Virginia Chance School Head of School Search

4200 Lime Kiln Lane | Louisville, Kentucky
Applications Due: July 1, 2020
Independent Day School: Co-ed
For July 1, 2021

Virginia Chance At A Glance

Founded: 1958

Type: Co-ed Independent Day School

Grades:
Age 2—Grade 5

Enrollment: 242 students

Average Class Size:
14 Students

Tuition:
Full Day Ranges From $6,175—$16,255

Annual Operating Budget:
$3.2 million

Financial Aid: $372,565

Financial Aid awarded to 21% of student body

Affiliations: Independent School Association of the Central States, National Association for the Education of Young Children, Progressive Education Network

OVERVIEW OF THE SCHOOL

The Head of School search at Virginia Chance School offers an exciting opportunity to lead a school that is both distinctive and successful. Chance, as it is commonly known, has those attributes that mark a healthy school. Most evidently, teachers and students exude a joy about what they accomplish together. In addition, parents are highly supportive and deeply engaged. Full enrollment provides financial stability. The Board of Trustees understands its appropriate governance role. Thoughtful planning will lead to a smooth leadership transition.

The truly unique aspects of Chance, however, are ones that cannot be readily measured, as they are qualitative, not quantitative. One finds here extraordinarily loving and trusting relationships between faculty, students and parents. The school buildings and outdoor spaces provide a home-like sense of warmth and welcoming. The interwoven fabric of what students learn in and out of the classroom gives them voice and nurtures how they see and feel and understand the world. It is not hyperbole when the people at Chance describe the learning there as “magical.”

Initially founded in 1958 as a preschool, Virginia Chance School holds an outstanding reputation in the Louisville area as both a preschool and elementary school, with its enrollment of 242 students almost equally divided between the two levels. Deeply committed to the principles of progressive education, the School’s focus on developing capable young people permeates all aspects of school life. The needs of the whole child are addressed through Chance’s curriculum, its belief in play-based learning, the attention to social-emotional growth, its environmental program and the common language used by faculty at all age levels.

Current Head of School Debbie Houston will retire at the end of the 2019-2020 academic year, and an Interim Head of School has been appointed for 2020-2021. The Interim appointee will not be a candidate for the permanent Head of School position. Thanks in large part to Ms. Houston's leadership, Chance currently enjoys full enrollment at all levels. The Board of Trustees has engaged Educators' Collaborative to assist with the search for Chance's next Head. The initial search schedule outlined a completion of the search early in the fall of 2020.

MISSION & VISION

Mission

Virginia Chance School is an independent school that serves children ages 2 through 5th grade. As a diverse community of learners, we commit to excellence and respect through a joyful, challenging and progressive program. With an intentional whole-child approach to education, each individual reaches his/her cognitive, social, emotional, moral and physical potential. Virginia Chance students graduate as confident, inquisitive learners prepared to engage productively with their world.

Vision

To ignite and instill confidence and skills to excel in a global and changing environment.

PROGRAM

Virginia Chance School proudly stands behind its identity as a school that offers a progressive education. While many other schools nationally may utilize some tenets of this philosophy, Chance is "all in" regarding progressive principles and approaches. Working together, Chance teachers, staff, and parents:



- Focus on the whole child
- Create a caring, learning community
- Encourage learning using intrinsic instead of extrinsic motivators
- Provide active, hands-on, experiential learning opportunities
- Embrace and celebrate individuality
- Recognize and honor diversity and perspectives and experiences in our community
- Develop critical thinking, problem-solving and higher-order thinking skills



- Focus on collaboration and cooperation
- Treat each child with dignity and respect
- Focus on process over product
- Provide developmentally appropriate learning experiences
- Give children a voice
- Provide compassion and social justice learning
- Have an integrated curriculum
- Provide authentic assessment
- Value outside play and environmental learning

While the program and the daily schedule provide a structure for teachers, they are not otherwise bound by a strict lock-step curricular sequencing. Teachers are entrusted to provide developmentally appropriate learning experiences that will best enable children to focus on process, to learn by doing and to learn cooperatively. As children help to guide instruction through theme learning and by capitalizing on their interests, they grow in self-confidence.

Especially noteworthy is that important elements of Chance's curriculum take place outdoors. These involve play-based learning on the school's playground, instruction about science in its greenhouse and elsewhere and a well-integrated environmental program.

