

POSITION STATEMENT

STERNE SCHOOL

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA



HEAD OF SCHOOL SEARCH
START DATE: JULY 1, 2027



OVERVIEW

For 50 years, Sterne School has been a leader in educating neurodiverse learners with dyslexia, ADHD, and language-based learning challenges, grounded in a strengths-based approach. Serving students in grades 4–12 in San Francisco, Sterne stands apart not only for what it does, but for how it does it: students are understood through their strengths, and across campus, there is a shared belief that every student has something essential to contribute and the capacity to succeed.

At Sterne, learning is both rigorous and personal. Small classes, integrated academic support, and a college-preparatory curriculum are paired with a commitment to student well-being, self-advocacy, and growth. Students develop the confidence to understand how they learn, the skills to navigate challenges, and the voice to advocate for themselves. They graduate not only prepared for college, but with a strong sense of identity and purpose.

The community is defined by care, connection, and shared commitment. Faculty are deeply invested in their students. Families are engaged and appreciative, often arriving after complex educational journeys and finding at Sterne a true sense of partnership.

Located in the vibrant heart of San Francisco, where the Financial District, Chinatown, and North Beach converge, Sterne's urban campus reflects the city's energy and diversity. The School's facilities support a dynamic academic program and an array of arts, athletics, and student life experiences.



Sterne stands at an important moment in its history. With a strong foundation, a clear mission, and a dedicated community, the School is poised to build on its legacy, clarify its identity, strengthen enrollment, and align its programs and systems for the future.

MISSION AND VALUES

Sterne School's mission is to build on the foundation of individual strengths to discover and nurture each student's version of greatness.

This mission is grounded in a set of core values that guide the life of the School:

- Start with Strengths
- Bring Joy to Learning
- Learn from Everyone's Uniqueness
- Honor the Educator
- Never Give Up

These values shape both the academic program and the community's culture. Students are encouraged to understand how they learn, to build confidence in their abilities, and to engage with others in ways that foster empathy, resilience, and self-awareness.



BY THE NUMBERS

- Grades: 4th through 12th
- Students: ~185
- Zip Codes in Student Body: 24 in LS/MS; 40 in HS
- Students of Color (self-identified): 52% in LS/MS; 35% in HS
- Gender: 63% male, 33% female, 4% non-binary/non-gender conforming
- Students who participate in competitive or club sports: 65%
- Students who participate in visual or performing arts class or program: 70%
- Teachers/Faculty: 28
- Admin & Staff: 18
- Tuition assistance on average \$1.3M dollars annually
- Accreditations & Associations: California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS), Western Association of Schools & Colleges (WASC), National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), Partner of the UCSF Dyslexia Center

PROGRAM

Sterne offers a comprehensive college-preparatory program for neurodiverse learners with dyslexia, ADHD, and language-based learning challenges, grounded in a strengths-based approach. The program is intentionally designed to meet students where they are while helping them grow into confident, capable learners.

Across grades 4–12, instruction is both personalized and rigorous. With a student-to-teacher ratio of approximately 8:1 and as low as 5:1 in the Lower and Middle School, teachers are able to deeply understand each student's learning profile and tailor instruction accordingly.

A defining feature of the Sterne program is its integrated support model. Academic interventions are embedded directly into the classroom experience, eliminating the need for “pull-out” instruction and ensuring that students remain connected to their peers and grade-level curriculum. The Sterne READS program, based on structured literacy and the Orton-Gillingham

approach, exemplifies this philosophy by integrating dyslexia support within English Language Arts courses.

Sterne offers a comprehensive math program designed to support a wide range of learners, from students with dyscalculia and math-related challenges to those for whom math is a particular strength. Over the years, Sterne has partnered with the UCSF Dyslexia Center, and more recently participated in UCSF's Arithmetic Fact Retrieval Instructional Trial. Through this work, Sterne gained access to a research-based program that is now going to become a core component of their approach to supporting students with numeracy needs.

In the Lower and Middle School, students benefit from flexible class placement based on instructional need rather than traditional grade-level tracking. A project-based, inquiry-driven model encourages problem-solving, creativity, and engagement, supported by more than 300 hours annually of hands-on STEM learning.





The High School program builds on this foundation with a challenging college-preparatory curriculum designed and delivered by expert faculty. Self-reflection, self-advocacy, and leadership are central, as students take increasing ownership of their learning. A highly personalized college counseling process supports students over four years, resulting in a 100% acceptance rate to four-year colleges and universities for students who apply.

