



# Presidio Knolls School

San Francisco, California

Founding Head of Middle School

Spring/Summer 2017

[www.presidioknolls.org](http://www.presidioknolls.org)



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# PRESIDIO KNOLLS SCHOOL

A Progressive Mandarin Immersion  
Independent Pre-K & Elementary School

## MISSION

Presidio Knolls is a progressive Mandarin immersion school. Our mission is to inspire and empower creative, confident, and engaged global citizens to lead and contribute in a future filled with challenge and possibility.

## The Position

Founded in 2008, Presidio Knolls School (PKS) is a relatively new addition to the Bay Area's independent school community—one that has grown rapidly since it opened nine years ago near the Presidio after which it was named. The mission of Presidio Knolls School is unique in its blending of progressive education and Mandarin immersion—a curricular combination that has caught on with families across the Bay Area. Today, the school enrolls approximately 300 students in preschool through fourth grade. PKS is more than halfway through a nine-year expansion plan to serve students from age two-and-a-half through eighth grade.

As it enters a new growth stage with transition of the Pioneer Year to fifth grade, Presidio Knolls School seeks a Founding Head of Middle School to begin spring/summer 2017. S/he will launch, grow, and sustain an innovative, world-class middle school program that embodies the school's mission to inspire and empower our children as creative, confident, and engaged global citizens through an innovative program that blends the best aspects of progressive education with outstanding Mandarin immersion. The Board of Trustees, alongside a deeply engaged community of faculty and families, seeks a bright and energetic leader for this exciting role. S/he will be an experienced educator with both the strategic vision of a cutting-edge program and the managerial talent to implement that vision. The Founding Head of Middle School will report to the Head of School (HOS) and will serve as an important leadership figure within the school and local community. The 2017 start date will give the new leader a full year to prepare for a Fall 2018 launch.



## School History

Presidio Knolls School was initially conceived and established by Wendy Xa, an engaged parent who set about finding the best educational program for her daughter but struggled to find the right fit. Prior to PKS, parents like Xa were forced to choose between educational programs that offer Chinese immersion and those with a progressive approach to learning. PKS was thus founded on two core beliefs: that learning multiple languages at a young age accelerates learning and cognitive development, and that children learn best when actively engaged and inspired.

While Presidio Knolls School started out small, with just six students in a two-room building, its mission and philosophy took hold quickly among San Francisco families and the school grew at a rapid pace. In 2011, in response to parent interest in expanding the school's unique program beyond preschool years, the Board of Trustees voted to grow the Presidio Knolls School into a preschool-8 educational program. That same year, the school relocated from its original campus to a larger facility in the SOMA neighborhood of San Francisco, which it recently purchased and is in the early stages of renovating. The school is on track to be a PS-8 independent day school by 2020, with plans to launch its middle school program (Grades 6-8) in fall 2018.

# The School

Since the decision was made to expand Presidio Knolls School beyond its preschool program, the school has managed to grow steadily and healthily, adding one new grade each year. PKS is on track to reach its goal of serving students in preschool through eighth grade in 2020. The rapid growth of Presidio Knolls School is due in large part to its distinctive two-pronged approach to learning. The school provides an exceptional progressive education using best practices drawn from Reggio Emilia and other progressive approaches within a Mandarin immersion curriculum. Students benefit from the immense cognitive development advantages that come with language immersion, while also developing an independent and authentic love of learning through an inquiry-based, student-led, progressive framework.

The progressive philosophy of Presidio Knolls School embraces the key tenets initially introduced to American schools by John Dewey in the 1880s. This includes the belief that students learn best through self-driven inquiry, discovery, and problem solving. Value is placed upon students' emotional as well as intellectual growth, and social-emotional learning is deliberately integrated into a curriculum that educates the whole child. Students grow as creative, collaborative, and flexible members of a community in a self-motivated pursuit of learning. Rather than adopting the directive and authoritative role seen in traditional classrooms, PKS teachers act as guides and co-collaborators, helping children to shape their own learning journey toward topics of greatest interest.

