

Alvarado Elementary School

Frequently Asked Questions

What kind of school is Alvarado?

We prioritize literacy, smaller class sizes, art and science throughout our school experience. Alvarado has a strong Latin American and multi-cultural identity that is felt throughout the school – from our annual Día de los Muertos festival to our students' beautiful artwork decking our historic, 1926 building. Our PTA contributes significant resources so that our children can enjoy a well-rounded education that includes lab science, studio art, physical education, music, environmental education and technology instruction. Many of our staff, extracurricular instructors and parent volunteers speak English and Spanish, among many other languages.

What programs and curriculum are offered at Alvarado?

Alvarado is a dual-immersion TK–5th grade school with 537 students in four programs: General Education (GE), Spanish Immersion (SI), Special Education and Transitional Kindergarten (TK). GE and SI each have two classes for K through 3rd grade; a 4th grade, a 5th grade, and a 4th-5th split class. GE also has one (English) TK class. Admission to Alvarado's GE and SI programs are handled separately by San Francisco Unified School District. The curriculums mirror each other and are based on Macmillan/McGraw Hill for social studies; Reading & Writing Workshop for language arts; Common Core and DreamBox for mathematics; and the Full Option Science System (FOSS). Both programs also provide daily instruction in English Language Development.

How does Spanish Immersion work at Alvarado?

Like other SFUSD schools that offer language immersion, kindergarteners enrolled in our SI track are taught in Spanish 90 percent of the day. The amount of Spanish spoken in the classroom decreases by 10 percent each year, so by 4th grade students are taught in equal parts English and Spanish. SFUSD ideally divides each immersion class into one-third native Spanish speakers, one-third English-only speakers, and one-third bilingual speakers.

What is a typical school day like at our school?

We offer a curbside drop-off at our 22nd Street entrance. Our school day begins at 7:50 a.m. when students, parents and staff gather on our upper yard. Monday through Thursday, our physical education teacher leads the entire school in a 10-minute exercise session. At least once a week, our principal Sara Shenkan-Rich leads announcements, songs and recognizes students' achievements including acts of kindness (SHINE Award). The school day ends at 1:50 p.m.

What are our options for after school care?

The Alvarado After School Program (AASP) runs from 1:50 p.m. to 6 p.m. Growth Learning Opportunities (GLO) heads the onsite program – the largest of its kind in San Francisco. Most Alvarado students are eligible, and some scholarships are available for students who qualify financially or academically. Other children walk or take a school bus to nearby programs including Katherine Michiels School, and others run by the San Francisco Recreation & Parks Department at Eureka Valley Recreation Center, Mission Clubhouse and Douglass Playground, among others.

What is a kindergartener's typical day?

Kindergarteners and TKers (see below) are separated from our older students for much of their day so that they can ease into our grade school. There are bathrooms and drinking fountains inside each kindergarten classroom, and our youngest students have their own lunchtime and designated recess yard. In general, they start the day working on the calendar and the weather.

Each class may work as a whole or split into groups for listening, reading/phonics, writing and art centers. Each of our four kinder teachers work with small groups on reading skills. Children take turns learning responsibilities like line leader, office messenger and recycler. Outside the classroom, they rotate through more focused enrichment programs throughout the year. (See chart.) Students take home a book bag each week and write and/or draw a book report. Alvarado has a Book Buddies program, in which our 4th and 5th graders partner up with a kindergartener and read to them once a week. Each also takes home a weekly science bag to conduct age-appropriate experiments with their parents.

What is Transitional Kindergarten (TK)?

Designed as the first year of a 2-year kindergarten program, TK is taught by a credentialed teacher and offers a modified curriculum based on the California Preschool Learning Foundation and the Kindergarten Common Core Standards. Children who turn 5 between September 2 and December 2 of a given school year are eligible for the program. Alvarado has 18, General Education (English) TK students and is one of more than a dozen schools taking part in the SFUSD program. While admission into Alvarado's TK does not guarantee admission into our kindergarten, it is considered a tiebreaker in the district's enrollment process.