Experiential learning is a core component across all divisions. Through Expedition Days, Experiential Week, and national and international travel opportunities, students engage in hands-on, real-world learning that connects academic content to broader contexts. Experiences range from local environmental work in San Francisco to international travel focused on cultural immersion, service learning, and academic exploration.

Social-emotional learning is deeply embedded in the program. Sterne partners with leading organizations to deliver a CASEL-aligned SEL curriculum that includes advisory programs, peer mentorship, counselor-led groups, and community-building activities. These experiences support student self-awareness, leadership development, and well-being.

Student life is vibrant and inclusive. Students participate in athletics, arts, and extracurricular activities at high rates, with approximately 65% engaged in sports and 70% involved in visual or performing arts. More than 20 clubs and affinity groups, along with traditions such as Spirit Week, performances, and community events, create a dynamic and connected student experience.





THE PEOPLE OF STERNE

Students

Sterne students are bright, capable, and complex learners who thrive in an environment designed for how they learn best. As neurodiverse learners with dyslexia, ADHD, and language-based learning challenges, many arrive having experienced frustration in traditional settings. At Sterne, they rediscover confidence and develop the tools to understand themselves as learners. Students are active participants in their education. They engage in leadership through student government, mentorship programs such as Eye to Eye, and service learning initiatives that contribute more than 500 hours annually to the broader community. The student body is a diverse and inclusive community, representing a wide range of backgrounds, learning profiles, and perspectives. Students are encouraged to explore their identities, develop empathy, and build meaningful relationships.

Faculty

Sterne's faculty are deeply committed to the School's mission and to the students they serve. Teachers are trained in best practices for neurodiverse learners and bring both expertise and creativity to their work. The School emphasizes professional collaboration through structures such as Professional Learning Communities and ongoing professional development. Teachers approach their work with a deep understanding of individual learning profiles, using varied assessment strategies, differentiated instruction, and responsive teaching practices. There is a shared belief that strong relationships and thoughtful pedagogy are essential to student success.

Administration and Staff

The administrative team oversees key areas of the School, including the Lower/Middle School and High School divisions, academic programming,

student support services, and operations. The team includes experienced leaders in instruction, counseling, learning support, and college advising, reflecting the School's integrated approach to educating neurodiverse learners. They are complemented by a strong and dedicated group of support staff who play an essential role in the daily life of the School, ensuring that students, faculty, and families are well supported across all areas of the program and operations. Mission-aligned, the administrative team works closely together to support faculty, students, and families while ensuring that academic, social-emotional, and operational priorities align in service of student success.

Families

Families are committed to their children's growth and value the partnership they find at Sterne, often after navigating complex educational journeys with their child(ren). There is a shared appreciation for the School's mission and its impact on students' confidence, self-understanding, and success. While levels of engagement vary across the community, there is a meaningful opportunity to deepen connection and broaden participation, creating more consistent chances for families to engage with one another and with the life of the School. Strengthening this partnership will further support student growth and reinforce a cohesive and connected community.

Governance and the Board of Directors

The Board of Directors is dedicated, mission-focused, and committed to stewarding the School's long-term health and vitality. Grounded in a belief in the

importance of a San Francisco home for neurodiverse students, the Board values recognizing individual learning profiles and building on strengths to nurture each student's version of greatness. The Board serves as a thoughtful partner to the School's leadership, providing strategic guidance through seven meetings each year, while entrusting the Head of School with responsibility for operations, academic programs, strategic plan implementation, enrollment, and personnel. As Sterne looks ahead to its next fifty years, the Board is eager to partner with a new Head of School to advance its strategic goals.



ENROLLMENT, FINANCES, FUNDRAISING, AND FACILITIES

Enrollment

Sterne operates in a dynamic and increasingly competitive independent school market in San Francisco and the broader Bay Area. In recent years, enrollment trends have reflected both the School's strengths and broader shifts in the landscape, including a declining school-age population, increased competition, and more schools expanding support for neurodiverse learners. The School continues to refine its admissions and marketing strategies to more clearly articulate its program, sharpen its value proposition, and attract best-fit students at key entry points. Strengthening enrollment through focused strategy, messaging, and market positioning will be a central priority for the next Head of School.

