

BECOMING A TRANSFORMATIONAL SCHOOL

SAN FRANCISCO UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL



SCHOOL
San Francisco University High School
San Francisco, CA

GRADE LEVELS
9-12

PRESENTERS
Julia Eells
Head of School
Nasif Iskander
Assistant Head of School and Dean of Faculty

HISTORY

The founders of **SAN FRANCISCO UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL** believed in the educational value of diversity and pluralism, imagining a school that would draw upon the exciting variety and resources of San Francisco and that would develop creative, capable, and socially responsible leaders.

They envisioned a school that would achieve both equity and excellence, and encompass the arts, academics, athletics, and community engagement. Two years after the opening in 1975, that same vision led to the creation of Summerbridge, a pioneering program in preparing ambitious middle school students from under-resourced circumstances to enter and thrive in college preparatory high schools. The work of these young leaders resulted in a powerful catalytic context that continues to nurture a community of inquiry, risk-taking, collaboration, and personal and intellectual growth for both students and teachers.

Forty-five years later, that catalytic context has produced generations of graduates who have made meaningful contributions in all sectors of society, and in doing so, they've built an outstanding reputation for the school.

"The question at the base of our work is essentially, 'What should a school be?' Suddenly I find myself challenging my most basic assumptions. I've been teaching for about 10 years, so challenging those assumptions at this stage of my career is wonderfully disorienting."
MICHAEL HOLT, ENGLISH INSTRUCTOR

"The heart of the community and the purpose of the school is very much intact. We don't need a big overhaul. The questions more surround how we better shine a light on qualities that make us unique as a school of and for the city of San Francisco."
MATT FARRON, CLASS OF 1999 AND TRUSTEE

"My definition of success has definitely changed over the last four years. It used to be just about going to a 'good' college, but now it's about living a meaningful life. I actually know what I want to do for the rest of my life!"
2017 GRADUATE

IDEAS

IMPERATIVE

We launched a two-year process that involved far-reaching institutional reflection, meaningful collaboration within our school community, and profound discovery. In our initial exploration, we found that compelling new insights from many sources suggest a clear need for schools across the country to evolve.

For example, cutting-edge research in adolescent development is redefining our understanding of what is necessary for teenagers to thrive. Well-respected voices from a range of fields and disciplines assert the benefits of innovative, collaborative approaches to learning. At the same time, colleges and universities across the nation report troubling levels of anxiety and depression among their most accomplished and well-prepared freshmen.

In dialogue with all of the school's core constituencies, we identified particular areas where UHS could evolve to better meet these challenges, including examining our pace, our assessment practices, our program, and our physical space.

COMMUNITY AND EQUITY STATEMENT

- Articulates our belief that deep learning requires a diverse community, and lays out our commitments to:
 - Diversity responsive teaching and learning
 - Equity in access and support
 - Care and interconnection
 - Institutional self-assessment and reflection

TEACHER & STUDENT GROWTH STATEMENTS & FEEDBACK

- Develop a meaningful set of growth statements—tied to our framework for effective teaching—for teachers to use for annual goal-setting and self-assessment
- Strengthen our existing statements that guide student social-emotional growth, and extend those statements to include high-level academic learning goals
- Deepen our use of Presence, the software we developed to collect feedback from teachers and to track student progress toward these goals to provide useful feedback to students and their mentors, and aggregate data to provide an assessment of program effectiveness

REDESIGNING ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

- Recognizing that concerns about grades often get in the way of learning, we are re-imagining the role of assessment in a transformational education.
- All teachers participate in small interdisciplinary teams to build trusting relationships across departments while advancing our thinking.
- Volunteer faculty team leaders facilitate the work, and gain valuable leadership training and experience.

EXPERIMENTAL DAILY SCHEDULE

- Dedicated time for faculty strategic work
- Late start for students
- Fewer classes, fewer transitions, and less homework
- Dedicated, unscheduled time for students and teachers to meet

LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

- Assess the ways in which our program and school climate either support or thwart our students' racial/ethnic identity development
- Identify differences in the experiences of students in different racial/ethnic groups, so we can address inequities on an institutional level
- Three faculty members serve as project leaders, and they have access to outside professional research consultants.

IMPLEMENTATION

- The most effective invention and design of culture-shifting programs emanates from the research, experience, and ideas of those closest to it: the faculty.
- Make use of the synergy and inspiration that comes from creating parallel models of growth: student learning, faculty professional growth, and institutional reflection and change.
- Listen for good ideas that will advance your strategic priorities, and then provide time and resources for the right people to develop them. Leverage the entrepreneurial spirit of younger teachers and students, and create new models for leadership.
- Don't wait for a perfect plan; set out an ambitious shared vision and be playful. Encourage people to start taking action on all fronts.
- Don't forget the parents; education of the parent community is an important part of bringing about any kind of cultural change.
- Play with an open hand; lead with honesty and transparency. Invite partners, feedback, and ideas.

RESOURCES

STRATEGIC DESIGN SITE
sfuhsdesign.org
SCHOOL WEBSITE
sfuhs.org
FACEBOOK
facebook.com/SFUHSorg
TWITTER
@SFUHSorg

