

LOWER SCHOOL HEAD SEARCH

ALTA VISTA SCHOOL

San Francisco, California

altavistaschool.org

Start Date: July 2026



**Carney
Sandoe**
& ASSOCIATES

CARNEYSANDOE.COM

Mission Statement

To prepare students to thrive as creative thinkers, innovators, and catalysts for positive change in the world.

Vision

Alta Vista School aims to help children grow dynamically, by providing them with a vigorous, interactive educational experience that engages their imagination and nourishes their curiosity, while teaching them how to think effectively and solve problems. With an emphasis on science, math, engineering, the arts, and social emotional learning, Alta Vista School encourages students to go beyond a strong academic foundation to pursue their passions as well as engage their community and environment.

Values

Curiosity, Experiential Learning, Scientific Thinking, Creativity, Belonging, Joy, Innovation

At a Glance



Established
2010



Lower School enrollment
206



Faculty in the Lower School
35



Average homeroom size
16



Students of color
51%



Financial aid awarded
\$1.4M



Total faculty with
advanced degrees
37

Enrollment: 310

Zip codes represented: 30

Total faculty: 74

Faculty of color: 35%

Student/teacher ratio in the Lower

School: 8:1

Students receiving tuition assistance: 27%

Annual operating budget \$14M

STEAM-based curriculum: 100%

Campus size: 37,000 sq ft (23,000 sq ft at the
Lower School and 14,000 sq ft at the
Middle School)



Overview

Founded in San Francisco in 2010 as an inquiry-based STEAM program, Alta Vista School (AVS) has grown quickly and now enrolls more than 300 students in Junior Kindergarten through Grade 5 on the Portola neighborhood campus and Grades 6 through 8 on the Mission campus. AVS's STEAM-powered curriculum fosters creative engagement with relevant issues within an integrated, multi-disciplinary framework. AVS students question, analyze, iterate, adapt, persist, and create. They learn to see the world's complexity from multiple perspectives. Students also learn to be inclusive, responsible, and respectful, creating a culture of kindness and acceptance. True to its mission, AVS is deeply committed "to preparing its students to thrive as creative thinkers, innovators, and catalysts for positive change in the world."

Entering its 15th year, Alta Vista has quickly built an enviable reputation in the Bay Area education world, and the school recently received a seven-year accreditation from the California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS). Rob Cousins, an experienced progressive school leader, joined AVS as its third head of school in June of 2024, and has reinvigorated AVS's STEAM-based approach to thinking critically, taking multiple perspectives, experimenting fearlessly, and caring for each child.

After nine years of distinguished leadership by the current division head, AVS seeks a Lower School Head to start July of 2026. The new leader will join an energetic and collaborative leadership team and serve a warm and deeply engaged community to deliver whole-child, progressive, inquiry-based programs tailored to the academic and developmental needs of AVS students and aligned with the AVS mission and values.

Opportunities and Challenges

Mentor and Empower AVS Faculty

The next Lower School Head will lead a talented group of educators who work collaboratively to deliver AVS's interdisciplinary, inquiry-based STEAM curriculum. The Lower School has two lead teachers per class, plus specialists, ensuring a rich learning environment in which adults work closely on curriculum, pedagogy, and meeting each student's needs. The Lower School Head will lead and inspire the faculty by being present and engaged in classrooms, at recess, and at community gatherings; by articulating and upholding clear professional standards and supporting new and veteran teachers to meet and exceed those standards; by listening with empathy and providing partnership and guidance; and by offering pathways to professional growth and leadership opportunities. AVS teachers appreciate clear and direct communication, even in the face of difficult decisions.



Guide Curricular Evolution and Standards

As AVS has grown from a start-up to celebrating its fifteenth year, it has fostered faculty creativity and explored different curricular paths. The Lower School Head will continue the excellent work currently underway to document scope and sequence, clarify curricular standards, and ensure progress in addressing gaps and overlaps across the program. In keeping with its culture, AVS values curricular innovation while at the same time understanding the importance of delivering a coherent and appropriately challenging learning experience.

Elevate Operational Clarity

The Lower School Head will bring fresh eyes to current systems and processes ranging from teacher onboarding to communicating the yearly cadences of the calendar in a manner that allows for optimal planning and teamwork.

Celebrate Collaboration and One-School Identity

The Lower School Head will bring a spirit of partnership to the leadership team. While the distance between the two campuses does pose some logistical challenges, the AVS community benefits from shared values and program continuity. This leader will support traditions and celebrations that link the two campuses, shared planning for special events, and opportunities for teachers in each division to understand and observe each other's work.

Lead Strategically

As a member of the leadership team, the Lower School Head will work closely with other AVS leaders to advance key elements of the strategic plan, including elevating AVS's interdisciplinary approach to STEAM, empowering educators, and fostering a culture of belonging for all members of the AVS community.



Desired Qualities and Qualifications

Professional Experience and Expertise

- An experienced educator with five or more years of Lower School teaching experience
- A curriculum leader who possesses strong understanding of pedagogy and academic excellence
- An instructional leader who can provide concrete feedback to support professional growth
- A demonstrated champion of diversity, equity, and inclusion with experience leading diverse communities

Faculty Leadership and Development

- A leader with a track record of recruiting, supporting, and providing growth-oriented feedback to Lower School faculty
- A mentor who fosters a collaborative, reflective professional culture grounded in growth and shared purpose
- A student-centered instructional leader who helps faculty support inclusive practices

Student-Centered Approach

- An educator who demonstrates deep understanding of developmental milestones and social emotional needs of children
- An enthusiastic leader who embodies lifelong learning
- A positive presence who genuinely enjoys interacting with students
- A participant who actively engages in all-school events and student life

Communication and Relationship Skills

- A clear and effective communicator, both verbally and in writing
- An empathetic listener who builds trust with faculty, students, and families
- A leader who can navigate diverse cultural and social situations respectfully
- A professional who maintains appropriate boundaries while being approachable and accessible

Alta Vista seeks a Lower School Head who will help write the next chapter of its story while honoring the qualities that make the school special..

Learn More

Click on the links below to learn more about Alta Vista School.

[School Website](#)

[High School Matriculation](#)

[Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#)

[About San Francisco, California](#)



To Apply

Interested and qualified candidates are invited to contact the consultants in confidence. Candidates will ultimately need to submit the following materials as separate PDF documents:

- A cover letter expressing their interest in this particular position;
- A current résumé;
- A statement of leadership philosophy;
- A list of five professional references with name, relationship, phone number, and email address of each.

References will not be contacted without the candidate's permission. Please submit materials to:

Karen Whitaker

Senior Consultant

karen.whitaker@carneysandoe.com

The full-time equivalent salary range for this position is \$150 to 200k. The starting salary is based upon, but not limited to, several factors that include years of experience, education level, and expertise.