to the Panhandle of Golden Gate Park in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco. The area is known for its diversity, and that is reflected in the school, both in the student body and faculty. As its name suggests, Urban has always considered itself a part of San Francisco, not an island within it.

The school has wonderful and appropriate facilities. A variety of spaces serve the mission: courtyards, offices, seating areas, public spaces, a gymnasium, as well as excellent science and UrbanX Labs (see below). The school’s facilities have undergone dramatic expansion in the last 20 years. From the modest original building in which the school began on Washington Street, the school moved to Page Street and has acquired and built several significant additions. The most recent is the Salkind Center on Oak Street (one block north of Page) where a gymnasium, classrooms, food service, conference room, administrative offices, common areas, and teaching spaces have been added. Additional components of the campus include a small apartment building and a newly renovated single-family home that serves as a residence for the Head of School.

In the fall of 2024, Urban will open a long-anticipated, new Performing Arts and Community Center directly across from the school’s main entrance. In addition to dramatically enhancing programming, this new facility will serve as a connector between Urban’s Oak Street and Page Street buildings.



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### PROGRAM

The program at Urban is challenging as well as engaging, with an emphasis on project-based learning. Courses use an inquiry approach that encourages diversity of thought and lively interchanges. Curricular and pedagogical innovation are central to the development of the program—some describe the faculty as “restless” in pursuit of refinement and improvement. Rarely is a teacher in front the classroom. Rather, they are engaged, lively participants in collaborative groupings in the classroom, and they are eager to make certain that all learners participate.

One graduate opined that “To graduate from Urban is to graduate from a liberal arts college with a high school diploma.” And a parent declares, “The excitement I see from my child in his learning is priceless.” A faculty member agrees: “Urban is a school that values critical thinking and discovery over more traditional benchmarks.”

An innovative block-scheduling plan was pioneered and implemented early on in the school’s history. The schedule involves three trimesters, during each of which a student takes four courses, but blocks are 70 minutes to two hours long, so most courses that are yearlong in other schools are completed in two trimesters at Urban. A panoply of creative electives is available, primarily to juniors and seniors, and they range from Nigerian Literature to Infectious Diseases to Global Migration, and more.

There are additional multi-use time periods in the schedule, referred to as “U” and “E” blocks, where students confer with teachers, meet among themselves, and convene ensembles and clubs. The school takes a weeklong break after each 12-week term for students to reenergize and for teachers to write rubrics with comments and plan for the following term.



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Students report that the focus of their classes is on “learning how to learn” and on the quality of their work. Fostering curiosity is a priority. Reporting on student achievement is not traditional, and never has been at Urban. Students receive grades at the end of each term, but in place of grades on daily assignments and major assessments, each course has developed extensive rubrics to give qualitative feedback to students about their work. Students even receive rubrics for re-tests and re-writes in order to provide robust feedback at every point along the learning journey. Departments collaborate on rubrics to give students a clear sense of what is expected of them.



Some signature programs at Urban include:

**Service Learning:** As part of the school’s long-standing commitment to partnership with the city of San Francisco, Urban has had an exemplary service-learning program since its earliest days. Furthermore, the program incorporates robust personal identity and social justice strands into the four-year sequence. In Grades 9-10, students have a classroom component for the program, learning about race, gender spectrum, ethnicity, sexual orientation, privilege, stereotypes, and socioeconomic diversity in their city. Students in these grades participate in short internships with Urban’s community partners. In Grades 11-12, students pursue individual projects all over the city and make deep connections and contributions to local agencies and organizations. Schools, nationally and internationally, regularly visit Urban to learn how the school does this important work. Many graduates cite the service-learning program as the inspiration for their values and careers in adulthood.



**Urban Advanced Studies (UAS):** The UAS courses are demanding—and bespoke at Urban. Most Urban students participate in at least a few UAS classes, some in many. These are the most rigorous courses in the curriculum and cover material beyond the usual expectations of an Advanced Placement syllabus.





