

Lick-Wilmerding High School

San Francisco, United States



Founded as an 1895 mechanical-arts school, it still requires wood, metal, jewelry, or electronics credits alongside AP coursework.

RANKING DIMENSIONS

Overall	74/100
Academic outcomes	78/100
University placement	75/100
Prestige & heritage	72/100
Alumni network	71/100
Facilities	73/100
Transparency	72/100

EDITOR'S VERDICT

Lick-Wilmerding still does something that many American college-prep schools have long since dropped: it makes technical arts central, not decorative. This is the rare San Francisco independent school where teenagers can take AP classes and still be required to earn credits in wood, metal, jewellery or electronics. That single fact tells parents a great deal. LWHS values making as much as talking, and it treats practical skill, design thinking and intellectual work as parts of the same education. The academic structure is serious — **137 courses**, 65 electives and an **8:1** student-to-faculty ratio — but the school’s identity rests on that *distinctive, stubbornly hands-on* blend of liberal arts, sciences, technical arts, visual arts and performing arts.

The school is small enough to feel tightly held, with **560 students** and average classes of 17, yet large enough to offer real breadth. It also draws from an unusually wide catchment: students arrive from more than 150 middle schools across five Bay Area counties. That matters. The social mix is broader than at many neighbourhood-bound independents, and the school states that 73% of students identify as students of colour. There is also serious financial backing behind access, with more than \$7.8 million allocated to Flexible Tuition. Parents who care about community rhetoric matching institutional spending will notice that. So will parents who want a school with a declared civic mission rather than a narrow university-placement machine; LWHS calls itself a “private school with public purpose” and runs that through its Center for Civic Engagement.

At **\$65,900** a year on average, this is an *expensive* day school, and families are entitled to expect substance. LWHS gives them a clear proposition: high academic expectations inside a culture that prizes craftsmanship, collaboration and civic responsibility. It suits students who are intellectually strong but do not want a *slick, status-driven* version of private education. It also suits teenagers who want to build, perform, argue, test and make things with their hands, not just collect grades. Students looking for a more conventional, exam-fluent, prestige-coded independent school experience may find it *idiosyncratic*. For the right child, that is the point.

STRENGTHS	TRADE-OFFS
• The school teaches at the junction of Design, Engineering and Craft, with hands-on courses in Coding, Electronics, Jewelry, Woodworking, Sewing, and Metal and Digital Fabrication, a distinctive feature among US day schools. • Roughly 33% of families are enrolled through the Flexible Tuition Program, which lets families pay an amount that meets their need given current financial circumstances. • Admission is highly competitive, with the school receiving almost 1,000 applications for the incoming 9th grade against only 140 open slots, indicating a rigorously selected peer group. • The school traces to bequests from Jellis Clute Wilmerding and a nationally recognized pioneer in vocational education, George Merrill, giving it a 130-year identity distinct from typical prep schools. • The school maintains a partnership with the adjacent City College of San Francisco for the use of their classrooms, laboratories, and sports facilities, expanding resources beyond its own campus.	• Full tuition for the 2026-2027 school year is \$64,900, and new families are asked to pay a one-time \$1,000 facilities fee, placing it among the costliest day schools in the region. • Every school year the school receives almost 1,000 applications for the incoming 9th grade, of which only 140 slots are open, so acceptance is far from assured even for strong candidates. • LWHS is accepting applications for rising 10th and 11th graders but, due to the Technical Arts curriculum and graduation requirements, is not able to enroll students into the 12th grade, ruling it out for late-stage transfer families. • Graduation from Lick-Wilmerding requires all students to take a minimum of four semesters in Technical Arts, a mandatory shop-based component rather than an optional enrichment track.

ADMISSIONS

Entry is centred on grade 9, with limited grade 10-11 openings contingent on attrition; the school does not enrol new students directly into grade 12 because of its Technical Arts graduation requirement. Roughly 1,000 applications compete for about 140 ninth-grade places each year, making admission highly selective. The process involves transcripts, recommendations, an essay and typically an interview. Financial aid is substantial: around a third of families use the Flexible Tuition programme, with contributions ranging from \$1,000 to \$50,000 depending on demonstrated need, alongside a \$60 Clarity application fee (waivable).

NOTABLE ALUMNI (2 5)

SPORT: Ben Wildman-Tobriner

MUSIC: Dan the Automator, Noe Venable, Mxmtoon

VISUAL_ARTS: Jonathon Keats, Kate Weare, Lionel Pries, Q19958339

LETTERS: Jonathon Keats, Lisa Brennan-Jobs, Teresa Strasser, Laura Sullivan

SCIENCE: Frederick Seitz, Jonathon Keats, Albert Overhauser, John Lane Bell, Laura Sullivan

BUSINESS: John D. Goldman

WTS RATING 

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