The PKS curriculum is project-based and interdisciplinary; Units of Exploration integrate math, science, social studies, art, drama, and movement around overarching topics of inquiry in English and Chinese, contextualizing all learning through a real-world lens. Critical to this approach is hands-on, experiential instruction. As such, learning often takes place outside of the classroom—from a symphony hall to a construction site—as



## CORE VALUES

- 1. Progressive Student-Centered Education**
- 2. Academic Excellence**
- 3. Exceptional Teachers**
- 4. Comprehensive Mandarin Immersion**
- 5. Passionate & Diverse School Community**
- 6. Continuous Improvement**

teachers bring concrete meaning to conceptual ideas. Interwoven into these units are themes of social justice, service learning, music, and various aspects of Chinese culture. Engaging and empowering students with these progressive beliefs and practices, Presidio Knolls School integrates the student-centered model with the scientific findings about language immersion. This research resoundingly shows the cognitive benefits of learning a second language in childhood—increasing children’s critical thinking skills, creativity, and divergent thinking. Immersion students demonstrate advanced problem-solving with misleading or ambiguous clues, are sensitive to both verbal and nonverbal cues, can focus more selectively, have greater inhibitory control, and show greater attention to listener needs. Immersion students have also been shown to outperform monolingual peers in both verbal and math testing, in addition to having longer and more focused attention spans.

For many PKS families, these cognitive benefits are just one aspect of what attracts them to the school’s Mandarin immersion program. The practical advantages of being able to communicate in dual languages in an increasingly global society are undeniable. Mandarin fluency positions young people for success in their adult lives, opening tremendous career and travel opportunities and making them more competitive in whatever professional path they elect to pursue. Also important for many families are the connections the program enables children to make with their Chinese heritage, from speaking directly with elders to participating in cultural holidays and traditions.

The program at PKS is set apart for its immersion depth, beginning with a curriculum that is 100% immersive in preschool. Again, this aligns with research for language acquisition; the capacity to learn multiple languages at a young age is immense, so PKS preschoolers experience a fully immersive program while English is introduced in elementary grades and further developed in middle school years. PKS is committed to providing a strong Mandarin immersion experience through middle school, as research indicates students will retain the language and embrace its cultural aspects as part of their identities if they continue learning in this environment during adolescence.



Presidio Knolls welcomes students with no background in Mandarin into the preschool and Kindergarten programs. Highly skilled teachers use verbal as well as non-verbal communication cues so that every student—whether they are native Mandarin speakers or not—can absorb and adapt to the language naturally. The program trusts in children’s inherent ability to comprehend through observation and interaction. Just as with their first language, native English speakers will acquire vocabulary and literacy through genuine need and authentic, immediate interactions.

The leaders of PKS recognize that the progressive model of learning requires ample time for students to pursue individual interests, while also acquiring bilingual skills and the academic foundation necessary for future scholastic success. For this reason, Presidio Knolls School’s schedule is structured with slightly longer school days (lasting until 3:30 or 4:00pm) and with more overall days in the school year.

Another distinctive trait of Presidio Knolls School lies in its remarkably diverse community. Seventy-five percent of the PKS student body is non-white, as is 91% of faculty. The community is hardly homogeneous in any one demographic, with approximately 28% of students identifying as multi-racial, 25% as Chinese-American, 25% as Caucasian, 2% as Latino, and 10% as Other.



## The PKS Program

At PKS, children are at the heart of everything. Presidio Knolls School sees its role as that of a protector who nurtures children's innate qualities of creativity, resilience, and curiosity, and encourages children to remain open, expressive, and honest. While PKS is still a young school, it has a clear vision of its future graduates:

1. **Creativity:** Children can think critically in dual contexts, unpack problems with content and context, and persevere in the process of seeking or creating original solutions.
2. **Resilience:** Children can take risks, experiment, fail, and try again with renewed determination.
3. **Curiosity:** Children can ask probing questions that shape novel connections and advance understanding.
4. **Expressive:** Children can sift through many options, in at least two languages, to best express their ideas and the best versions of themselves.
5. **Open:** Children have a dual perspective that provides multiple angles of judgment and empathy.
6. **Honest:** Children have the courage to question, speak their minds, pursue truth and fairness, and own their learning.

PKS graduates will be confident individuals, equipped not just for high school but for a lifetime engaged in the authentic, compassionate, and purposeful pursuit of their personal passions and roles in the world.



