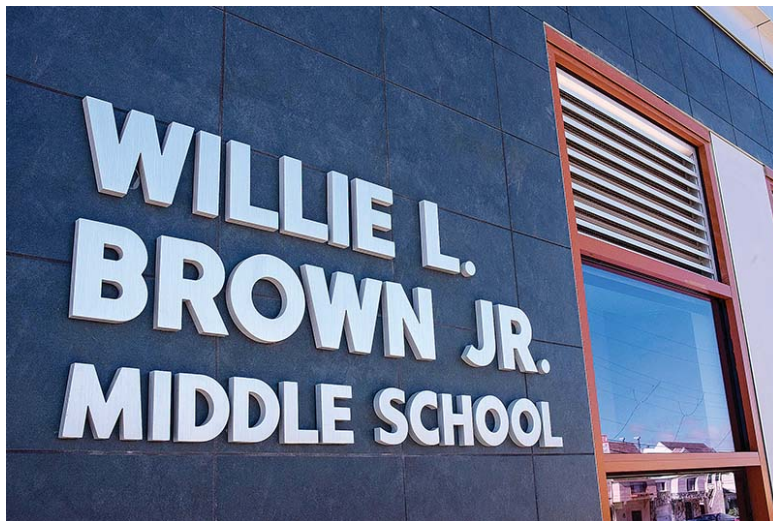


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## SFUSD school year to begin with unique classes, new middle school

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This school year marks the opening of Willie L. Brown Jr. Middle School in the Bayview — the first new public school constructed in The City since 2005.  
(Michael Ares/Special to S.F. Examiner)  
By Laura Dudnick on August 17, 2015 12:01 am

The start of the 2015-16 school year today is bringing many firsts to the San Francisco Unified School District.

From the introduction of a unique computer science curriculum, to the opening of the first new school constructed in a decade, to what is believed to be the first LGBT studies class at a public high school in the U.S., SFUSD officials say they are ready to welcome the 56,000 prekindergarten through 12th grade students into The City's public school classrooms this morning.

"It's always one of the most joyful times for families, for children and for our educators," said Board of Education Vice President Matt Haney. "On the first day of school there's always some challenges

and some things to work out, but we're feeling pretty excited and confident about the start of school."

Perhaps the most notable change to the district this year is the opening of Willie L. Brown Middle School, the first entirely new public school constructed in The City since Dianne Feinstein Elementary School opened in 2005.

The new school, located at the same site as the former Willie Brown Middle School building in the Bayview that was taken down in 2011, boasts a three-story glass building with science labs, a digital media lab and maker space to emphasize a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education.

To entice families into enrolling, district officials last year promised that students who attend all three years of middle school and graduate from Willie Brown will be given top priority in the high school admissions process after sibling placements, with the exception of Lowell High School and Ruth Asawa San Francisco School of the Arts.

Such an incentive appeared successful, with Superintendent Richard Carranza announcing in March that 365 families had applied for the 200 spots available in the school's inaugural sixth grade class.

"It is a fabulous place of learning that our community should be very proud of," Carranza remarked Tuesday at the first Board of Education meeting of the school year.

The SFUSD this school year is also rolling out the first computer science classes at a handful of middle schools, a pilot effort of what will become a districtwide computer science curriculum to be phased in in the next few years. Computer science education includes coding, computer security and databases — all valuable skills in today's job market, district officials emphasized.

The board approved expanding such classes to preschool through 12th grade students in June, and it is believed that the SFUSD will be the first district in the U.S. to implement such a widespread computer science curriculum.

Another groundbreaking class on the district's syllabus this year is an LGBT studies course at Ruth Asawa School of the Arts. The class, which will focus on the history and current culture of the LGBT community, marks what district leaders consider the first LGBT studies class at a public high school in the U.S.

This school year may also be the time when district officials take on the much-discussed challenge of how to house teachers as the SFUSD grapples with a yearslong teacher shortage in part due to a significant lack of homes available on a teacher's salary, Haney said.

The district's highly publicized teacher shortage is not unique to California, but the issue is apparently exacerbated in The City by the skyrocketing cost of living. The situation even called for measures unprecedented in recent years, including a letter from Carranza to teachers in July encouraging them to recruit candidates, and year-round recruitment programs implemented by the SFUSD throughout the past school year.

"We have to do something this year on teacher housing," Haney said. "We have to [take] ...hopefully some bold action to address teacher recruitment and retention this year."

As of Tuesday, 19 teacher positions remained unfilled. The district has said multiple times it is confident all classrooms will be staffed by the start of the school year.