

RG 175

Change as Opportunity



Urban

HEAD OF SCHOOL SEARCH **URBAN SCHOOL OF SAN FRANCISCO**

San Francisco, California

Starting Date: July 1, 2019

MISSION AND HISTORY

Since its founding in 1966, the Urban School has been committed to the life of the mind and the truly collaborative nature of the 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 the compelling commitment to innovation, high standards, and reflective improvement. Programs have been implemented with care and deliberation.

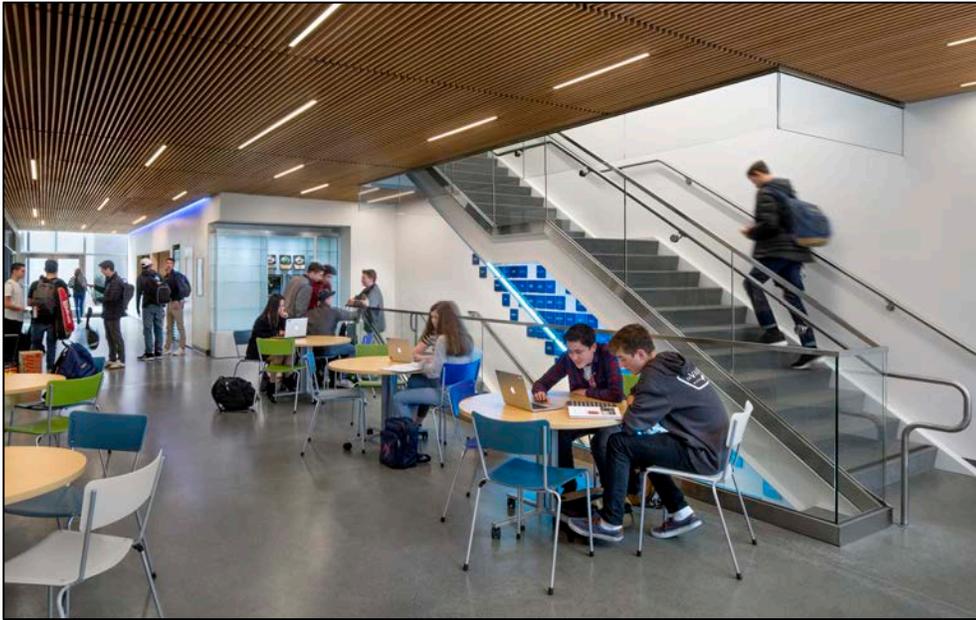
The school has woven its commitment to developing young people with what it means to be a member of its urban setting, San Francisco. Thus, Urban has carved out a remarkable position of respect for itself for its integrity, its values, its rigor, and its forward-thinking. Urban stands out among peer 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.

And the core values of the school, true to the original vision of Urban, guide daily life on campus: respect, inclusion, diversity, critical thinking, innovation, and community engagement.



To learn more about the Urban School of San Francisco
<https://www.urbanschool.org/>



Urban's growth has been steady as the demand for its exciting blend of academic rigor, independent thinking, and progressive values has increased. Urban currently enrolls 420 students in grades 9-12.

LOCATION AND FACILITIES

Urban is located adjacent to the Panhandle of Golden Gate Park in the Haight/Ashbury neighborhood of the City. 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 the City, 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, and excellent science and UrbanX Labs (see below). The school's facilities have undergone dramatic expansion in the last 15 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,

administrative offices, common areas, and teaching spaces have been added. This facility sits atop a two-story underground parking structure. Urban has leased this space for 99 years from the local church that also uses some of the facilities on weekends. Also part of the campus map is a small apartment building and a newly renovated single-family house with an in-law unit near the school buildings. The school has approval and

plans to create a Performing Arts Center across the street from the School's main entrance and is currently raising funds to break ground in the next few years.



PROGRAM

The program at Urban is extraordinarily challenging as well as engaging, with course offerings more extensive than many larger schools. 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, the “sage on the stage.” Teachers are engaged, lively participants in collaborative groupings in the classroom and 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. Yearlong courses may not be sequential. 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 an “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. Furthermore, teachers have collaborative planning time built into the weekly schedule, another reflection of the commitment to collaboration—among adults—at Urban.



