

HEAD OF SCHOOL SEARCH

SENECA ACADEMY

Darnestown, Maryland

senecaacademy.org

Start Date: July 2025



**Carney
Sandoe**
& ASSOCIATES

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Mission

Seneca Academy fosters children's natural curiosity and ignites a love of learning through a collaborative, inquiry-based program in a dynamic and welcoming community.

Vision

Through the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (IB PYP), students develop into globally-aware citizens who are compassionate and confident problem-solvers. The academic and social-emotional skills they gain at Seneca Academy prepare them to excel in a rapidly changing world.

At a Glance



Established
1983



Grade levels
Preschool-Grade 5



Enrollment
145



Total faculty and staff
33



Student-faculty ratio
8:1



Campus size
6.1 acres



Annual operating budget
\$2.4M



Financial aid awarded
\$304,660



Students receiving aid
30.5%



Students of color
58%



Faculty of color
22%



Faculty with advanced degrees
36.8%



Overview

A determination to preserve the wonder of childhood. The International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program (IB PYP) providing the inquiry-based frame. A building and campus that promote curiosity and exploration. Designed at every level with children in mind, Seneca Academy offers a remarkable setting for young people to learn and grow. Founded in 1983 as a preschool, Seneca Academy now enrolls 145 students through fifth grade on a six-acre campus—a National Wildlife Certified Schoolyard Habitat—in Darnestown, MD, about 20 miles northwest of Washington, DC. This vibrant learning community, which describes itself as a village in which children and teachers know each other by name across grade levels, now seeks its fourth Head of School, effective July 1, 2025.

An IB PYP World School, Seneca Academy strives to develop curious, thoughtful, knowledgeable, and confident learners who are coming to know and care for themselves and each other, their communities, and their wider world through the inquiry-based, experiential program. The next Head of School will find a dedicated faculty and staff, an engaged community, and a strong Board of Trustees intent on supporting the ongoing maturity of the school. The Board is poised for a new strategic planning cycle once the new Head has settled into the role, envisioning a partnership that will enable Seneca Academy to become even more robustly the school it aspires to be while building on the current plan's pillars of community, program, and sustainability.

The Circle School was established as a preschool in 1983 and added Kindergarten two years later. The program's elementary school component, Seneca Academy, began in 1998, and the Board consolidated the names about a decade later. Once extending through eighth grade, Seneca Academy has more recently eliminated the middle school grades in favor of its current preschool to fifth grade configuration. Seneca Academy was authorized as an IB PYP World School in 2012 and continues to build on that strong foundation, which "aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring young people who help create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect."



This Head of School position should be particularly attractive for an exceptional educator who recognizes the many strengths of a small-school setting, including the small class sizes, the low student-teacher ratios, and the close relationships that result. A warm, accessible, and collaborative educator who is prepared to build on those strengths, create new strengths, and continue to develop the vibrant and challenging academic program and administrative structures and processes that will shape its maturity as a school will thrive at Seneca Academy. There is important work to be done in this welcoming, engaging, child-centered place—a place that provides the time and space for children to wonder and explore—and a faculty and staff, Board of Trustees, and community ready to do that work.

Opportunities and Challenges

A deep belief in children’s natural curiosity and sense of wonder and a determination to build on those qualities animate Seneca Academy as educators strive to ignite a lifelong love of learning through a challenging, inquiry-based program. Members of the community—faculty and staff, parents, and Trustees—recognize in the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program an exceptional opportunity to pursue those goals in the preschool and elementary school years. That widespread support for the IB PYP program and the skills of inquiry, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity it fosters, along with the social-emotional health and well-being of the child, provides a sturdy foundation for Seneca Academy.

At the same time, Seneca Academy exists within a competitive educational landscape, one that offers families public, parochial, and other independent school options, especially in the elementary school years. Bringing greater stability and predictability to enrollment beyond the preschool presents a challenge Seneca Academy will continue to face as it works to achieve a financially sustainable model. Firmly establishing a program that is sized appropriately for its mission, its physical plant, and its place in the wider community will promote just such a model.

Seneca Academy has renewed efforts to provide the kind of administrative staffing necessary to strengthen support for students, faculty and staff, and the instructional program more broadly. In the 2023-2024 school year, the further articulation of administrative roles, specifically those of Educational Director and Director of Student Learning and Support, has already yielded significant benefits. The ongoing consideration of a counselor position aims to continue that process.



Specific opportunities include:

