

# The New High School Project at Chartwell



TNHSF | RANDY TUNNELL

A different kind of learning community with an education carefully designed to make high school exciting, meaningful, and successful for the students it serves.

Written by **Lisa Vitarisi Mathews**

Imagine an environment that embodies all of the things you wish you could have changed about your own high school experience, or that you wish you could change about your teenager's current high school experience. Imagine an environment that completely rethinks day-to-day life at a high school; not based on what one person thinks, but based on what research shows and what parents and educators know: many students who do not succeed in the traditional high school setting can succeed in an environment specifically designed for a high performance educational experience. Douglas Atkins, Elizabeth Miles, and Steve Henderson of academically acclaimed Chartwell School in Seaside, California, did just that—they designed a school with a singular purpose: to unwrap the potential of students who, despite their hard work and obvious talents, struggle to succeed in a traditional educational setting. They named the school “The New High School Project.”



Administration building  
Photo by Michael David Rose

The New High School Project (TNHSP) is a pioneering program targeting students with specific language-based learning variations. The students may have difficulty processing language and as a result, experience frustration with reading, spelling, and writing. TNHSP unlocks the potential of these students and helps them feel understood, confident, and successful. The ultimate goal of TNHSP is for students to transition effectively back into a more traditional learning environment, newly empowered with the knowledge of how they learn best, and with the communication skills to advocate for themselves.

Research, application, and innovation are at the core of The New High School Project's approach to curriculum and student life. This unique school emphasizes problem-solving exercises, field experiences, and collaborative student-centered learning. Students can be proud of their work at TNHSP, as they create a high quality portfolio to record their achievements.

The curriculum strengthens essential reading, writing, organizational, and study skills while teaching advanced concepts. For example, students gain a deep understanding of scientific sustainability practices by studying and interacting directly with the school's green buildings. The arts, often a particular strength for TNHSP students, creatively reinforce language and critical thinking skills, while the use of technology is integrated into all aspects of the school experience, providing important tools for learning as well as vehicles for individual expression.

Students benefit from scheduling innovations like a slightly longer school year, short breaks between each 30-day project period, and flex scheduling to meet the needs of the learning community. The students' daily schedules begin at a later start time in order to ensure that they are beginning their day when they are mentally and physically ready to learn.

The New High School Project's parent organization, Chartwell School, is no stranger to innovations in learning. It is widely known for its

success in teaching bright children with learning variations like dyslexia. In addition, Chartwell's campus is a model for learning, having been honored as a "High Performance School" and achieving a Platinum rating for Leadership in Environmental and Energy Design (LEED) awarded by the U.S. Green Building Council. It is, in fact, among the highest certified sustainable K to 8 schools in the country.

The New High School Project will join Chartwell's carefully planned campus. TNHSP has considered research by Heschong-Mahone, Rutgers University, University of Minnesota, and many others in planning the school. Students will benefit from dozens of innovations and sustainable building practices designed to produce optimal learning conditions. For example, classrooms are filled with abundant natural daylight, which can accelerate student progress in math and reading by 20% or more. TNHSP pays special attention to indoor environmental quality, a factor that has been shown to increase student awareness and decrease rates of absenteeism.



**Douglas Atkins**  
Executive Director

Characteristic of Chartwell's educational disposition, Executive Director Douglas Atkins has decided to lead rather than follow when it comes to providing high school students with a new kind of learning community. Creators of The New High School Project are unwavering in their commitment to

address all aspects of the learning environment—from the school's physical design to its carefully planned curriculum and schedule—they are creating a new high school experience, custom designed for the students it serves.

*To learn more about The New High School Project, contact Dean of Curriculum, Elizabeth Miles, or Dean of Student Life, Steve Henderson, at 831.393.8004 or [info@thenewhighschoolproject.org](mailto:info@thenewhighschoolproject.org)*

*The New High School project is located at 2511 Numa Watson Road in Seaside, California.*



**TNHSP Open House days**

- Saturday, Feb. 28  
11:00 am – 2:00 pm
- Sunday, March 22  
11:00 am – 2:00 pm
- Sunday, April 26  
11:00 am – 2:00 pm

**Parent Information Meetings**

- Tuesday, Feb. 24 • 7:30 pm at NextSpace in Santa Cruz
- Tuesday, March 24 • 7:30 pm at TNHSP
- Tuesday, April 28 • 7:30 pm at TNHSP
- Tuesday, May 26 • 7:30 pm at TNHSP