Students report that the focus of their classes is on “learning how to learn” and the quality of their work, not on their letter grades. (That said, the word “hard” is often heard to describe a student’s course load.) Fostering curiosity is a priority. Reporting on student achievement is not traditional, and never has been. Students receive grades at the end of each term, but in place of grades on daily assignments and on major assessments, each course has developed extensive rubrics to give qualitative feedback to students about their work, both at midterm and end-of-term. Students even receive rubrics for re-tests and re-writes in order to provide robust assessment for growth at every point along the learning journey and to provide the opportunity for students to participate in self-evaluation. Departments collaborate on rubrics to give students a clear sense of what is expected of them in the discipline and to clarify shared expectations.

Currently, math and science classes give some numerical feedback on major assessments during the term, but even in those courses, students are asked to focus on rubrics and whether or not their work meets or exceeds the standards for the coursework.

Some signature programs to highlight:

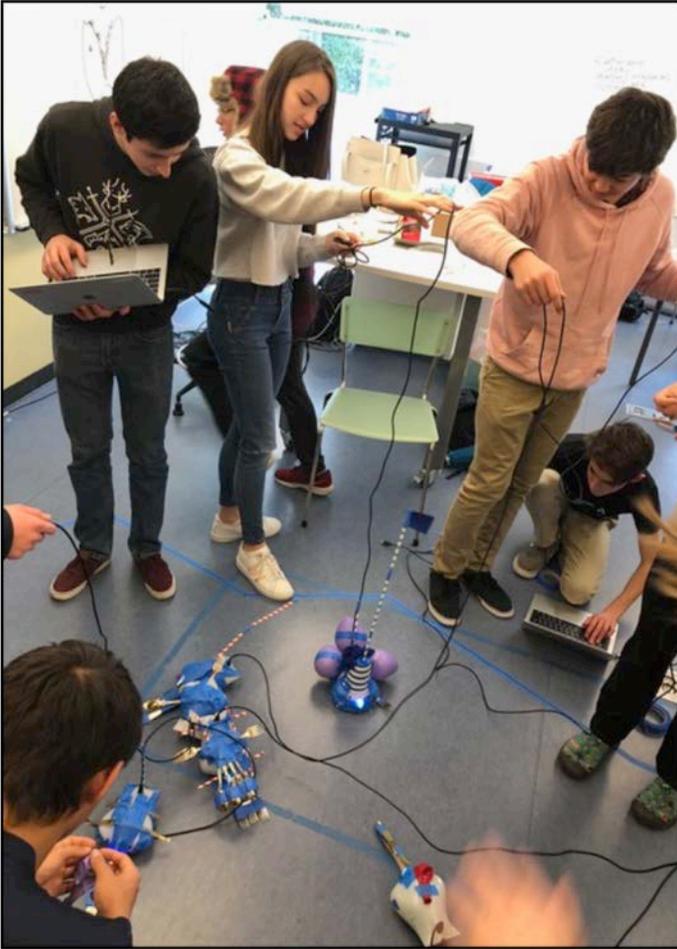
Service Learning and Identity: As part of the school’s long-standing commitment to partnership



with San Francisco, Urban has had an exemplary service learning program since day one. But the program also 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, socioeconomic diversity, and San Francisco.

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. The program is both inside and outside the campus. 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 to 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. Students at Urban do take AP exams in the courses where the Urban curriculum aligns with the AP exams: math, science, and studio art. But in the main, students at Urban do not sit AP exams.