## Preschool Program

The preschool at Presidio Knolls School is a vibrant and thriving environment fueled by passionate, dedicated, and energetic teachers. Their progressive model of education is central to students' learning experience across all three divisions of the preschool: P1 enrolls the youngest students at age two and a half, followed by three-year-olds in P2 and four-year-olds in P3. Each level has two classes, each of which is capped at 20-24 students depending upon level. A small student-to-teacher ratio is a hallmark of the preschool at PKS. P1 classes have one teacher for every five students, while P2 and P3 have a ratio of one teacher for every eight students.

The preschool program is inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach. Presidio Knolls School makes every effort to nurture the infinite capacities of children and consistently emphasizes respect for the individual child. Teachers create a space rich in natural, open-ended materials that nurture, stimulate, and engage the children, encouraging them to learn and express themselves while developing Mandarin skills. Teachers foster an atmosphere of constant interaction and communication in which multiple relationships can develop and thrive.

Preschoolers—who are viewed and understood at PKS as being in reciprocal relationships with family, peers, teachers, school, and community—engage in dialogue, negotiation, and shared inquiry and discovery with teachers and each other. The preschool's hands-on curriculum emerges naturally from this dialectic between educator and child. Teachers observe students to discover their natural inclinations and interests, interpret their observations together with the child, and then grow the curriculum by designing “provocations” to invite and support learning. The short and long-term projects in the preschool support and deliver on the beliefs of learning by doing, having meaningful and authentic purposes for learning, and using open-ended, multimodal inquiry to best serve children's full potential.





The progressive experience of preschool students at PKS is layered with targeted Mandarin immersion. Prior Mandarin knowledge is not required to enroll in the preschool program, but Presidio Knolls School does aim for a mix of native and non-native Mandarin speakers to provide peer models for Mandarin communication. Teachers implement differentiated instructional strategies based on the language level of each child to maximize language acquisition. Children learn Mandarin in authentic daily and instructional context, and are motivated to use it actively and meaningfully through classroom activities, music, dance, dramatic play or field trips. Even children with no prior exposure to Mandarin develop full comprehension remarkably fast, due in part to their developmental stage but also because of the authentic interactions and shared inquiry and discovery that drive natural language acquisition.

Social-emotional learning (SEL) is a critical component of the preschool curriculum as well. Students' entire day is structured around the understanding that children of all ages need a safe and familiar space in which they can explore, express themselves honestly, and take risks. The aim of SEL in the preschool is to guide students in developing a sense of individual identity as well as an understanding of others—to learn to interact thoughtfully with peers and to become active participants in a wider community.

The preschool meets for a full day, five days per week, though there is a four-day option for P1. As children progress through the preschool, they are individually assessed at intervals to ensure preparedness for elementary school. Each spring, students in P3 make several “field trips” to kindergarten classrooms as they build excitement for becoming a “big kid” like those they meet on the playground and in school-wide gatherings.

## Elementary Program

Fundamental to the PKS elementary program is the continued Mandarin immersion environment supported by the belief that authentic language usage hastens fluency and literacy. Up to eighty percent of the elementary school program is delivered in Mandarin (varying based on grade). This ensures that students truly live the language—a differentiator for PKS as compared to other 50/50 immersion programs. Every student is individually assessed on his or her progress, and individual support plans are developed where appropriate. In Grades 2-4, students take the Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Language (APPL) examination to assess Mandarin proficiency.

The elementary school at PKS also extends the student-centered, hands-on learning approach first introduced in the preschool. The curriculum is purposely designed to engage students' natural curiosities and encourage exploration in an environment that is at once supportive and challenging. Each day, elementary students at PKS study Mandarin, English, and mathematics in dedicated 45-minute periods, and are then challenged to apply the knowledge acquired from these lessons in meaningfully designed Units of Exploration. Lasting approximately six weeks each, these interdisciplinary units are built around relevant, compelling topics of inquiry. The intent is to foster a conceptual skillset that students can use in solving a wide array of problems—whether they be intellectual, analytical, ethical, emotional, or creative. Often, units involve meeting with experts or engaging in activities outside the classroom. To conclude each unit, students present individual projects they've completed to express their own interpretations and innovations of the unit's subject matter and what it means to each of them. A detailed list of past Units of Exploration are available on [the school website](#).