Finances

The yearly operating budget hovers around \$8M, with operating reserves above the best-practice level of 15% of expenses. The

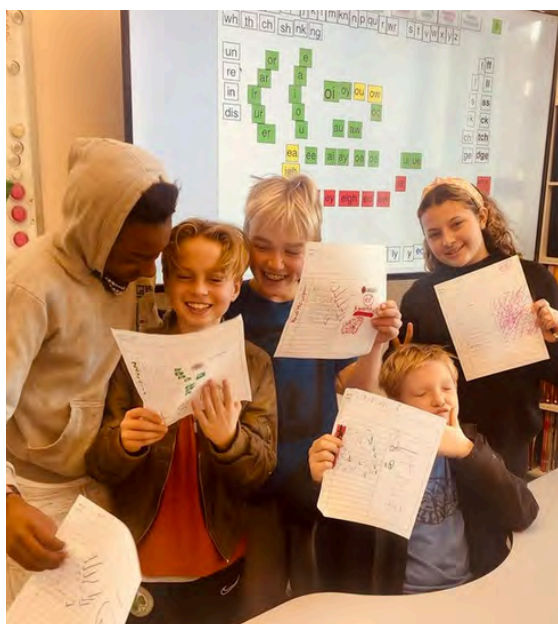


current endowment is \$486K.

Currently, the School awards just over \$1.3M in financial assistance, which represents approximately 19% of gross tuition. Growth of the endowment is critical to raising Sterne's ability to award more tuition assistance and grow our enrollment. The School carries debt of \$1.4M that was used to build out the lower level into a performing arts and gymnasium space. The principal of this debt is due in March of 2028. Sterne is currently at the beginning of a Capital Campaign with a 3-pronged objective: paying off debt, growing the endowment, and expanding into a sizable, unused portion of space within the existing building.

Fundraising

Sterne School's traditional fundraising initiatives, the fall Annual Fund campaign and spring gala, collectively generate between \$500K-\$600K each year. In Spring 2024, Sterne began initial planning for its 50th Anniversary Capital Campaign, launching it publicly in March 2026. The campaign is a three-phase, \$3M+ initiative that will resolve previous campaign debt, renovate campus communal space, and grow the school's endowment. Acknowledging that giving takes many forms, Sterne fosters a culture of philanthropy amongst stakeholders by educating the school community on various ways they can make a difference and highlighting the impact of their gifts.



Facilities

Sterne's campus provides a vibrant urban setting in the heart of San Francisco. In 2017, the School relocated to its current home at 838 Kearny Street, securing a long-term presence through a 99-year lease. Since that move, Sterne has thoughtfully invested in creating facilities that support its program and reflect its commitment to students, including science labs and a visual arts studio. The newly built performing arts/gymnasium space includes a black-box theater, a music room, a film room with a green screen, and recording spaces. These spaces are central to both academic and co-curricular life, supporting creativity, collaboration, and student engagement. At the same time, meaningful opportunities exist to continue enhancing and optimizing the use of space within the building, ensuring that the physical environment evolves in alignment with the School's programmatic aspirations and future growth.

STRENGTHS

Sterne School is a mission-driven community with a clear and compelling purpose. Its strengths are both programmatic and deeply relational. This creates an environment where students are known, supported, and able to thrive, offering a strong foundation on which the next leader can build and grow the School's impact.

Key strengths include:

- A clear and enduring mission focused on neurodiverse learners with dyslexia, ADHD, and language-based learning challenges, grounded in a strengths-based approach
- A culture of deep relationships, where students are well known and supported both academically and personally
- A skilled, committed faculty who bring expertise, creativity, and a strong sense of purpose to their work
- Small class sizes and individualized instruction that allow students to access learning in meaningful ways
- Signature programs, including Sterne READS, that reflect depth of practice in supporting students with dyslexia and other learning differences
- A strong college counseling program that provides highly personalized guidance and supports successful post-secondary outcomes
- A supportive parent community, grounded in shared experience and trust in the School's mission
- A collaborative adult culture in which teachers, administrators, and families are aligned around student success
- A well-developed physical campus and facilities, providing a strong foundation for future growth

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Sterne School is well positioned to build on its strong foundation as it enters a new phase of clarity, alignment, and strategic growth. The opportunities and challenges ahead are interconnected and offer a unique moment for the next Head of School to shape the School's trajectory and extend its impact in meaningful and lasting ways.

