

Head-Royce School

Oakland, United States



Since 1887 on a wooded Oakland hills campus, pairing rigorous scholarship with a decades-old public-school partnership that opens college doors for first-generation students

RANKING DIMENSIONS

Overall	65/100
Academic outcomes	77/100
University placement	75/100
Prestige & heritage	72/100
Alumni network	0/100
Facilities	72/100
Transparency	71/100

EDITOR'S VERDICT

Set in the wooded Oakland hills and founded in 1887, Head-Royce trades on substance rather than spectacle. It is a non-religious K-12 day school with an American curriculum, teaching in English, and an annual average day fee of ****\$60,500**** across the full age range. That places it firmly in the top tier of Bay Area private schooling. The school’s public identity is clear: rigorous academics, diversity and belonging pushed beyond slogans, and civic engagement tied to the local community rather than treated as a decorative extra. The campus history matters here too. Anna Head’s school started more than a century

ago, but the institution has kept one foot in tradition and another in modern programme design, with innovation, internships and integrated learning all named as part of its current direction.

What marks Head-Royce out is the combination of **serious academic pressure** with an equally serious moral and civic brief. The school states its mission in blunt terms: character, intellect and creativity. It also commits, in unusually explicit language, to anti-racist curriculum revision, conflict resolution, repairing harm and prioritising BIPOC leadership. Many schools gesture in this direction; Head-Royce has written it into the spine of the institution. Parents who want a polished, country-club version of independent education should look elsewhere. This is a school for families comfortable with an intellectually and socially **demanding** environment, and for children who will use the opportunities of a diverse community rather than retreat from them. NEASC and NAIS accreditation add a layer of external credibility, but the stronger signal is the school’s long-standing seriousness about what education is for.

It also earns a place on a shortlist because it sits in a rare position in the market: **prestige without social insulation**. The editorial tagline points to a decades-old public-school partnership that opens college doors for first-generation students, and that widens the school’s frame beyond its own fee-paying families. That matters. It gives Head-Royce a civic texture many expensive American day schools lack. The minimum verified alumni footprint is also deep enough to register: ***20 notable alumni*** catalogued in Wikidata, including ***6 writers and journalists***, alongside figures in film, music and the visual arts. That pattern fits the school’s self-declared emphasis on intellect and creativity. The student who will thrive here is bright, articulate, resilient and happy being stretched across disciplines. The student who wants anonymity, low stakes or a narrow exam-factory education will not enjoy it. Head-Royce is **for engaged minds**, not passengers.

STRENGTHS

- Head-Royce maintains an average class size of 16 with a 7:1 student-to-teacher ratio across its roughly 921-student K-12 enrollment, supporting close individual attention.
- The upper school is built on a four-year interdisciplinary Humanities Core, senior seminars, and a capstone, with 60-plus honors and advanced courses, giving students an unusually structured academic pathway.
- Recent matriculation includes UC Berkeley, UCLA, University of Chicago, USC, Stanford, Northwestern, Brown, Cornell and Yale, indicating access to competitive university placement.
- The school traces its roots to the Anna Head School for Girls, founded in 1887, which merged with the neighboring Royce School in 1979, giving it a long institutional history and a campus with historic designation.
- The school states that commitment to socioeconomic diversity is foundational, with a flexible tuition program designed to make a Head-Royce education affordable for all families based on demonstrated financial need.

TRADE-OFFS

- Upper-school tuition is \$60,500 for 2025-26, placing the school among the higher-cost independent day schools in the Bay Area, even with aid available.
- With total enrollment around 921 students and 11 interscholastic sports, the range of athletic and extracurricular options is narrower than at larger private schools in the region.
- The Head-Royce acceptance rate is lower than that of other private schools in the area, and the admissions process is challenging, meaning families should not assume an easy path to enrollment.
- Students come from Oakland, Berkeley, Alameda, Orinda, and 33+ other communities representing 80 other zip codes in the East Bay and beyond, so families outside the immediate Oakland hills area may face a significant daily commute.

ADMISSIONS

Head-Royce is a K-12 day school with main entry points in kindergarten, sixth grade and ninth grade. Applicants complete the school's own application, which requires the ISEE, transcripts, recommendations and an interview; a preliminary application is due in early December, the full file in early January, with decisions released in March. Tuition for 2025-26 is \$60,500 for the upper school, though a need-based flexible-tuition program exists. Admissions consultants describe the process as competitive relative to peer East Bay schools, reflecting limited spaces and strong local demand.

NOTABLE ALUMNI (20)

SPORT: Helen Jacobs, Helen Wills

MUSIC: Adam Duritz, MC Lars, Jane Connell

DRAMA: Daniel Wu, Jane Connell, Krista Marie Yu

VISUAL_ARTS: C.C. van Asch van Wijck, Claire Falkenstein, Helen Wills

LETTERS: Suki Schorer, Peter Alexander, Margaret Wentworth Owings, Rebecca Alexander, Helen Jacobs, Helen Wills

POLITICS: Libby Schaaf, California Gibson

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_b84f5675f1.