The Chance website (www.chanceschool.org) provides an excellent overview of its curriculum and the philosophy that is its foundation.

COMMUNITY

Virginia Chance School is located in the Glenview neighborhood of Louisville and draws students from the city and surrounding communities. The city is Kentucky's largest with a metropolitan area population of approximately 1.3 million people and a highly favorable cost of living.

The offices, classrooms and other indoor learning spaces of the school are in two connected buildings that have the welcoming feel of a large home. Abutting the school is a large wooded playground area, and Chance also owns twenty-six acres of field space diagonally across Lime Kiln Lane.

Chance's enrollment during the 2019-20 academic year included 242 students with 114 in the Preschool and 128 in the Elementary School. Twenty-one percent of students receive financial aid. The faculty and staff is comprised of fifty-two women and men. Such a highly favorable teacher-student ratio is a by-product of Chance's commitment to have two full-time teachers in every classroom, which provides a high degree of individual attention to students. Student retention at Chance has been approximately 85% in recent years, which is quite impressive for a school with such a significant portion of preschool enrollment.

GOVERNANCE

The Board of Trustees is well respected in the school community and seen as an effective ally with faculty and staff. It provides Chance with prudent financial stewardship and forward thinking about mission, program, facilities and personnel.

The Board currently includes nineteen members, with the Head of School as an ex-officio member without voting privileges. Trustees are elected to three-year terms and may serve no more than two consecutive terms. By-Laws require that at least half of the Board must be parents of current or former students. Board meetings are held nine times per year, typically monthly except for March, July and December. Like many effective Boards, Chance's relies heavily on the work of its committees, which are:

- Buildings, Grounds and Technology
- Development
- Executive
- Finance
- Marketing and Admissions
- Personnel
- Program Advisory
- Trustees and Governance



Among the major responsibilities currently facing the Board are preparation for a new strategic plan and a capital campaign. Significant progress has been made in completing the objectives of the most recent strategic plan (enacted in 2014) in its three pillar areas:

- Educational Excellence
- The Student/family Experience
- Community Engagement and Partnership

The Board expects to complete the current plan and to adopt a new one prior to the tenure of the new permanent head. Understandably, the implications of the current Covid-19 pandemic may have an effect on the launching of the capital campaign and other significant initiatives.

FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT

The financial picture at Virginia Chance School is sound, although continual attention will be needed by the Board of Trustees and the Head of School in the years ahead. The operating budget for the 2020 fiscal year is approximately $3.2 million. As noted previously, twenty-one percent of students receive financial aid awards totaling $372,565. Tuition is the primary source of revenue with five-day tuitions ranging from $6,175 for two-year olds to $16,255 for Fifth Grade. Other sources of revenue include the Summer Under The Trees Summer Camp, the Challenge for Chance Annual Fund and the Auction. As the primary spokesperson for the school, Chance's next Head will be expected to continue leading fundraising efforts.

A major financial consideration for the school is assuring a high quality faculty while maintaining the favorable faculty-student ratio. With high trust placed in the faculty and with supportive parents and administrators, Chance offers a wonderful teaching environment. Nevertheless, the budgetary implications of two teachers per classroom challenge Chance to provide salaries and benefits that compare favorably with area competition.



FUTURE LEADERSHIP OF THE SCHOOL

The Board of Trustees of Virginia Chance School is conducting a national and international search to identify its next Head of School. To that end, and to assist them in clarifying the opportunities and challenges the school will face, Doug Jennings and John Mackenzie of Educators' Collaborative received input from a broad cross section of the school community during an on-campus visit and by means of an electronic survey. Those interviewed and surveyed included faculty, staff, parents, trustees and alumni. Based on this input, the following represents a summary of Chance's strengths, the challenges it faces in the coming years and the qualities and traits the trustees and the school seek in the next Head of School.



Strengths of Virginia Chance School

Virginia Chance School is a warm and welcoming community that is well regarded in the Louisville educational landscape. The school has many attributes that should attract candidates and that position the school well for success in the years ahead.