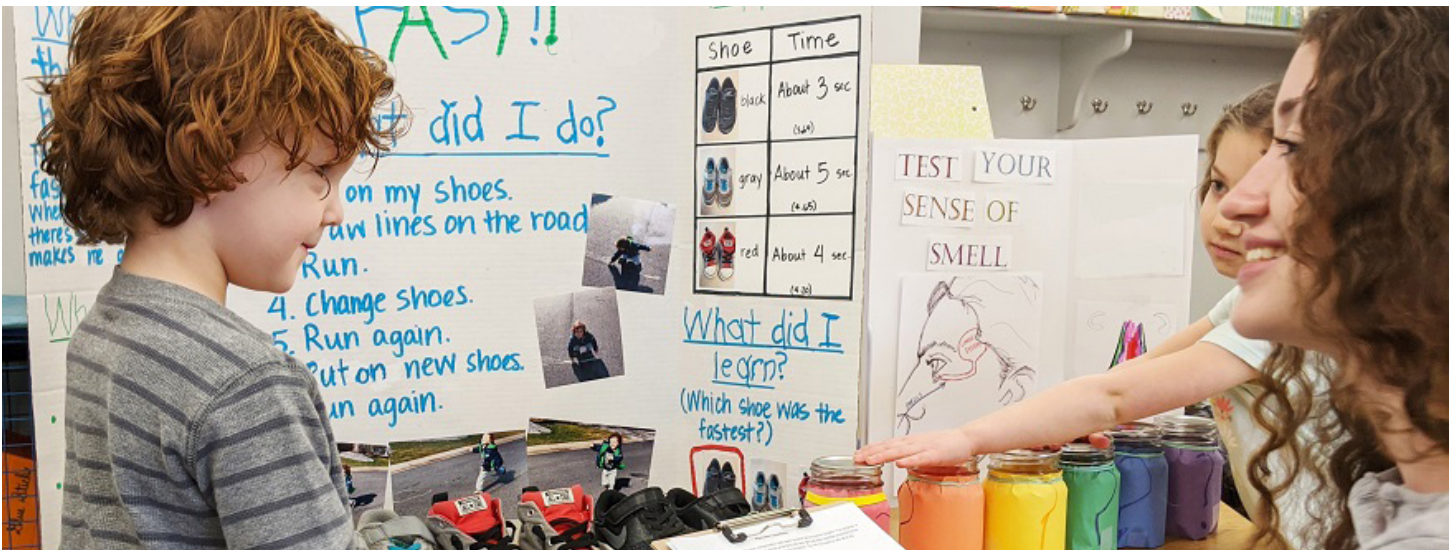
- Entering into, and continuing to nurture, a school community—conceptualized and intentionally nourished as a village—characterized by warmth and welcome, with the child at its center;
- Recognizing the value of a racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically diverse student body as an essential characteristic of this village of learners;
- Becoming a leader and a learner in a dynamic small-school setting that thrives on strong face-to-face and shoulder-to-shoulder relationships;
- Building on the remarkable dedication, commitment, and support of the faculty, staff, and administration; parents; and wider Seneca Academy community;
- Maintaining and enriching a program that values a challenging, developmentally appropriate curriculum side-by-side with the social-emotional health and well-being of the child;
- Stewarding the ongoing development of the IB PYP, which provides the inquiry-based framework and global perspective that shape the curriculum;
- Joining a forward-looking Board of Trustees in a robust strategic partnership.

Specific challenges include:

- Increasing student retention beyond the preschool years and strengthening and smoothing out mission-aligned enrollment across grade levels;
- Continuing to attract and retain exceptional faculty and staff, providing them with competitive salaries and benefits and offering multiple opportunities to grow professionally;
- Ensuring that teachers have the training and resources necessary to do this important work well, given the increasing student neurodiversity in independent schools;
- Identifying and implementing the administrative structures, processes, and staffing that will enable Seneca Academy to continue to mature as an institution;
- Securing Seneca Academy’s long-term financial health and well-being through a culture of philanthropy, creative revenue-enhancing strategies, and ongoing physical plant improvements.

Qualifications and Personal Attributes

Seneca Academy seeks a talented educator with wide-ranging experience in preschool and elementary school settings, including significant administrative leadership, strategic thinking and planning, building and nurturing a strong faculty and staff, expertise in curriculum and instruction, and increasing financial sustainability through stable enrollment and sound management of resources.



A successful candidate will pair that professional expertise with a warm, accessible, and collaborative spirit, one rooted in a deep interest in and knowledge of child development in the preschool and elementary years and the determination to work with faculty and staff and families in support of the healthy cognitive and social-emotional growth of the young people in the school's care. Seneca Academy will welcome an educator who can engage and inspire the community, communicate clearly and effectively with internal and external audiences, and continue to intentionally nourish the village of learners that it has become.

While certification or background in the International Baccalaureate Primary Years Program is not a requirement for the Head of School position, the Search Committee will view IB PYP and inquiry-based learning experience as a valuable feature of a candidate's profile.

The following qualifications and qualities will be important for the next Head of School:

- Knowledge of current research in education and child development and the ability to combine that understanding with an appreciation of Seneca Academy's mission, vision, and values;
- A love for children and appreciation of their developmental differences, their strengths and growing edges alike;
- Strong interpersonal skills and the ability to communicate with confidence, inspiration, clarity, and decisiveness, both orally and in writing;
- A collaborative leadership style built on approachability, responsiveness, humility, and transparency, all in support of building effective teams and an effective community;
- Experience recruiting, hiring, supporting, retaining, and leading a talented, diverse, and mission-aligned faculty and encouraging instructional innovation;
- A textured understanding of the forces that promote institutional sustainability, including strategic financial planning, enrollment management, and philanthropic giving;
- The ability to articulate vision and strategy and the tactical skills necessary to deftly manage the systems and processes necessary to implement strategy;
- Personal and professional commitment to the important work of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging and the requisite skills to support critical conversations in the design of an ever more inclusive culture, curriculum, and program;
- A dynamic and engaging presence, visible and active in all areas of school life;
- The ability to work effectively with the Board of Trustees in articulating and achieving Seneca Academy's strategic objectives.

Learn More

Click on the links below to learn more about Seneca Academy.

[School Website](#)

[Virtual Tour](#)

[School History](#)

[About Darnestown, Maryland](#)

[Strategic Plan](#)



To Apply

Interested and qualified candidates are invited to contact the consultant 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;
- A completed Candidate Questionnaire (to be provided by consultant);
- 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:

Peter Barrett

Senior Consultant

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