The social-emotional learning begun in preschool carries over deeply into all elementary school learning. Teachers incorporate Responsive Classroom as well as an innovative mindfulness curriculum with lessons of understanding one's emotions, respecting social boundaries, standing up for oneself and others, and staying calm in moments of frustration or adversity. Teachers and students across all elementary school classes also meet in daily community sessions where relevant topics or concerns can be shared and solutions on how they should be handled can be collectively discussed.

## Faculty & Staff

The faculty of Presidio Knolls School draw from across the globe. All share a love for working with children and a dedication to the school's progressive philosophy and mission. In addition to co-teachers and teaching assistants, Presidio Knolls School also staffs teaching specialists, native-speaking English teachers, and dedicated educators for art, music, and physical education. Over 95% of the full-time faculty hold advanced degrees, as do more than half of all PKS faculty.



## PKS Community

The highly engaged and giving parent community at PKS is widely recognized as one of the school's greatest strengths. The school enjoys 100% parent participation in giving. Families are very present on the PKS campus, whether on the playground, in classrooms, or engaged in some other aspect of school operations. Each family is expected to volunteer three hours per month, or 40 hours per year, and most easily exceed this requirement. Each class tends to become very close-knit, with parent volunteers serving as field trip chaperones, event planners, admissions representatives, and more. School-wide gatherings like the Chinese New Year celebration offer opportunities for students and parents alike to forge connections across grade levels as well.

Drawn from this community are the highly active Board members who bring great breadth and depth of experience to the school. Representing parents of all grades and community demographics, the Board takes a keen interest in the school's plans. The Board is very involved in key activities from the Master Plan build-out and the capital campaign, and works closely with administration on the Strategic Plan to support the program's growth and direction.

## Physical Campus

In 2016, Presidio Knolls School purchased the outstanding 1.5-acre campus on which it resides. The facility, located in the South of Market (SOMA) neighborhood of San Francisco, offers ample space given the growth projections that have been made for the school. The school is currently in the early stages of a large-scale renovation of this multi-parcel facility, which will ultimately provide the PKS community with a modern campus ten times the size of the original preschool building. The new campus will boast over 80,000 square feet, and will feature a total of 26 classrooms as well as a library, art studio, music room, science lab, and makers studio. Students will also enjoy a new multi-use gymnasium and auditorium, a teaching kitchen and flexible dining area. Outdoor play is also soon to be enhanced, thanks to the addition of a rooftop play area.

In addition to ensuring that implementation of these renovations does not disrupt current school activities and student learning, the development of the PKS Campus Master Plan was guided by the following conceptual design goals:

- Meet the educational program requirements for expansion from preschool through eighth grade;
- Maximize outdoor play, learning space, and natural light;
- Provide flexibility for rooms and buildings to easily adapt to changing needs of a growing school;
- Reflect the dual identity of PKS as both a progressive school and a Mandarin immersion program; and
- Combine timeless design with cost efficiency.





## San Francisco, California

Though small in physical area—a tight seven-by-seven-mile grid of narrow streets and avenues at the tip of a peninsula—San Francisco’s impact on the nation’s economic, technological, social, and political landscapes is immense. What is today the cultural, commercial, and financial center of Northern California began as a Spanish mission and settlement at the Presidio near the Golden Gate Bridge—a fort, park, and the namesake of Presidio Knolls School. San Francisco’s first population boom came with the Gold Rush of the 1840s. Though devastated by an earthquake and fire in 1906, the city fully rebounded in the 20th century, becoming a hub for progressive social movements, high tech, and global commerce. Many characteristics define San Francisco in the American psyche—the elegant Golden Gate Bridge and bustling Fisherman’s Wharf; dense fog and basking seals; Victorian row houses and rumbling cable cars, Alcatraz Island in the bay and redwood forests just to the north.

Though San Francisco is a popular tourist destination, the city also ranks high on lists of most livable cities. Comprised of 11 colorful neighborhoods, including the famous Chinatown and Haight Ashbury districts, San Francisco offers a little bit of everything. A thriving economy, vibrant and open-minded cultural scene, and exceptionally mild climate attract a diversity of people to the city—entrepreneurs and environmentalists; artists and engineers; foodies and families; and anyone drawn to an active, outdoorsy lifestyle. While traffic and parking in the city can be daunting, San Francisco boasts one of the nation’s most sophisticated public transit systems. The city’s compact layout and pleasant weather make it pedestrian-friendly in most months as well.