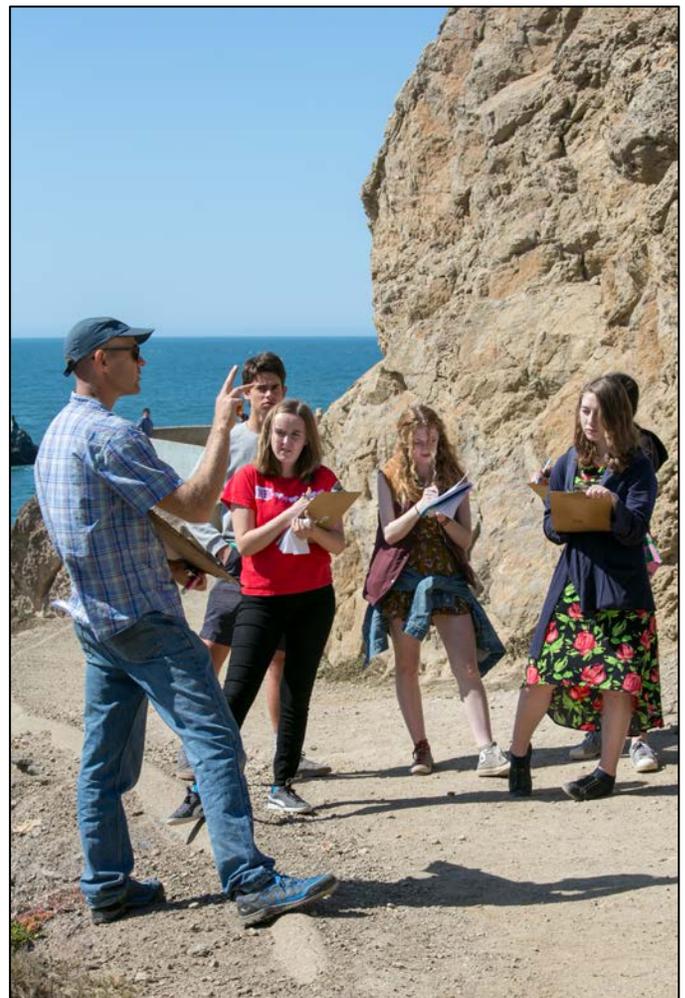
Technology and UrbanX Labs: Again the pioneers, Urban led the way on one-to-one laptop programs in independent schools in the late 90's. And authentic, problem-based learning elements were incorporated into the curriculum early on in the design thinking movement. The UrbanX Labs emphasize the intellectual underpinnings of STEAM work, and coursework is increasingly popular and interdisciplinary.

Arts: Urban has an exceptionally strong arts program, both visual and performing. There are

courses offered and student work done that are extraordinary and professional. Many of the arts experiences are those associated with university level quality. Ten of the eleven arts faculty are practicing artists in their own right.

Bay Area BlendEd: This program was founded by Urban and four other Bay Area schools to allow students to take advanced courses that otherwise might not be offered at the secondary level. The courses meet virtually with a monthly face-to-face meeting. The program was supported by a grant from the EE Ford Foundation.

For more detailed information about these and other programs at Urban, please visit the school website at www.urbanschool.org.





COMMUNITY OF THE SCHOOL

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Since the outset, Urban has been a school committed to social justice through programmatic and philosophical commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. These themes and 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 the Dean of Equity reports that there are 12 affinity groups, all led by 29 students, at the school. A signature event for the community is the Month of Understanding during which there are multiple speakers, movies, 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 of these topics. There are groups 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 Urban culture.

Faculty and Staff: The Urban faculty is legendary for 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 to critical thinking, to shared planning, and to academic depth and rigor. And although there are a number of teachers who have been at Urban for most of their careers, this is not a faculty that is hidebound or moldering; innovation is in the DNA at Urban, and there are new things being tried all the time based on research and best practice. The faculty is diverse with 35% people of color, broad representation from the LGBTQ+ community and a cohort of young teachers who complement the experienced veterans.

The Urban staff members are loyal to the School and see their role as supporting the student experience. They are eager to participate in school life, in decisions where appropriate, and in the search process. Professional development is expected of everyone who works in the school.

Students: Urban students are lively, independent, diverse, and capable. Most of the students (80%) live in San Francisco and the remainder commute from a variety of surrounding communities in all directions. Forty-two percent of students self-identify as students of color and 29 percent of the student body receives some form of financial aid. Students are respectful of one another—they know one another across all grades—and the diversity each brings to Urban. Demand for the school has increased markedly over the years and there are now 6-7 applicants for every opening in the 9th grade.

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

Administration: Urban owes much of its growth and development and sustained excellence to the remarkable educational vision of Mark Salkind, the current head, who is retiring after 32 years of leadership at Urban. Mark is also an alumnus from the school's second graduating class and taught at the school before becoming its head.

