

HEAD OF SCHOOL SEARCH

AURORA SCHOOL

Oakland, California

auroraschool.org

Start Date: July 2025

aurora
school



**Carney
Sandoe**
& ASSOCIATES

CARNEYSANDOE.COM

Mission Statement

Aurora School's mission is to nurture children's love of learning by cultivating academic excellence, emotional intelligence, and social engagement.

At a Glance



Established
1988



Enrollment
84 (capacity 130)



Total faculty
25



Student-teacher ratio
8:1



Students of color
38%



Financial assistance budget
\$536,996



Faculty with advanced degrees
24%



Campus size
**17,000
square feet**

Grades: K-8
Faculty of color: 21%

Students receiving aid: 31%
Annual operating budget: \$3,717,765



Overview

Aurora School has been a beacon for progressive education in the Bay Area since 1988, providing its students with a safe and inclusive community to learn and grow. Aurora’s work is guided by an enduring commitment to its core values of attending to the whole child, community, collaboration, social justice, intrinsic motivation, deep understanding, active learning, and taking kids seriously. “Kids are respected for who they are and challenged to grow in the kindest way,” reflected one parent. Each value is palpable in the school’s classrooms and across its campus, and parents report being consistently moved by their children’s experiences at the school, noting the ways in which their children have developed confidence, knowledge, and skill. Another parent noted, “My child told me, ‘Before I came to Aurora, I thought I was dumb, now I know who I am and like myself,’ Kids develop a sense of self and soul here.”

Aurora’s longstanding commitment to team teaching and multi-grade classrooms and the dedication, skill, and care of its professional community yields an environment in which a wide range of students feel known as humans and propelled as learners by their teachers and peers. A faculty member reflected, “I appreciate the multi-grade approach—I get to develop sustained relationships with kids and their families for two years.” Social-emotional learning and diversity, equity, and inclusion work are integrated into the curriculum and support building a positive sense of identity, strong peer-to-peer relationships, and a commitment to social justice.

The school’s campus, nestled in Oakland’s Upper Rockridge neighborhood and shared with Holy Names High School, offers a unique blend of diversity and vitality. Perched atop a hill, it provides inspiring views of the Bay. The school actively fosters its ties with the community through experiential education programs, community partnerships, and public events like the [Tinker Faire](#). The facility is a charming and warm space, with spacious classrooms for active learning, studios including a woodshop, performance spaces, and a variety of outdoor areas for learning and play.

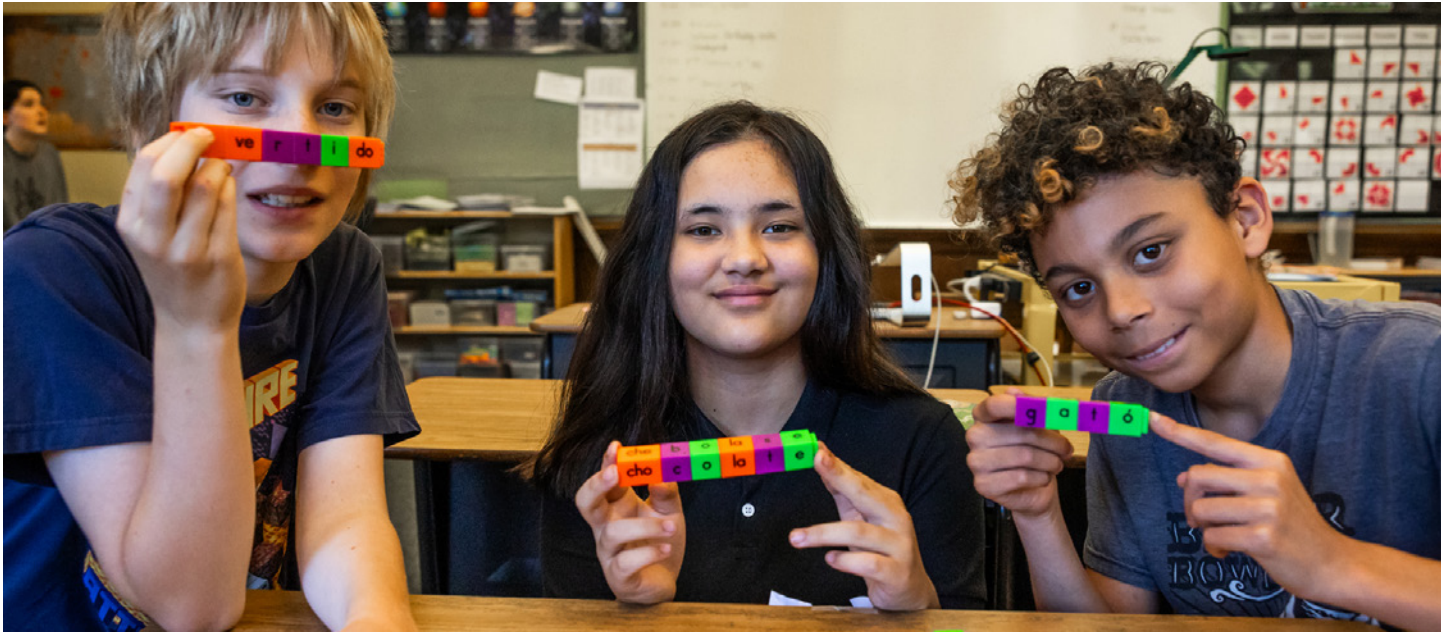


After a lengthy and successful tenure, the current Head of School, Abbie Koss, is stepping down. Aurora seeks a new academic and operational leader to build upon the school’s many strengths and grow the school community in size, composition, and mission-aligned quality. Enrollment growth will be a primary driver of the next Head’s work, balanced with attention to the school’s culture and continuing to diversify the school’s families and professional community. Continuing to refine, build, and articulate the academic program will be additional leadership opportunities. In addition to demonstrating readiness to advance the school in these areas, candidates will need to have an innovative and creative mind and spirit, commitment to progressive education, and an orientation toward building authentic relationships, their team’s capacities, and positive work and school culture.