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**UrbanX Labs:** Urban led the way on one-to-one laptop programs in independent schools in the late 90's, and authentic, problem-based learning elements were incorporated into the curriculum early on in the design thinking movement. UrbanX Labs emphasize the intellectual underpinnings of STEAM work, and coursework in this area is popular among students.

**Arts:** Urban has an exceptionally strong arts program, both visual and performing. There is student work produced that is truly extraordinary. Many of the arts experiences are those associated with university level quality. Many of the arts faculty are practicing artists in their own right.

**Athletics:** The same kind of initiative and enthusiasm that animates Urban classrooms also inspires the Blues in athletic competition. Urban provides both experiences for competitive athletes and for students trying out a new sport. The interscholastic program promotes respect, discipline, integrity, commitment, physical fitness, sportsmanship, leadership, and teamwork. Each year, around 70% of students participated on a team, a testament to the importance of athletics as part of Urban's overall educational program.

For more detailed information about these and other programs at Urban, please visit the school website at [www.urbanschool.org](http://www.urbanschool.org).

## COMMUNITY OF THE SCHOOL

**Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** Since the outset, Urban has been a school committed to social justice. Diversity, equity, and inclusion practices permeate the life of the community, and Urban remains fiercely committed to these principles. The curriculum reflects an intentional commitment to diversity and inclusion, and there are 15 affinity and ally groups, all led by students at the school. A signature event for the community is the Month of

Understanding during which there are multiple speakers, films, and lunchtime discussions devoted to issues ranging from gender identity and socioeconomic status to race and identity. Unlike other schools that might have a day or two devoted to these topics, Urban dedicates an entire month to deep-dive discussions. There are group meetings at all levels of the organization of the school—the board, faculty, alumni, and students—to acknowledge and celebrate the diverse culture of Urban. This is a school where all students and families are not only accepted, but embraced, and these values are among the most important and most cherished within the school's culture.



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**Faculty and Staff:** The Urban faculty is distinguished by its intellect, depth of knowledge, innovative teaching, and commitment to students. When asked about “the best thing about Urban,” the students responded enthusiastically and unanimously: “Our teachers.” While given considerable academic latitude in their pedagogy, there is a common commitment among faculty to critical thinking, to shared planning, and to academic depth and rigor. And although there are a number of teachers who have been at the school for most of their careers, innovation is in the DNA at Urban, and there are new things being tried all the time based on current research and best practice. The faculty and staff are diverse with 38% people of color, broad representation from the LGBTQ+ community, and a cohort of young teachers who complement the experienced veterans.

**Students:** Urban students are lively, independent, diverse, and capable. Most of the students live in San Francisco, and almost 30% of the student body receives some need-based financial aid. Students are respectful of one another—they know one another across all grades—and they value the diversity each brings to Urban. Demand for the school has increased markedly over the years, and there are now almost seven applicants for every opening in 9th grade.

Urban students matriculate to a wide variety of colleges, including liberal arts colleges and research universities, both public and private. The broad range of their choices reflects the range of student interests and the depth of their scholarship and talents, developed through the Urban program.

**Administration:** The Head of School works with a diverse, 11-member administrative team that includes leaders in student life, college counselling, athletics, academics, admissions, business, marketing, and development. The Assistant Head for Student Life supervises four grade-level deans, who each move along with students through a four-year cycle.



**Parents:** Urban parents work on behalf of the school in a variety of ways. They are organized by the efforts of the Parent/Guardian Association (PGA) whose efforts are substantive and relate to the culture of the school and the experience of families. The PGA sponsors events that build community via affinity groups, events relating to current issues, and overall support for families, especially those from historically under-represented sectors.

**Board of Trustees:** The Urban board is highly supportive of the mission of the school and conducts itself with professionalism and collegiality. The board includes 22 members, with additional ex-officio seats occupied by the Head of School, PGA, Alumni Council, two faculty representatives, and two student representatives. Practices of good governance are evident, and the board understands its role and responsibilities, while working effectively in partnership with the Head of School. Board members are active in fund-raising and cultivation of support for Urban.



