

# The Nueva School

Hillsborough, United States



*Since 1967, a Bay Area laboratory for gifted minds, pairing design thinking with the country's first dedicated social-emotional learning curriculum.*

## RANKING DIMENSIONS

|                      |        |
|----------------------|--------|
| Overall              | 79/100 |
| Academic outcomes    | 83/100 |
| University placement | 81/100 |
| Prestige & heritage  | 76/100 |
| Alumni network       | 75/100 |
| Facilities           | 78/100 |
| Transparency         | 79/100 |

## EDITOR'S VERDICT

Nueva’s defining proposition is not generic “gifted education” but a full PreK–12 school built around it, with social-emotional learning treated as core architecture rather than pastoral garnish. Founded in 1967 in Hillsborough, it runs an American curriculum in English for ages 3 to 18 and remains day-only, which matters: this is an academically intense Bay Area school without the boarding buffer that can soften pressure-cooker cultures. The school’s own language is heavy on “learn by doing” and “learn by caring”, and the important point sits beneath the slogan: project-based work, deep inquiry and permission for

students to “fail forward” are embedded in the model. Parents looking for orthodox, teacher-led instruction and conventional academic signalling need to register that early.

What puts Nueva on a serious shortlist is the combination of *intellectual stretch* and a long-standing commitment to emotional literacy. Its editorial tagline points to the country’s first dedicated social-emotional learning curriculum, and that still reads as central to the school’s identity rather than legacy branding. For bright children who are intensely curious, highly verbal, inventive, or impatient with routine classroom pace, that mix can be *genuinely distinctive*. The accreditation profile is solid rather than flashy — NEASC and NAIS — but the stronger signal is institutional coherence: gifted education, design thinking, interdisciplinary work and explicit attention to how children relate to one another all pull in the same direction.

The school’s market position is clear. At an average annual day fee of **\*\*\$54,211\*\***, Nueva sits in the expensive tier of US private education, and parents are paying for specialism, not old-school prestige theatre. The alumni floor recorded in Wikidata — **\*\*12 notable alumni\*\***, including figures across film and music, with **\*\*1\*\*** star-tier drama laureate — gives at least some evidence that the school has produced graduates who convert precocious talent into public achievement. Still, this is not the school for every high achiever. The best fit is a student who wants challenge without constant rank-ordering, enjoys making things as much as mastering content, and can thrive among other bright, intense peers. Children who want a more conventional competitive ladder, or who prefer clear external structure over *customised, inquiry-heavy learning*, will find Nueva *demanding in the wrong way*.

STRENGTHS

- Nueva's internationally recognized social-emotional learning program has been fundamental to the school's commitment to nurture the whole child since its founding in 1967, and the SEL curriculum was highlighted by Daniel Goleman in his book Emotional Intelligence.
- Student to teacher ratio is 6.5:1, allowing significant differentiation for academically advanced learners across small classes of 15-18 students.
- Niche's 2026 rankings place Nueva 1 of 1,218 for Best High Schools for STEM in California and 2 of 209 for Best Private K-12 Schools in California.
- Graduates regularly attend Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Harvard, Princeton, UPenn, Dartmouth, Yale, MIT, Stanford, Caltech, UChicago, Duke, and Northwestern, per third-party school-profile reporting.
- The academic approach integrates project-based learning, social-emotional development, design thinking, and environmental citizenship, alongside a distinct music program; Nueva's Menuhin program, teaching musical theory and practice to selected students in grades one

TRADE-OFFS

- Fees are among the highest in the Bay Area day-school market: tuition for grades 9-12 is listed at \$63,720, before additional fees or expected giving.
- The acceptance rate is low, and admission is very competitive, as the school seeks to admit highly motivated students who can take on its challenging curriculum, meaning families should expect a rigorous, assessment-heavy process focused on identified giftedness rather than general academic fit.
- Assessment style is non-traditional: Nueva students do not have a GPA until grade 10, children usually do not take exams, and instead projects replace final exams, which can be an adjustment for families expecting conventional grading benchmarks.
- The school operates across two sites rather than one contiguous campus, and about half of Hillsborough students ride buses to get to school regularly, though not quite as many at the high school given its proximity to free Caltrain, implying real commute logistics for many families.

through eight, was established by Sir Yehudi Menuhin and Helen Dowling.

ADMISSIONS

Nueva enrolls from pre-kindergarten through Upper School (grade 12), with the Hillsborough site serving Lower and Middle School and a separate San Mateo/Bay Meadows campus for Upper School. The application process is detailed and multi-stage, typically including a parent/guardian written and video questionnaire, an applicant written questionnaire, a timed writing sample, a creative project, recommendation letters, and transcripts. Because the school is built around identifying and serving gifted learners, evaluation leans on assessed intellectual profile as well as family philosophical fit, not simply grades. Admission is described by independent consultants as low-acceptance and highly competitive, favoring highly motivated students able to handle an accelerated, project-based curriculum.

NOTABLE ALUMNI ( 1 2 )

- MUSIC: Marc Yu, Q6835623, Olga Wilhelmine Munding
- DRAMA: Shemar Moore, Olga Wilhelmine Munding, Alex Nickel
- LETTERS: Lisa Brennan-Jobs, Jon Fisher
- SCIENCE: Will Harvey, Jon Fisher
- BUSINESS: Will Harvey, Jon Fisher

WTS RATING 

This profile summarises editorial research by World's Top Schools. Verify all admissions dates directly with the school before submitting. Sources are cited in the full online profile at [WorldsTopSchools.com/schools/sch\\_ab9dac7c88](https://WorldsTopSchools.com/schools/sch_ab9dac7c88).