Opportunities and Challenges

Grow the school while maintaining the connectivity valued by students, families, and professional community members. The Head of School will partner with the Board and members of the school’s leadership team to develop and lead a data-driven plan to grow the school’s enrollment while simultaneously working to preserve the community connections that have long been a hallmark of the school. Current enrollment includes 84 students, and at capacity, the school can support 130 students. In this work, the Head of School will need to be a strong and active partner for the Director of Admission and Enrollment, a public face and voice for the school as it engages with feeder programs and prospective families, and an internal guide and cultivator of school culture.

Bring increased clarity to the school’s identity and raise awareness of the school within a competitive independent school market. Aurora’s unwavering commitment to progressive pedagogy and the power of close, knowing, and trust-filled relationships between teachers and students is and will remain core to the school’s identity. Yet, the competitive market requires the school to clearly market the value of its brand of progressive education not only to those who are looking for it, but also to those who have never considered it. The Head of School will work to build Aurora’s name recognition and reputation through authentic and skilled messaging, marketing, and storytelling.



Empower the ongoing development of the academic program, including the relatively-new Middle School. With an academic program characterized by student-centered and multi-grade classrooms, Aurora’s classrooms fuel student engagement, inquiry, and skill development. The faculty develop their own curriculum based on the needs and interests of their students, and they ably take advantage of the learning moments provided by their students’ curiosities, interests, and interactions. The school boldly chose to add a [Middle School](#) in 2021, expanding its programmatic footprint and providing a distinctive program for its students to continue learning and growing. With project-based learning as a primary pedagogical structure, the Middle School team is developing a compelling Quest-driven program incorporating individual and group projects completed while on campus and through off-campus learning excursions during which they engage in and with Bay Area communities and organizations. The Head of School will support the continued development of both divisions, balancing alignment between the two divisions while providing space for each to have their own identity under the Aurora School umbrella.

Support the continued growth and development of the school’s professional community. Aurora’s professional community is deeply committed to the school’s students and families, their craft, and each other. Conversations with and between them are powerful and fueled by a shared sense of purpose, philosophy, and practice. The new Head of School will continue cultivating a positive and supportive working environment, balancing trust-driven autonomy and accountability, and provide opportunities for the team to stretch, grow, and develop their skills in the classroom.

Further engage the parent and guardian community in support and service of the school. Aurora has relied on its parent and guardian community to support the school with their time, talents, and treasure, and their contributions have proved invaluable. Over time, however, the school has needed to adjust its expectations as family dynamics have shifted and parents have been less able to be regularly involved since the start of the pandemic. The new Head of School will need to work with the Board and other parent leaders to assess and chart new ways to engage the parent community.

Partner with and support a lean leadership team. Each one of Aurora’s [leadership team](#) members either wears multiple hats or works part-time. With an esprit de corps and roll-up-your-sleeves willingness amongst the team, the next Head needs to also model a can-do and all-in spirit with good humor and zest. High degree of collaboration, creativity, and resourcefulness will also serve the next Head well.



Qualifications and Personal Attributes

Aurora School is seeking in its next Head of School an innovative and inspiring educational leader who is eager to make a long-term commitment to its amazing and vibrant community and to engage in the vital and creative work ahead. The next Head of School will offer the following qualifications and qualities:

- Experience leading within a progressive independent school community and the ability to articulate progressive educational philosophy and practice with clarity and depth to a range of audiences.
- A creative and innovative thinker who can envision, lead, and operationalize the work ahead.
- Strong experience growing a school community, whether through direct admission, enrollment management, and/or marketing work or leading those teams as senior-level school leader.
- A history of building strong relationships with teachers and other professional community members, including ideally having experience as a classroom teacher.
- Strong interpersonal skills and the ability to communicate with inspiration, clarity, and decisiveness, both in writing and in person.
- A collaborative leadership style built on approachability, responsiveness, humility, and transparency and experience building and empowering teams by managing the balance between autonomy and accountability.
- Personal and professional commitment to equity and the requisite skills to support critical conversations in the design of ever more inclusive communities.
- Experience recruiting, hiring, supporting, retaining, and leading talented, diverse, and mission-aligned faculty.
- Experience with what effective fundraising/development/advancement functions look like in a school and the ability to tell compelling stories that will motivate donors.
- Good business sense to maximize resources and strengthen the financial state of the school;
- Experience working effectively and collaboratively the school's Board of Directors.
- Experience living and working within a competitive educational market and a progressive urban setting, including, ideally, the Bay Area.

Learn More

Click on the links below to learn more about Aurora School.

[School Website](#)

[Aurora Video Gallery – see Aurora in action!](#)

[Lower School Program](#)

[About Oakland, CA](#)

[Middle School Program](#)



To Apply

Interested and qualified candidates are invited to contact the consultants in confidence. Candidates will ultimately need to submit the following materials as separate PDF documents:

- A cover letter expressing their interest in this particular position;
- A current résumé;
- Two recent writing samples you authored—you may include speeches, blog posts, articles, or letters to community;
- A list of five professional references with name, relationship, phone number, and email address of each (references will not be contacted without the candidate's permission) to:

Jennifer Wong Christensen

Senior Consultant

jennifer.christensen@carneysandoe.com

Chris Boyle

Consultant

chris.boyle@carneysandoe.com

The full-time equivalent salary range for this position is \$180,000-210,000. The starting salary is based upon, but not limited to several factors that include years of experience, education level, and expertise.