The following strengths were most frequently mentioned:

- Belief in a truly progressive educational approach that is research-based, and deeply rooted in the values of play, outdoor experiences, arts, differentiation and hands-on learning.
- A faculty and staff that is impressively dedicated to its work and, as one, buys into the vision, mission and philosophy of the school.
- The commitment to developing capable young people is one shared by the entire community. This involves deep attention to the social-emotional needs of children as well as the use of common language and behavioral practices with students of all ages.
- The classroom experience at Chance is commonly described as "magical." This is the result of a combination of factors:
  - A school culture of respect, kindness, warmth and caring.
  - A trust bestowed upon teachers enabling them to be innovative and flexible in adapting to the interests of students.
  - Small class sizes with two teachers in each classroom.
  - Authentic relationships across all constituencies, where adults and children feel heard.

- Its strong reputation historically in Louisville. Chance values its traditions and takes pride in being a good neighbor.
- A unique physical plant that blends indoors and outdoors and feels more like a large home than an institutional structure, with student art and project work adorning every classroom and hallway.
- A well-integrated environmental program that takes full advantage of the natural setting of the campus.
- An engaged and supportive board of trustees focused on the long-term success of the school.
- A healthy financial picture that includes a balanced budget, a modest endowment and a vibrant summer camp program.



Challenges and Opportunities

The responsibilities of the Head of School are many and varied. With them will come the inevitable challenges that are common to many independent schools as well as some that are unique to Virginia Chance School at this point in its history.

The following will likely be the primary focus areas for the school in the next three to five years:

- While enjoying the benefits of full enrollment, address how Chance meets the counterbalancing challenges related to space utilization, class sizes and appropriate staffing.
- Find the best balance of keeping tuition at a competitively low level and simultaneously supporting a favorable teacher-student ratio and offering competitive salaries and benefits.
- Successfully complete the newly launched capital campaign intended to improve facilities and increase endowment.
- Carefully assess the demands on teachers and staff. New initiatives, even while well intended, have increased teacher workload without a corresponding reduction in other responsibilities.
- Address internal protocols and communication while maintaining the “small school” feel of Chance.
- Advance the school’s commitment to diversity in recruiting faculty and students and in assuring that programs for children and adults are fully inclusive.

- Effectively market a Chance education, not just as a preschool but also as a strong and vibrant elementary program. While maintaining its institutional humility, Chance should not hesitate to trumpet the values of progressive education and the impressive work the school does.
- Thoughtfully consider different opportunities regarding Chance's growth and expansion, including the possible extension beyond Grade 5.
- Maintain the long-standing relationship of being a good neighbor and environmental steward in the local community.
- As is the case with all aspects of society, Chance will be finding thoughtful and innovative ways to deal with recovery from the coronavirus pandemic. The next Head of School will be instrumental in implementing and refining these measures.

Qualities and Characteristics

The successful candidate who best aligns with Chance's needs now and into its future will be one who matches with the following descriptors.

- Leads with an "all-in" and hands-on approach but can also delegate responsibilities and share decision-making with others.
- Is passionate about the values of progressive education and can articulate its advantages in the development of young people.
- Embraces the culture and programs of Chance and also seeks to continually enhance both at a pace that is respectful of the capacity for change.
- Communicates in an effective and timely manner, both orally and in writing.
- Has demonstrated experience in an educational setting and the ability to provide forward looking instructional leadership.
- Builds relationships in a manner that is authentic, caring, approachable and mutually respectful.
- Is an engaged listener, who appreciates a variety of perspectives and is yet willing to make difficult decisions.
- Has the ability to see the big picture needs of the school and can guide the community towards them.
- Is willing to be Chance's public face and voice at school events as well as in the broader Louisville community.



SUMMARY OF THE SEARCH PROCESS

Candidates interested in this position are asked to submit the materials listed below in one single Word document or PDF:

- Educators' Collaborative Candidate Summary Sheet and Disclosure Form (contact Doug Jennings or John Mackenzie for those documents)
- Letter of Interest addressed to the Search Committee
- Current résumé
- Statement of Educational Leadership Philosophy
- A list of five or more references with contact information (including phone numbers and email addresses)
- Up to three letters of reference (optional)
- Please address any inquiries or expressions of interest to:

Doug Jennings, Partner, Educators' Collaborative, LLC
djennings@educatorscollaborative.com - 317-319-2936

OR

John Mackenzie, Partner, Educators' Collaborative, LLC
jmackenzie@educatorscollaborative.com - 614-207-1006

Virginia Chance School is an equal opportunity employer.

