Opportunity Statement

Gig Harbor Academy, an independent school in Gig Harbor, Washington, seeks a Head of School to lead the community through the next exciting period of the school’s growth.

Head of School Job Summary
The Head of School serves as the educational leader, responsible for managing the policies, regulation and procedures to ensure that all students are supervised in a safe environment that meets the approved curricula and mission of the school.

Achieving academic excellency while encouraging joyful discovery requires that the Head of School work collaboratively to direct and nurture all members of the school staff and to communicate effectively with parents, students and the Board of Trustees. Inherent in the position are the responsibilities for faculty recruitment and development, curriculum oversight, administrative and operational management, institutional advancement efforts and implementation of the strategic plan.

School Description and History
Gig Harbor Academy is an independent elementary school and preschool for children age two through fifth grade, with a licensed year-round childcare facility. The school is certified annually by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction for Washington State and is a Candidate Member in good standing for full accreditation in the Northwest Association of Independent Schools (NWAIS), with a site visit for full accreditation planned for Fall 2020. The school has grown substantially over the past decade to serve additional upper elementary grades with an annual enrollment averaging 130-150 children over the last several years. Despite the school’s growth, it has retained a strong sense of family and community that is truly the core of its institutional culture.

Location
Gig Harbor Academy is located on ten wooded acres and wetlands in Gig Harbor, Washington at the south end of the Kitsap Peninsula, about an hour southwest of Seattle. Gig Harbor is a scenic, suburban and rural community with a strong maritime tradition. The larger Gig Harbor community is family-oriented, experiencing a rapid regional growth rate. The local public school district is comprised of three high schools, four middle schools and eight elementary schools totaling 9,000 students.

Gig Harbor Academy currently has four buildings, outdoor multi-use pavilion, Nature Certified outdoor classroom, a large wooded playground with multiple play structures, a multipurpose athletic field, a 0.5 mile fitness jogging course, an outdoor archeological dig site, and 5 acres of wetlands accessed by trails. GHA is a multi-platform institution with a technology inventory of Mac and PC devices to allow
students from preschool to 5th grade access a progressive learning interface that is highly intuitive and child friendly.

**Mission, Core Values, and School Culture**

**Vision Statement:** We empower young minds through joyful discovery, create a passion for critical thinking; and unlock the potential in every student.

**Mission Statement:** At Gig Harbor Academy we send independent thinkers into society with the goal of positively impacting lives. We do this through living our core values of Integrity, Critical Thinking, Empathy, Creativity, and Community, and through creating a student-centered and inclusive environment. By embracing the individual learning styles and passions of our students, we tailor our approach, engage each child in a uniquely meaningful way, and cultivate their joy of discovering the world around them.

**Core Values:** Integrity, Critical Thinking, Empathy, Creativity, and Community.

- **Integrity:** Do the right thing, every time, especially when nobody is looking. By living this value every day and instilling it in the young minds we are fortunate enough to engage, we will help develop character in the students who walk our campus.
- **Critical Thinking:** We teach students how to think, not what to think. We do this by challenging students to analyze and evaluate information, arguments, and beliefs so they can arrive at their own conclusions with reason, logic, and objectivity.
- **Empathy:** Observe the world through other people’s eyes. Changing your perspective allows for compassionate connection with others and better use of critical thinking skills to solve problems. We use empathy to understand every person’s approach to living and learning.
- **Creativity:** Children learn creatively, so we must teach creatively. Through adaptability and agility with our approach, we customize the learning environment for our students and develop a passion for lifelong learning, regardless of what form that learning may take.
- **Community:** We establish and nurture a supportive and diverse community at GHA. By reinforcing this every day, we instill in our students the ideals of our mission and core values so they can meaningfully and positively impact their communities.

The school’s mission statement reflects its focus on the academic rigor of learning while retaining perspective on the growth and development of the whole child within a nurturing community of classmates, faculty, and parents. The mission statement speaks of “engaging each student in a unique and meaningful way” which is embraced by tailoring learning approaches to the needs of the individual child. The school’s core values of community, empathy, and critical thinking emphasize a shared perspective that learning is a collaborative journey where developmentally appropriate intellectual risk-taking is supported and discovery is celebrated. The focus of GHA’s approach focuses on the young child with an emphasis on the excitement of exploration and the joy of learning.

Gig Harbor Academy is a learning community based upon the mutual respect of all members. The school’s core strength is the positive energy of faculty, students, and parents with the sense that everyone is on a common journey of learning and that every member can make a valuable contribution.

**Curriculum and Instruction**
The preschool program for two, three and four year old students is based on an emergent curriculum or Reggio Emilia-inspired approach which seeks to engage the school’s youngest students as learners by incorporating their interests and passions. While the program covers some formal pre-academic skills, much of the program concentrates on the social and emotional development of young children. Pre-Kindergarten is a full day, five day a week program for four-year olds with a much greater emphasis on academic preparatory skills to enable its graduates to excel in Gig Harbor Academy’s academically challenging Kindergarten through fifth grade program.