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### STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

Urban is a school with many enduring strengths—among them are a clear and compelling mission, an outstanding faculty, staff, and administration, passionate students who love learning, an appealing urban campus, loyal alumni, supportive families, and a strong financial base from which to build towards the future.

At the same time, Urban faces many of the challenges common to high-performing independent secondary schools today—from leaning into its commitment to being an equitable and diverse community to providing resources to support students in managing the stresses and strains of their daily lives. In working with the Board, Administration, Faculty, and Staff, the next Head of School should be prepared to face the following challenges:

- Continue to strengthen trust and build collaboration around shared projects, decisions, initiatives and program refinements.
- Continue to elevate Urban’s pursuit of being a diverse, equitable, and inclusive school community, assuring that all Urban students can access its demanding curriculum and flourish.
- Balance the tradition of faculty independence, empowerment, and engagement in decision-making with the need for structures necessary to support an excellent, consistent, and equitable student experience.

- Create effective strategies to continue to attract and retain outstanding teachers in San Francisco’s real estate market.
- Cherish the historic identity of Urban, while leading the school into its next chapter of visionary program and identity development.

Urban School has enjoyed significant growth over the past 20 years. With no immediate potential for further growth in enrollment or facilities, the next Head of School will need to work with others to develop a shared vision for Urban’s continuing leadership among Bay Area independent schools.

And, with a tuition of \$61,000 in 2024-25, the next Head of School will be engaged with the Board of Trustees in marshalling the resources to support Urban’s ongoing commitments to innovative programming, socioeconomic diversity, and faculty excellence, while enabling the school to sustain high aspirations for the future.





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### THE POSITION

The Head of School at Urban School oversees the ongoing operations of the school, hires and supports its employees, and manages its annual budget. Initial annual base salary for the next Head of School will be commensurate with the compensation offered by similar Bay Area independent secondary schools and will be between \$475,000 and \$600,000 plus the use of a newly remodeled 3-bedroom residence adjacent to the school.

First and foremost, successful candidates will need to embrace Urban's mission and values, including proven commitment to innovative educational practice and the centrality of student agency. In addition, candidates should demonstrate a record of skill in leadership and change management, including many of the following professional and personal attributes:

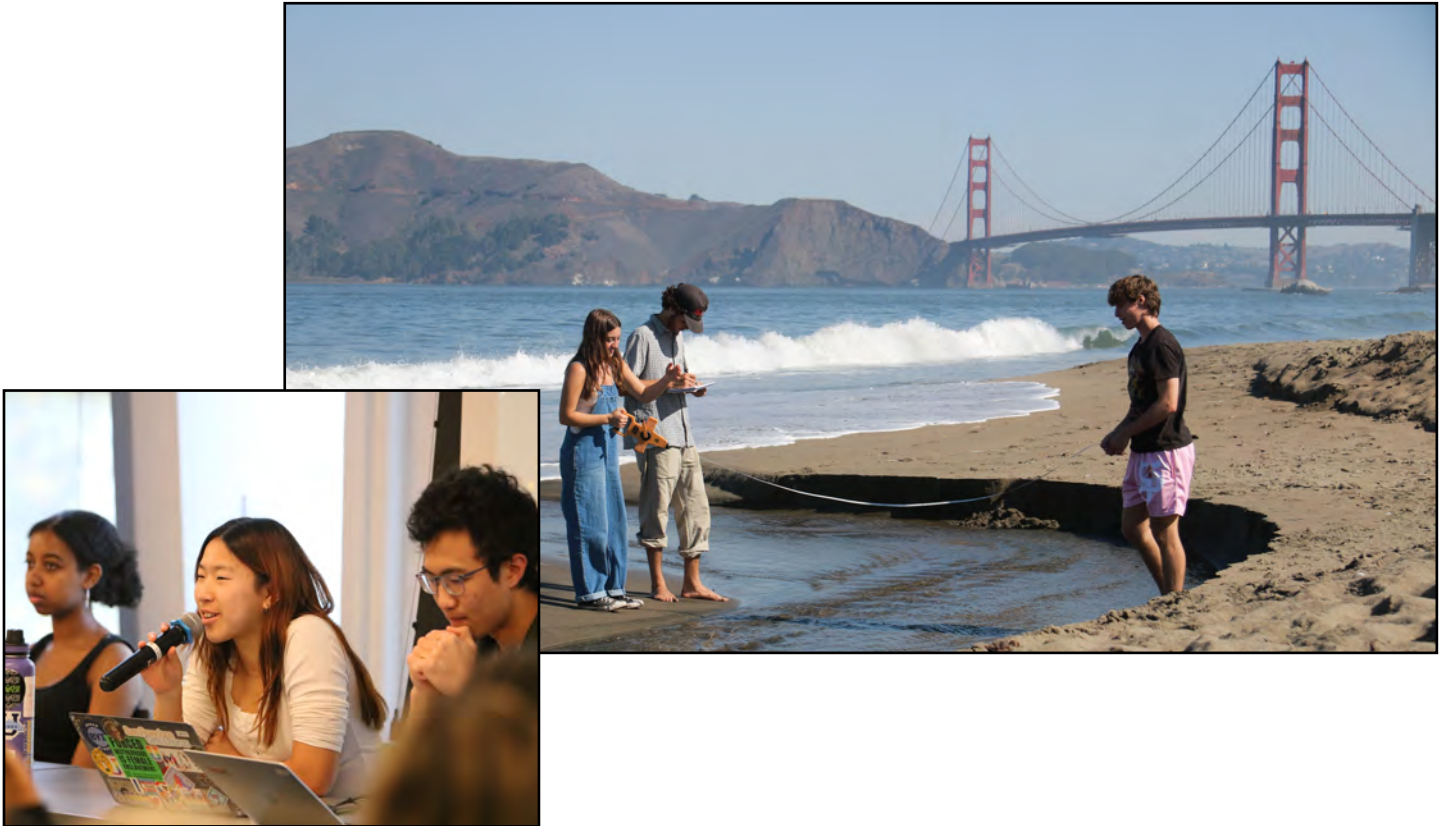
- Demonstrated skill in the leadership and management of a complex organization.
- Educational thought leader and innovator, up to the task of leading an intellectually thoughtful faculty and community.
- Demonstrated success recruiting, developing, evaluating, and retaining outstanding talent.
- Conviction and skill that matches Urban's strong commitment to diversity, equity, and social justice.
- A collaborative leadership style characterized by seeking input from others, willingness to delegate, but able to make hard decisions.
- Embracing the joys of being an engaged presence on campus—warm, empathetic, approachable, and available to students, faculty, staff, and parents.



- Prior teaching experience and genuine appreciation and respect for teachers.
- Understanding of adolescent development and respect for students and their families.
- Ability to manage difficult conversations with sensitivity and conviction.
- Process-oriented, reflective, and open to hearing and providing honest feedback.
- Capacity to be a leader in fundraising and a strong partner in enrollment and financial management.
- Highly effective in a crisis—calm, clear, courageous, and caring.
- A good listener and an honest, open, and inspiring communicator – both orally and in writing.
- A connector who authentically demonstrates humility, resilience, and humor.

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## APPLICATION PROCESS

Urban School has retained Resource Group 175 (RG175) to support the search for its next Head of School. To apply, interested candidates should prepare a cover letter, a current resume, and a personal statement.

Candidates are requested to submit these materials online at: <https://rg175.com/candidate/signup>

For an initial inquiry or to nominate a potential candidate for this exciting leadership position, please contact RG175 consultants Cathy Hunter [cshunter33@gmail.com](mailto:cshunter33@gmail.com), Steve Morris [steve.morris@rg175.com](mailto:steve.morris@rg175.com), and Jerry Katz [jkatz@rg175.com](mailto:jkatz@rg175.com).

**Application Deadline: March 31, 2024**

**Start Date: July 1, 2025**

*Urban School is an equal opportunity employer. The school does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, national or ethnic origin, and it actively encourages applications from candidates of diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.*