



ALEXANDER DAWSON SCHOOL
FOUNDED 1970

POSITION STATEMENT
Head of School Search

The Alexander Dawson School

Lafayette, Colorado
Start Date: July 1, 2026



Head of School

Position Statement

The Place

Imagine a 107-acre campus covered with flowering trees and buildings from the same palette that complement one another, all with breathtaking views of the Front Range of the Rockies. That's the Alexander Dawson School, founded in 1970 as a boys' boarding school, now a coed K-12-day school. Situated in one of the most glorious locations in the country, the Dawson campus turns gold in the fall, white in the winter, and green in the spring, a four-season wonder unrivaled by many independent schools.

Campus buildings are specific in their uses: for example, there's a Fifth-Grade building, an Innovation Center, two gyms, and an Arts Center whose student works festoon the entire campus. Students glide from class to class, building to building, seemingly always cheerful and polite while also purposeful and academic in their orientation. Classrooms are light-filled and spacious and the dining commons is a wonderful building with glass walls and high ceilings, making it an ideal gathering space for students and teachers. Indeed, the most cited reason among the students for loving school is their closeness to faculty; they love their teachers!

About a half-hour from Denver, Dawson sits in Lafayette, a suburb of Boulder, so with a great university at hand and all the attractions of one of America's great cities nearby, Dawson is a very appealing place for students and teachers. And the two—students and teachers—feed off each other and their mutual enthusiasm. Time and again, visitors hear how close the students are with their teachers. A simple question – “Is there someone on staff you could go to if you had a problem?” – elicits uniform responses of “Yes. Many.”



The Community

Boulder County has exploded in recent years. Hi-tech firms discovered the climate, the people, the ambiance, and the quality of life brought thousands of engineers and top executives to the area. For the most part, these are highly educated men and women who demand good schools for their children. As a result, the Boulder County public schools are considered to be very good, providing stiff competition for Dawson, requiring it to be innovative, forward-thinking, and possessing a “value added” component that justifies the cost of going there as opposed to the free public schools. The people who send their children to Dawson seek a school that is suitably demanding in its academic program, expansive in its extra-curricular offerings, competitive in its sports program, and bustling in the visual and performing arts. They expect their school to be forward-thinking and challenging; complacency here is the enemy, and when parents think they spot it, they're not bashful about voicing their thoughts.



Head of School

Position Statement

There is a very pleasant quality to the parent body that is hard to put into words—relaxed in dress and manner, they are keen in their insistence on good pedagogy. They want teachers who challenge their students and who keep up their own professional development. For their part, Dawson’s teachers love their students and the life of the campus, even while seeking more opportunities to advance professionally.

Dawson’s students are bright, polite, interesting young people. They’re talented, creative, smart, and just plain fun—good kids, in other words. It’s unfortunate; some don’t stay through their high school years. The allure of Friday Night Lights and a bigger social stage to play on siphons away about a third of the high school students each year, effectively de-populating the Upper School and diminishing opportunities for all who stay for the full high school experience.

Faculty at Dawson like each other—not always the case in independent schools! —and characterize themselves as “creative and forward-looking.” They see themselves as brimming with untapped potential. The library is symbolic of the teachers: warm, inviting, and comfortable, it is clearly student-friendly space.

Dawson is united in nurturing a culture of belonging that embraces diversity of thought, experiences, identity and passion. Everyone on campus is focused on belonging as a major goal of the school. There are affinity groups (No Place For Hate and GSA, for example) and an Affinity Day in the Middle School. A DEIB Committee that includes faculty, administrators, staff, and students has the responsibility to oversee a series of annual events and take seriously their mission to nurture a culture that ensures the comfort of all.





Head of School

Position Statement

Mission, Vision, Virtues

MISSION

Dawson School is dedicated to excellence of mind, body, and character. We prepare students, through challenging and relevant learning, to become creative, resilient problem-solvers who bring their best to the world.

VISION

Dawson graduates achieve their individual potential, savor life, and meet the challenges of the world.