Attractions for visitors and residents alike include the Golden Gate Park, the San Francisco Zoo, Mission Dolores Park, and of course, Fisherman’s Wharf. The music and arts scene is diverse, with classical offerings at the San Francisco Symphony, Opera, and Ballet, as well as jazz, rock, and folk concerts at the Civic Center and new SFJAZZ venue. The city is also a popular site for cultural events and festivals, including the Cherry Blossom Festival (April), Fringe Festival (September), San Francisco International Film Festival (April/May), Tet Festival (January/February), Union Street Art Festival (June), and Haight Ashbury Street Fair (June). Residents of San Francisco also tend to be avid fans of the Giants (MLB) and the 49ers (NFL).

# Opportunities and Challenges

With the support of a dedicated faculty and parent body, and buoyed by a clear mission and dedication to progressive education and Mandarin language acquisition, the Founding Head of Middle School will have a unique opportunity to shape the middle school program at PKS. The 2017 Strategic Plan will be in place to provide a framework with which the Founding Head of Middle School can develop a dedicated team of teachers alongside a middle school program that supports the school's progressive and Mandarin immersion educational model.

While PKS is a growing school, deep community relationships have been established with students and families as well as local and international partners, schools, and organizations. Continued support of these relationships will be essential for the growth of the school. The Founding Head of Middle School at PKS will play a significant role in the continued development of the exciting educational experience unique to PKS.

The Founding Head of Middle School of Presidio Knolls School will be charged with the following:

- Create a safe, positive, and challenging middle school learning culture while recognizing the unique mission and vision of the progressive/ Mandarin model as an example for the future;
- Lead the hiring and retention of exceptional teachers for the middle school program with the opportunity to build the inaugural “dream team” and provide professional development to support them;
- Design and develop a developmentally appropriate, progressive, Mandarin immersion middle school curriculum that fits within the continuum of learning for the whole school and is inclusive of individual student learning needs;
- Manage effective day-to-day operations and staff performance of respective roles in developing a world-class middle school program;
- Work closely with HOS, the Board, and other staff members to foster a collaborative and high-performance school culture;
- Serve as role model to encourage professional growth, self-assessment and effective training with best-practice research, trends and innovations in adolescence, progressive pedagogy, inquiry-based education, and immersion learning;
- Recognize and support the opportunities that arise within a developing school community.

# Qualifications and Qualities of the Founding Head of the Middle School

The Founding Head of the Middle School at Presidio Knolls School will ideally possess most or all of the following qualities and qualifications:

- Commitment to PKS vision and mission as progressive, Mandarin immersion school;
- Expertise in progressive and inquiry-based principles in a middle school setting;
- Deep understanding and appreciation of adolescence as a unique and critical time;
- Middle school teaching experience;
- Background in middle school program design, curriculum development, and instruction;
- Excitement for the opportunity to launch a new program in a growing school
- Innovator mindset of risk-taking, courage, creativity, empathy, adaptability, resourcefulness, and resilience;
- Effective and engaging communication skills in diverse situations with various constituents;
- Passion for working with children and teachers;
- Enthusiasm of a culture-builder in dynamic community (PKS is the place to be!);
- “Can-do and roll-up-your-sleeves” attitude;
- Bilingual, immersion and/or international experience a plus.



# To Apply

Interested candidates should submit the following materials as separate PDF attachments in one email:

- Cover letter expressing interest in the Founding Head of Middle School position at Presidio Knolls School;
- Current résumé;
- Personal statement or educational philosophy;
- List of five references with name, phone number, and email address of each. (References will be contacted only with the candidate's permission.)

Please send all materials to Fred Wesson or Burke Zalosh of Carney, Sandoe & Associates:

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**BURKE ZALOSH**

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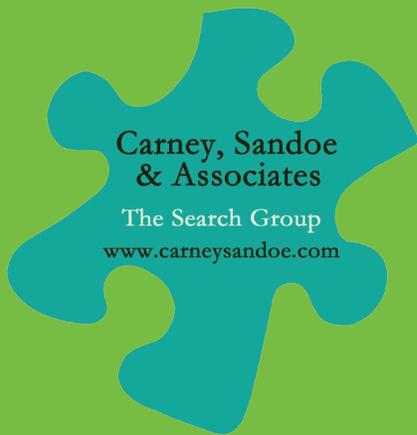
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Thank you for your interest in  
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