In addition to the Head, the Assistant Head for Student Life, Dean of Faculty, Dean of Academics, Dean of Equity, and Chief Financial Officer sit on

the primary leadership team. There are two class deans, one for Grade 9-10, and one for Grades 11-12, and administrators for Admissions, Development, Communications, Ed Tech, and STEAM. Urban has an administrative structure that has grown proportionally as the school has grown.

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 the families. Instead of some of the typical fund-raising and hosting roles maintained by Parents' Associations, 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. Support among the parents for annual giving is robust.

Board of Trustees: The Urban board is highly supportive of the mission of the school and conducts itself with professionalism and collegiality. The board is large, currently 29 members, with various *ex officio* seats occupied by the Head of School, PGA, Alumni Council, 2 faculty members, and 2 student representatives. The practices of good governance are evident, and the board understands its role and the responsibilities while working effectively in partnership with the Head of School. Board members have been active, along with the Head, in fund-raising and cultivation of



support for Urban. There is the usual number of committees with task forces taking on more specific governance duties when needed.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES for the next Head of School at Urban

Identity and Program. At every turn, it is evident that Urban School has been thoughtful and successful in crafting an identity that defines the School. Intentional and innovative, the School seeks a head of school charged with the task of cherishing the historic identity of Urban, at the same time leading the School into its next chapter of visionary programmatic development.

An Outstanding Faculty and Staff. The heart of Urban lies in the quality of its faculty and staff, all deeply devoted to the intellectual and social-emotional development of the students in their care. The next head of school must attend to the critically important challenge of hiring, supporting, and retaining an outstanding teaching corps in the context of the increasingly expensive urban location.

Infrastructure and Organizational Development. Urban has enjoyed significant growth over the past 15 years, having doubled in size. The next head of school at Urban will address the implications of the expanded student population and the organizational infrastructure and communication vehicles needed to serve both students and adults.

Finance. The School is financially healthy and sound but still faces challenges. Urban has run surplus operations for several years, and there is an endowment and a PPRSM reserve fund. These funds total about \$14 million against an operating budget of about \$18 million. The debt is about \$20 million and the school feels that more debt would not be appropriate. The next head will be engaged and working with the Board of Trustees to address the long-term financial plan to address tuition and

compensation, level of endowment and debt, financial aid and facilities needs, especially in light of the San Francisco economic climate with special emphasis on attracting and retaining an outstanding faculty.

Campus Facilities. Urban has added significantly to the size of the campus over the past 15 years, and there are plans in place for a new Performing Arts Center to be built. The next head of school will oversee the management of the theater project and continue to provide oversight of all of the facilities owned by the School. Again, this growth has had impact on the culture and retaining a sense of community in the School will require careful attention and management going forward.





THE SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE

Must have:

- Proven alignment and commitment to the values and ethos of Urban, especially in terms of innovative educational vision and the centrality of student agency
- Deep understanding and success in implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion practices, community-wide
- The intellect to lead the Urban community
- The ability to recruit, support, assess, and retain an excellent faculty and staff
- Experience in building a vibrant and self-reflective community
- Strong administrative and management skills, demonstrated in a leadership position in education
- Dynamic communication skills
- Commitment to collaboration
- High emotional intelligence
- Teaching experience at the secondary level
- Experience in fundraising
- Unquestioned integrity
- Warmth and lack of pretension

Should have:

- An advanced degree
- Familiarity with an urban environment

Might have:

- Experience as a Head of School
- Worked in a school similar to Urban

APPLICATION PROCESS

Interested candidates should send:

- A cover letter explaining interest in the Urban School
- An up-to-date resume, and
- A writing sample, not to exceed two pages, that could be a personal statement, an article for a school publication, the text of a talk, a letter—something that helps inform us about the candidate's interests or experience.

These items should be sent in a **single PDF** to both Coreen Hester and Clay Stites. We will also need, in a separate document, up to five references with contact information.

chester@rg175.com AND cstites@rg175.com

Deadline for submission of materials: April 20, 2018