What does Alvarado offer for Special Education and Inclusion students?

Alvarado includes children with disabilities within the general population in a manner that is fair and appropriate as determined by a child's family and SFUSD. Special Education also has two, dedicated special day classes: K-2 and 3-5th grades. Onsite resources include a fulltime inclusion specialist, a social worker, paraprofessionals, American Disabilities Act upgrades (including an elevator), and a parent-run Inclusive Schools Committee. A number of specialists – including occupational, physical and speech therapists – also work in and out of the classroom with students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs).

How can parents get involved at Alvarado?

Every classroom has opportunities for parents to volunteer during the school day – assisting with small group work or activities, field trips, etc. – or at home helping our teachers with prep work. We have an active PTA and School Site Council (SSC) – elected parents and staff who make decisions regarding our curriculum and how we spend our budget. We also have many parent committees supporting the arts, literacy, math, science, the environment, inclusion, technology and English learners (English Learner Advisory Committee or ELAC), among others. Parents and teachers work together to plan events like our Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) celebration in the fall, book fairs, math festivals, and science nights featuring everything from robots to bats.

How much money does the PTA raise and how is it used?

Our PTA budget for the 2016-2017 school year is nearly \$450,000 – raised in large part through our annual auction, parent contributions and grants. The majority of the money pays for our PE coaches, art and music teachers, science programs (including a science lab teacher and an Education Outside instructor), math tutors, art and school supplies and literacy programs. The PTA also works with the SSC, which receives discretionary funds from SFUSD that it uses to pay for a computer teacher, a classroom size-reduction teacher, a family liaison and literacy specialists. A copy of our budget can be found on our website – www.alvaradoschool.net.

What are some of Alvarado's enrichment programs?

Area	Grade	Frequency	Features
Art	TK-5th	Once a week, year-round	Art projects reinforce classroom curriculum and are taught in our studio by a resident artist – a model created at Alvarado in 1968 by Ruth Asawa, a nationally renowned artist + education activist.
Music	K-5th	Once a week, 10 weeks	Orff-based music curriculum. Third graders learn to play the recorder. Optional instrumental music for grades 4th and 5th.
Science	K-2nd	Once a week, 10 weeks	FOSS-based science curriculum is taught in all of our classrooms. Students also take science in our laboratory with a certified science specialist. K-1st graders are assigned weekly Science Sacks filled with experiments to do at home. Science fieldtrips and Science Nights are held throughout the year.
	3rd-5th	Once a week, 14 weeks	
Outdoor Education	All	Once a week, 10-14 weeks	Our bilingual Education Outside coordinator teaches hands-on lessons in two gardens equipped with a cistern, edible plants, a fish pond, reading nooks and an outdoor kitchen.
Library	All	Once a week, all year	Longtime, bilingual librarian. Recently remodeled library.
Literacy	All	All year	Literacy specialists work across grades and coordinate tutors. Lower grades take home book bags once a week filled with Spanish or English books.
	K + 2nd -5th	All year	Reading Partners (a PTA and city funded program) provides tutoring for another 50 students.
Math	K-5th	All year	In addition to a district-designed Common Core curriculum, all of our students receive differentiated math instruction through DreamBox, an online math program in English and Spanish. The PTA sponsors an annual math festival for students.
Motor Skills + PE	K-3rd	Once a week, all year	We have a dedicated PE teacher for all grades. In addition to teacher-led exercise, two yard coaches also teach Motor Skills.
Physical Education (PE)	3rd-5th	100 minutes per week, all year	During recess, our coaches facilitate organized sports and conflict resolution exercises through our Playworks program.
Computers + Technology	All	Once a week, all year	A trained instructor teaches in our computer lab. Each classroom is provided with computers. ELMO projectors, tablets and other computing devices are available to our teachers. Qualified students are assigned tablets as part of a district-run Special Education Services program.

For more information visit www.alvaradoschool.net