

AltSchool Lab Schools

Student-Driven Learning

LOCATION San Francisco, CA and New York, NY
PROFILE TK-8th Grade Independent School
STUDENT IMPACT 230 Students

From 2013 through 2019, AltSchool operated a network of small, private lab schools in New York and the San Francisco Bay Area. These lab schools were instrumental in the development of our vision for the future of learning, and had a great impact on many learners, families, educators and AltSchool staff. They also helped with the development of our technology platform, ensuring it was built close to the classroom, in a true partnership between educators and engineers.

When we started these schools, we had a lot to learn about education and an open mind about where the future of school and learning were going. Listening carefully to our learners, educators and families, our model started to take shape, and our focus areas became clear. Great results followed. Today, our schools continue as part of our partner network, operated by Higher Ground Education. They continue to build on the positive outcomes described below.



Dramatic improvements in YoY standardized testing results

AltSchool students consistently scored highly on a percentile basis, but what’s more remarkable is that our schools made significant progress each year in terms of year-over-year growth. Each year, student growth rates improved to the point that by ‘17-’18, students’ mean MAP scores across math, reading, and language arts grew by an average of 134% relative to normalized national growth benchmarks of 100%.



These results were achieved in an environment where little focus was given to standardized testing. To us, they showed that cramming and teaching to the test is actually NOT the best way to get great results. **Students who are learning to think critically, problem solve, drive their own learning, and developing knowledge along with the skills and habits they need to thrive in the modern world will actually do better on tests too.** When well-implemented, hands-on, project-based approaches in a competency-based grading model can and should lead to better academic growth rates.

Relevant whole-child learning experiences

In a single year, educators captured over 39,000 assessments across academic and social-emotional learning via the technology platform. Character strengths such as grit, curiosity, and purpose were the second-most assessed subject area overall, following English Language Arts (ELA). We validated this focus on social-emotional learning via external assessment tools like the Panorama student survey, one of a number of instruments being developed nationally to help provide insight into student progress beyond standardized test results. At the same time, much data was collected through observation and evidence collection directly through the technology platform that is now Altitude Learning.

Students co-construct learning goals that go beyond academic knowledge to address the skills and habits they need to develop as people entering a world where knowledge is increasingly easy to access and skills and habits are at a premium. All are important, and a well-rounded, competency-based assessment system helps build a more robust picture of progress.

One key part of this is student goal-setting. In all of our schools, and across all ages, students co-constructed learning goals, assessed themselves against rubrics they often helped design, and presented progress to their parents and community. Using the **Goals** feature in the platform, students input their own evidence and assessments as they progressed.

“AltSchool has really changed me. What I’ve learned here is that even if I get it wrong or fail, then I need to figure out why I failed, and then set myself up again for success and keep trying until I get it. That’s the growth mindset that’s been instilled in me. I’m using it in my life in all sorts of different situations. Whether that’s in math or doing a craft or a project, I’ll keep trying to figure out what went wrong so I can do it right the next time.”

8th Grade Student
AltSchool Lab School

Students driving their own learning experiences

AltSchool graduates were admitted to more than 50 different high schools and are thriving academically and socially in a wide range of environments. Contributing significantly to this success: Each of our learners is on a personal journey to understand themselves as learners, and specifically what motivates them and how they learn best.

In 2017 students began facilitating student-led conferences. They seized the opportunity to showcase their growth; highlight the individual challenges they faced; and drive progress reporting for their families. After studying transferable skills, students created a taxonomy that they found most relevant to solving complex problems. By 2018, they began co-constructing their own weekly schedules, organizing and prioritizing from a menu of optional and required activities aligned to a competency-based taxonomy.

Part of this process required students to self-identify strengths and weaknesses, calling for deep introspection. By using the platform to review past work in **Playlist** and **Stream**, students were able to build their portfolios, document evidence of growth, and even recreate moments that hadn't previously been documented. Further, since many of these tasks and learning outcomes required collaboration, they needed to collaborate with peers, align schedules, agree on priorities, communicate effectively, and provide each other feedback along the way - all skills that are as important to success in today's world as any specific piece of information.

Highly satisfied families engaged in their children's learning

Learning is inherently social. Building healthy, meaningful, and sustained relationships with peers and adults helps students to feel a deep sense of belonging. Across our schools, we worked to cultivate a community where students built connections to expertise and opportunity. Educators intentionally designed learning experiences with such this exposure in mind. A few examples include visiting experts from a variety of fields, access to mentors and role models, and programs that expose children to diverse career paths.

In addition, through regular assessments and progress reports, AltSchool families get personalized updates. Educators leveraged tools like **Stream** and **Capture** to keep families abreast of learning activities and help them to understand their child's unique challenges and growth areas. Armed with this visibility into their children's learning and progress, families understood how and when to support learning throughout the school year.

More than 80% of our families accessed **Stream** weekly, with many guardians reporting appreciation for the ability to track student progress in real time. This contributed to a high parent satisfaction rate, with 90% of families reporting that they understood their child's progress and felt strongly connected to their child's learning community.

Learning environments much more like the ones we live and work in

In summary, you would have seen a learning environment much like the rest of the world we live and work in. You would have seen students making, designing, and collaborating with peers, using multiple methods to demonstrate their learning, exploring beyond their school walls, and working with experts on projects that have lasting impact on the broader community.

In this dynamic environment, students worked on being curious, empathetic, self-aware, growth-oriented, and learning how to learn. They learned to prioritize, manage time, track progress, make decisions and advocate for themselves. Through that experience they ultimately became more engaged in and dedicated to learning.

These learner-centered environments are what our technology was designed to enable, and we are proud that our schools continue to push forward with this vision as part of Higher Ground Education's international school network using Altitude Learning technology.

“Within the first six months at AltSchool, our kids just blossomed. Their self-direction is amazing, which makes parenting so much easier. They have this zest and this passion that all of my friends notice. They’re confident—they’re going to say something if they have an opinion. And that is what I think will carry these kids, this generation, through the next formative years of their life and into whatever the future is.”

Sandhya, parent of elementary and middle school students
AltSchool Lab School

See how Altitude Learning is enabling educational transformation for students everywhere.