

Eric Thuau takes over as director of the International School of San Francisco

BY HÉLÈNE LABRIET-GROSS / MAY 12, 2026 / EDUCATION



Eric Thuau takes over as director of The International School of San Francisco. © Frédéric Neema

For its annual gala evening on Saturday, May 2nd, the International School of San Francisco (formerly French American School and International High School) had a full house. More than 500 guests attended the dinner and dance held at the Saint Francis Hotel in San Francisco to raise funds for the aid program that benefits approximately 30% of the school's students.

This evening held a very special significance: Melinda Bihn, the school's current headmistress, was attending for the last time after twelve years at its helm. Indeed, on July 1st, Eric Thuau, also present at the gala, will officially succeed her as head of this bilingual institution, founded in 1962, which welcomes over 1,000 students from preschool to the final year of high school.



Eric Thuau at The International School of San Francisco's Spring Soirée on May 2, 2026, with Melinda Bihn (right), the school's current Principal.

The future headmaster is thus closing a chapter of sixteen years at the helm of the French American School of Puget Sound, located on Mercer Island near Seattle, and is delighted to be moving to San Francisco. " *I discovered the city during a trip in 1994, and it has always greatly appealed to me,*"he confides. " *It's a legendary, vibrant city, at the heart of technological and cultural innovation, and one that cannot fail to make an impression. I also love port cities; they soothe me as much as they inspire me to travel.* "

When the opportunity to lead the International School of San Francisco arose, Eric Thuau wasn't actively looking to leave Seattle, a city he felt very much at home in: " *For sixteen years, I benefited from a professional and personal environment that I greatly value, thanks in particular to a wonderful community and an extraordinary team.* " He had also been working on the ambitious project for the new facilities for the French American School of Puget Sound: " *I had been working on it for four years. Once the project was well underway, I was able to leave.* "

Cape Verde, Türkiye, United States: a rich international experience

Eric Thuau can draw on extensive experience leading international schools, which he began acquiring at a very young age. Freshly graduated from the teacher training college (IUFM) in Metz, Moselle, he chose to fulfill his military service obligations as a national service volunteer, in order to nurture his passion for international affairs and teaching. " *I was appointed director of the Les Alizés International School in Praia, Cape Verde, in 1998,*"he recounts. " *The theory was still fresh in my mind, but at 24, I had no practical experience. Through hard work, and despite a motorcycle accident that could have ended this adventure, my team and I obtained accreditation for the school after two years.* "

Eric Thuau then left Cape Verde for Bursa, Turkey, where he spent four years directing the Oyak-Renault school, while also teaching math, physics, music, and technology at the middle school level, as well as accounting and management at the high school level. " *At the end of this assignment, I was supposed to return to France. I was then offered a position in Austin, Texas. This school operated a bit like a start-up. When I arrived, a third of the year's budget had already been spent. We managed to balance the books and get the school accredited. I stayed for six years before the Seattle position became available...* "

From these diverse experiences abroad, Eric Thuau has developed what he describes as cultural agility and an ability to navigate ambiguity: " *I learned a great deal from these different cultures, countries, programs, and ways of working. I myself come from Lorraine, a very cosmopolitan region with a strong immigrant population.*"His mother is of Polish origin . " *When I was little, going to Poland was as much a journey through space as through time. I didn't pursue my career abroad to escape France, but to broaden my horizons and make me think.* "

New premises and a new management team

The interviews he conducted with teachers, parents, and students reinforced Eric Thuau's desire to lead the International School of San Francisco. " *It's an inclusive school, upholding universal and human values,*"he explains. " *I particularly appreciate the cross-cutting nature of DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) and sustainable development. The students I met actually asked me about these topics, and it's they who motivate us to champion and promote them.* "

For the community of parents, students and staff, the arrival of Eric Thuau is accompanied by other changes in the management team: the arrival of Christine Brandebourger Bodet to lead the nursery and primary school in replacement of Pauline Dides, and the departure of Fabrice Urrizalqui, principal of the middle school, whose functions will be assumed for the coming year by Allegra Molineaux, current principal of the high school.

Furthermore, students will benefit from completely renovated facilities, with the International School expanding into the premises previously occupied by the Chinese American International School and the construction of a cafeteria. " *It's a very strong school, thanks to the work of Jane Camblin and Melinda Bihn, who preceded me, and above all, thanks to the teachers supported by the administrative team.* "

Eric Thuau insists he is not arriving " *with a preconceived vision.* " He says he wants to take the time to immerse himself in the school , " *to become part of its DNA, to fully grasp the challenges, understand the expectations of parents, students, and staff, and unleash the energy within the teaching teams to innovate and experiment. I am not coming in with a sense of entitlement, driven by the same curiosity and enthusiasm I had when I started my career.* "