

## Viewpoint

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### 133 -- The School by the Bay

Imagine a college preparatory school that opened in August 2005 perched above San Francisco Bay, hard by the old Presidio parade ground (until recently the San Francisco Presidio was an active military installation in what was arguably the most beautiful military or civilian site in the United States). The distant views alone are spectacular, with Ft. Point below and the towering Golden Gate Bridge above; the near views of the Presidio are its equal, with towering eucalyptus trees framing the dome of the Palace of the Legion of Honor and the Marina Green. It simply takes your breath away.

Imagine as well a building converted from military to civilian use that preserves the historic exterior and interior lines but now accommodates high school students rather than cryptographers. Large windows open on the scenic vistas, four floors of classrooms, laboratories and offices -- all wheelchair accessible - capped by a roof aerie that is a true eagles nest (for a faculty lounge) that once housed the Pacific fleet's communication center (through which the first news of Pearl Harbor came tapping in by Morse Code more than half a century ago.)

Imagine a school that draws on the whole of the Bay area for its ethnically and socioeconomically diverse student body, from the South Bay to the Peninsula, from Marin County to San Francisco itself.

Imagine all these aspects and you'll be halfway there. Truth be told, the less important half. As impressive as the setting and building obviously are there is one thing more impressive: what goes on inside the school. In that there is a lesson for schools around the nation.

First is the plan. Designed by *backward mapping* from 2030-40 to the present, the founders of the Bay School asked themselves a grand question: what should our graduates know and be able to do to assume leadership positions - as adults -- with confidence, commitment and capacity - in the decades ahead? That's what the Bay School is all about: preparing the next generation of civic, professional and business leaders for the Bay Area and the nation as a whole. The Bay School's time horizon is not next year or the next graduating class, but two to three decades out. No small ambition that. No wonder the Bay School's tag line is *A New World, A New School*.

To undertake so bold a vision requires solid grounding in the past as well as a clear-eyed and unromantic view of the future. Second it its statement of mission, at once traditional and future-oriented:

- To offer an imaginative, engaging and demanding college preparatory curriculum taught by master teachers who model the school's values
- To emphasize the centrality of studying science and technology, ethics and world religions in the twenty-first century

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- To combine academic excellence with a multi-faith spiritual and community focus
- To encourage compassion, confidence and intellectual curiosity
- To build a diverse community of trust, resourcefulness, affection and good humor

By now it will have occurred to the reader that the Bay School is not a public but a private school. True insofar as it goes. As a legal entity the Bay School is private. Yet its structure and activities could not be more carefully designed to serve public purposes.

Nonetheless, when presented with such a school - intellectually rich, academically rigorous, physically beautiful, and spiritually aware - a common response for many of us is to dismiss it as an outlier, beyond the pale of public education. An outlier it is, but it need not be. The challenge public schools face is to do precisely what the Bay School is attempting, to use the jargon of the trade, to model its purposes, organization and behavior. We should expect no less of ourselves.

For more information visit [www.bayschoolsf.org](http://www.bayschoolsf.org).

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