Gig Harbor Academy’s curricular arc from kindergarten through fifth grade is currently undergoing extensive cross-level integration and coordination as the result of discussions sparked by the accreditation self-study. At the core, our goal is to provide a student-centered learning approach where our teachers recognize each child’s strengths and challenges, adjusting instruction to meet their individual needs and encourage success. Students from preschool through fifth grade have exposure to specialists in music, art, Spanish, technology and physical education.

Values education is an explicit part of Gig Harbor Academy’s educational mission as the school’s core values of community and stewardship are emphasized. Examples include student maintenance of the school grounds and wetlands, student responsibility for recycling and composting, participation of the entire school in weekly “Colors” assemblies at which achievements are celebrated, partnerships between members of different classes in various projects, and opportunities created by the parent volunteer network’s efforts to involve students of all ages in making the community of Gig Harbor a better place.

Faculty and Staff
The school employs thirty three employees, comprised of full-time and part-time faculty, an administrative staff and a facilities maintenance team. The full-time, year round administrative staff currently consists of a Director of Operations also acting as Interim Head, Director of Admissions and Marketing, a Business Manager. The school recently hired an additional part time administrative support specialist that will also fill a part-time Development Coordinator position to support the Board led Annual Fund, and chair the annual auction. Faculty have depth of experience and exude a high degree of professionalism and dedication while bringing innovation and flexibility to their classrooms and teaching.

Parents
A notable hallmark of the Gig Harbor Academy community is the extraordinary connection and involvement that parents acquire and emulate after enrolling their children. There is a palpable sense of involvement nourished by teacher interaction and communication on an almost daily basis. Parents provide transportation to all field trips and coordinate the tempo and depth of all volunteer opportunities and efforts. The parent volunteer group, School Family Network, coordinates a variety of school events and gatherings, and is in close communication with the administrative staff.

Governance
The Board of Directors is presently composed of current parents. The working relationship between the Head of School and the Board of Directors is a highly collegial and collaborative one with the Board setting strategic goals and giving the Head of School significant independence in operational matters. The school’s financial affairs are managed in a business-like manner and day-to-day operations are managed with attendance to best practices for independent schools. The Board itself is energetic, deeply committed to the school, and maturing in its planning processes and long-term focus.
**Finances**
Gig Harbor Academy has a $1.5 million dollar annual operating budget which includes both the school and childcare activities. The auction and the annual fund produced approximately $140,000 of income for the school in the most recent year with robust parent and faculty participation. Currently the school does not have an endowment and thus is tuition-driven for operating expenses. No recent capital campaigns have been completed, nor is one on the horizon for the next 1-2 years. We do Gig Harbor Academy does have the resources within the community to support more giving with the right vision and leadership for the future of the school.

Efforts to achieve sustained enrollment in the upper grades will be a central task for the next head of Gig Harbor Academy. Additionally, assisting with the ongoing maturation of the annual giving process and auction including, but not limited to, increasing participation percentages for both initiatives is a key focus.

**Challenges and Priorities**
The major immediate challenge for Gig Harbor Academy is maximizing enrollment in the upper grades. Early childhood programs (preschool, prekindergarten and childcare) continue to experience full or near full enrollment each year, with the challenge of retention beyond kindergarten being a recurring issue. The school must optimize its marketing strategies to maintain enrollment in early childhood and use internal marketing and communication to avoid attrition in first through fifth grades. Enrollment sustainability must be an immediate area of attention for the incoming Head of School.

Accreditation by NWAIS is a long-sought marker of quality desired by the Board and the broader school community. Much of the self-study process is currently being addressed by the appropriate constituencies within the school. The final self-study document will be completed and distributed in the fall of 2020. The new Head of School will need to safely navigate the ship to harbor in terms of completing the accreditation process in the timeline currently determined.

Space utilization is at 90 percent or higher, and it is likely that an additional building is required to accommodate programmatic and administrative needs in the future. In particular, administrative and office space is at a premium and is presently inadequate for the functions of the staff. The school lacks any dedicated conference area or meeting space and there are no large indoor areas for physical education or recess activities during inclement weather. Currently, the specialist classes share limited space between two room; with the priority to find dedicated space for the Spanish program.

While there is a strong connection between parents and the school, there are still opportunities to incorporate the many talents within the community to provide additional resources to the school.

Leadership stability is a priority for any organization, and GHA is committed to gaining a head of school who is prepared to commit several years to the continuity of leadership, growth, and development of the school community.
Application logistics and points of contact
Interested candidates should assemble the following documents and send them electronically as a single pdf file to search@gigharboracademy.org

- A cover letter describing the candidate’s interest in and qualifications for being the next Head of Gig Harbor Academy
- A current résumé
- A personal statement which includes the candidate’s philosophy as it relates to the role
- Names and contact information (email addresses and phone numbers) for five references. Please indicate one initial reference to be contacted prior to the interview stage.

All application materials should be received by the committee no later than October 15, 2019. Semifinalists will be notified no later than October 28, 2019 and will be invited to interview late October or early November 2019. Finalists will be invited to campus for a day-long interview during December 2019 with exact dates arranged for mutual convenience.

Please submit any questions or logistics concerns to search@gigharboracademy.org.

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