VIRTUES

- Respect
- Compassion
- Courage
- Integrity

Dawson's Mission and Vision are consistent with the School's founding and will animate the school for years to come.

and "Love of the Land" and coupled with Mr. Henderson's belief that "there is no such thing as a bad kid," he created a boarding program for boys from the juvenile court system. In 1980, CJR became the Alexander Dawson School. Changing the school's name was the start of a larger plan to shift to the college preparatory school that it is today.

The Program

Dawson's curriculum is academically strong and relevant, preserving the best of traditional education while infusing emerging, in-demand skills. The school equips students with essential academic habits and the social-emotional skills for success both in and beyond the classroom. Dawson provides an experiential, hands-on education because direct experience and reflection are the most effective ways to learn and keep students engaged.

Winterim is Dawson's signature program. An annual experience, it provides K-12 students the opportunity to dive deeply into a special topic, culture, or activity. Examples of Winterim offerings include the following: Guitar Making, Marine Biology and SCUBA certification in the Bahamas, Walk Across Japan, Fly Fishing in the Boulder Watershed, Snowshoe Adventure, and Fabulous Fibers and Fabrics.

Experiential education tied to curriculum includes field trips beginning in the 2nd grade when student sleeps with the sharks in the Denver Aquarium, in the fifth grade when students study forest ecology, snow science, and general earth science, they spend four days and three nights at the Keystone Science School. Closer to home, the campus includes a climbing wall and an ambitious ropes course.

A recent survey of school families revealed interest in expanding offerings in Business and Entrepreneurship, Robotics, Instrumental Music, and Internships with local universities and businesses as well as introducing A.I. and Engineering courses.

History

Girard Brown (G.B.) Henderson was a philanthropist and entrepreneur who was fascinated by technology, education, and innovation. He created the Alexander Dawson Foundation in 1957 to give students access to the highest quality of education in the United States. He founded and named the Foundation in honor of his father, and dedicated it to children's education. His goal was to inspire children not just to learn, but to be responsible citizens leading purposeful lives, countering the lack of inspiration he experienced throughout his educational journey.

The Colorado Junior Republic (CJR) was opened in 1970 and innovation and experiential education were the traits that would most define what was to be. The guiding principles for CJR were "Nothing Without Labor"



Head of School

Position Statement

Dawson's impressive curriculum guides show each area of the curriculum with course outlines, resources, measurable objectives, and assessments. Teachers feel a sense of autonomy in developing their courses, while five learning specialists across the three divisions support students and work with teachers to enable teachers to differentiate instruction and to meet the needs of their students.

College counseling is an integral and important part of the junior and senior years, and Dawson graduates matriculate to some of the leading universities in the country. The College Profile shows the mid-range of SAT Math scores of 585-700, Verbal 600-695, while the ACT composite for the mid-50% was 25-31. Honors and AP classes stretch Dawson's top students and help solidify their attractiveness to top institutions of higher education.

The Upper School Director characterizes the Dawson experience as centered on passion, agency, and relevance. "Our job is to open doors for students so they can realize their own agency in a world they care about and know what they do is important."

Athletics are important at Dawson, where State champion teams have excelled in girls' volleyball and soccer, as well as boys' tennis and lacrosse. In addition, there are opportunities for students to take Cyclocross, coed tennis in Middle School, and in the spring canoeing and kayaking in addition to more predictable sports.

The visual and performing arts at Dawson are stunning. The visual Arts department has its own building and from the littlest student to the most advanced, the work they produce in that studio is amazing. Ceramics, woodworking, graphic design, painting and drawing—all these classes and others like them are heavily subscribed.

Similarly, by the time students leave the Lower School, they can read music, play the recorder, are familiar with the Kodaly and Orff approaches to music education, and have experience playing a variety of instruments. They can sight-sing, identify polyphonic music, read two-part vocal scores, and identify melodic patterns.

The School has invested heavily into its facilities in recent years, culminating in a \$9.6 million Dining Commons and a \$1.7 million Learning Commons, both placed into service in 2018, and a \$14.9 million Innovation Center, placed into service in 2020. Generous donations from families and the Foundation made these projects possible.

The Innovation Center provides students with the opportunity to pursue game design, robotics, wearables, and the ability to work with 3-D printers, wood and metal fabrication as they produce items of real interest and use.