Clarifying and strengthening institutional identity

Sterne has a distinctive mission to serve neurodiverse learners with dyslexia, ADHD, and language-based learning differences through a strengths-based, college-preparatory program. At the same time, the School has been refining how it communicates this identity in a changing educational landscape. There is a clear opportunity to articulate a confident, compelling value proposition, one that fully embraces Sterne's expertise and history while clearly defining who the School serves and why it matters.



Enrollment and market positioning

Like many independent schools, Sterne is navigating a more competitive admissions environment. Other local schools have expanded their learning support offerings, and demographic shifts have impacted enrollment patterns. At the same time, Sterne's deep expertise and differentiated program position it well to reclaim and strengthen its market position. A focused and aligned enrollment strategy, supported by clear messaging, will be key to long-term sustainability.

Ensuring programmatic coherence and excellence

Sterne's program offers significant strengths across divisions, particularly in its support of neurodiverse learners with dyslexia, ADHD, and language-based learning differences, as well as its college-preparatory outcomes. There is further opportunity to align program design and expectations across grade levels, ensuring a coherent and consistent student experience from Lower School through High School. Strengthening alignment between stated program goals and their execution will reinforce academic clarity and confidence across the community.

Strengthening systems, structures, and operational excellence

As the School looks ahead, there is an opportunity to build greater clarity and consistency in systems, scheduling, and collaboration across divisions. Enhancing organizational coherence will support faculty effectiveness, improve communication, and ensure that the School's operations align fully with its mission and programmatic goals.



Supporting an evolving student population

The needs of Sterne students have become increasingly complex, including a rise in students with social-emotional and mental health needs. This evolution presents an opportunity to thoughtfully invest in counseling, student support structures, and faculty resources to ensure that the School continues to meet students where they are while maintaining program strength and sustainability.

Advancing financial sustainability and philanthropy

Sterne currently operates with a small endowment and relies primarily on tuition revenue. This presents an important opportunity to build a stronger culture of philanthropy, expand fundraising efforts, and explore additional revenue streams. With its compelling mission and demonstrated impact, the School is well-positioned to inspire philanthropic investment in its future.

Enhancing community engagement and adult culture

Sterne benefits from a committed and caring adult community. Looking ahead, there is an opportunity to deepen engagement among families and faculty, strengthen communication, and create more opportunities for connection and shared purpose.

Maximizing the potential of place and program

The School's campus and location offer both strengths and constraints typical of urban independent schools. Thoughtful planning around facilities, programming, and student experience will allow Sterne to continue making the most of its environment while exploring opportunities for enhancement over time.

THE SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE

The successful candidate will be a warm, visible, and mission-aligned leader who understands and values Sterne School's unique strengths.

The next Head of School will bring:

- A strategic and forward-thinking mindset, with the ability to translate vision into clear priorities and action.
- A clear and compelling communicator who loves telling a School's story and inspiring others to connect as deeply as they do.
- Strong organizational and management skills, including the ability to build systems, support leaders, and ensure effective execution.
- Strong relational leadership, with the ability to build trust and connection across students, faculty, and families.
- The ability to attract, develop, and retain talented faculty and staff while fostering a collaborative adult culture.
- The capacity to partner effectively with the Board and engage meaningfully in advancement and fundraising efforts.
- A deep commitment to students and neurodiverse learners and their experiences.
- Sound educational judgment and experience supporting academic excellence across a range of learners.
- A commitment to student well-being, including an understanding of social-emotional development and mental health.
- Personal qualities of warmth, humility, good judgment, and a sense of humor, along with an appreciation for the individuality that defines Sterne.



SALARY RANGE AND BENEFITS

The anticipated salary range for this role is \$325K - \$375K. Compensation slightly above this range may be considered for candidates with exceptional experience. Sterne School offers a comprehensive benefits package including a retirement plan with employer contribution, comprehensive insurance benefits, and support for professional growth.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Sterne School has engaged Resource Group 175 (RG175) to support the search for its next Head of School. Interested candidates are invited to submit the following materials:

- A resume
- A cover letter
- A personal statement, including reflections on and/or experience serving neurodiverse learners
- A list of references (references will not be contacted without the candidate's permission)

The deadline for submitting application materials is **August 23, 2026**, for a start date of July 1, 2027. Candidates are encouraged to submit their materials in a timely manner. Please submit materials online at:

<https://rg175.com/login>

For an initial inquiry or to nominate a potential candidate for this exciting leadership position, please contact one of the following RG175 consultants:

Steve Morris
steve.morris@rg175.com

To learn more about Sterne, visit the school's website [here](#).