Head of School

Position Statement



Governance

The Dawson School is one of two schools owned by the Alexander Dawson Foundation. The Foundation is based in Las Vegas, Nevada. In addition to the Dawson School, the Foundation also owns the Alexander Dawson School at Rainbow Mountain, a Pre-K to Grade 8 day-school, in Las Vegas. Furthering its education mission, the Foundation also operates the Dawson Summer Initiative program, a comprehensive educational summer program for select Colorado public school students and funds Dawson College Bound, a rigorous college-readiness program preparing high-achieving low-income students to become first-generation college students.

The Head of each school operates with a high degree of independence and reports to their respective school boards, which boards are made up of the Foundation trustees together with parent trustees. There is generally a loose rein, but the Foundation Board hires the Head of each school and maintains a watchful eye on their budgets, mindful of their historical and annual multi-million-dollar commitments to each campus.

Finance

Dawson School has its own internal CFO who works closely with the Head and the campus administration. The Foundation pays the debt service for each school, which debt service financed the construction of each school. The Foundation's annual commitment to Dawson amounts to approximately \$3,500 per student that is not passed on to the cost of tuition. The Foundation has committed in excess of \$10 million over the past 10 years for new construction and added security features at the School. Currently, the school operates on a break-even budget of around \$18.8 million.

Recently, parents have expressed fundraising fatigue. The Foundation, recognizing such fatigue and desiring to improve culture and remove any perception of donor favoritism, will pilot a program to eliminate fundraising solicitations at each school by donating the equivalent of the net proceeds of the School's historical annual fund and event fundraising. While such support is critical, and the Foundation's commitment is unique, the school still must watch its budget with great care. Much of this owes to the vagaries of enrollment, which has trended downward in recent years.



Head of School

Position Statement

Challenges and Opportunities

The next Head of Dawson School will not be bored, for sure. Keeping in mind that all challenges are also opportunities, first on the list is unifying all the things that makes Dawson great to create a clear vision to prepare students for the future. He/she should be media-savvy because that's how people learn about a school these days. The Head must provide an inspiring vision and create a program that will retain students and families at the school through their senior year. Being visible, becoming a part of the broader community, focusing on admissions and attrition, adding a dash of charisma or panache to the daily life of the school will have a salutary effect. Unique among independent schools, there is no expectation that the Head of School be a fundraiser. The Foundation wants to remove that onus from the Head by increasing its commitment and support in the future.

Being versed in K-12 independent schools will be a major plus for the next Head. Understanding curriculum and pedagogy will lead to the creation of a collaborative vision for Dawson's future. Not only should the new Head have such a vision, but it will also need to be carefully articulated. People are willing to give their all for Dawson, they just need to know it's going to lead somewhere, so another requirement of the new Head is to be something of a Pied Piper.

There is an opportunity for the next Head, working with the faculty, to define academic excellence, develop a curriculum that's innovative and relevant, encourage student engagement, and provide more experiential, hands-on, real-world immersive experience for the students. There is an expressed desire by the faculty to focus on aligning the three divisions, to have a creative vision for the Innovation Center, and to increase interdisciplinary learning opportunities for students. An enormous opportunity also exists to collaborate with the Las Vegas sister school.

To be that, the next Head must have an accessible nature, a warm personality, a compelling speaking style, and genuine humility that leads to shared buy-in and responsibility; together the faculty and staff can do great things with the Head - this is not the school for a one-person show. Teamwork will build success.

At the moment, creating a clear communication line between the community and Head must be high on the list of early tasks for the new Head. Additionally, that individual must be the school's head cheerleader, know the students and hang out with them at lunch or at games, be a constant source of encouragement for both teachers and students, and have a sense of humor that will brighten any day.

The salary range for this position is \$350,000 - \$400,000. Benefits are competitive.

Application Process

The deadline for applications is **August 15, 2025**, and all applications must be made through the RG175 website: <https://rg175.com/candidate/signup>. Applicants' questions can be sent to Debbie Reed (dereed2014@gmail.com) and Tom Hudnut (tom@tomhudnut.com).

