

POSITION STATEMENT

Blue Oak School

NAPA, CALIFORNIA



HEAD OF SCHOOL SEARCH
START DATE: JULY 1, 2026





OVERVIEW

Blue Oak School is a TK-8 independent school with approximately 190 students and is in the heart of Napa, California. From its founding 24 years ago, Blue Oak teachers have taken a child-centered approach to teaching and are eager to stoke their students' curiosity. The result, in each classroom and specialty, is a curriculum that is engaging and meaningful. With a stunning, recently completed, modern Middle School building, and its charming original Lower School site, Blue Oak owns resources that set it up for the next quarter century of growth and development. Blue Oak seeks a Head of School who will embrace the core principles and mission of the school and leverage its location and resources to help shape the path forward.

Blue Oak is currently engaged in a two-year strategic planning process that has actively and intentionally invited every school constituent (past and present) to take a comprehensive and robust approach to its future planning. The strategic plan is scheduled to be approved and presented to the community in February 2026. Under the current Head of School's leadership, Blue Oak made progress against each of the major recommendations on its last accreditation report. The next self-study report is due December 15, 2027.

Over the last 25 years, the town of Napa has grown from a sleepy farming and retirement community to a dynamic center for winemaking, art and culinary crafts. With its extraordinary climate (plenty of daytime sunshine and cool nights), Napa draws families who seek a small and welcoming community and relish their proximity to nature and culture. The area's heart is in agriculture and hospitality; from its earliest days, the Napa Valley has attracted folks who seek to cultivate the remarkably rich soil and celebrate the bounty together.

Nestled in a quiet neighborhood in downtown Napa, Blue Oak attracts families from across the Napa and Sonoma Valleys, some of whom fled more densely populated cities of the Bay Area during the pandemic and decided to stay in the relative peace of Napa. As the only independent school in the area, many families are introduced to the benefits of independent education upon their first campus visit. Blue Oak's main competition comes from parochial and public schools, and while its students thrive and excel in high school and beyond, clearly conveying the school's progressive principles, rich program, and the unique value of being the area's only accredited independent school remains a central communications challenge.

Blue Oak's commitment to progressive education is in its DNA. While the greater Bay Area is home to schools that place students at the heart and seek to strengthen critical inquiry, creativity, thoughtful analysis and internal motivation and drive, Blue Oak is the only school in the North Bay with a progressive heart. The school has not wavered from this commitment.

In its next chapter, Blue Oak aims to deepen its ties to the Napa community, elevate awareness of its distinctive philosophy, and strengthen a sustainable business model, rightly positioning itself to be celebrated as part of the Bay Area's world-class educational landscape.

MISSION

Inquisitive Minds, Inclusive Hearts, Purposeful Lives

Blue Oak School is a dynamic community of students, educators, and families. We provide an exceptional learning experience that cultivates the skills, habits, confidence, and sense of belonging needed to shape the future in a diverse and ever-changing world.

Blue Oak School offers a challenging and stimulating education to children of diverse backgrounds and interests. Balancing structure with choice and the requirements of the group with the gifts of the individual, the school holds itself to the highest standards of responsible educational innovation, so that students develop the skills and habits of learning that endure.

COMMUNITY

Students at Blue Oak are warm, joyful and engaged with the myriad of activities and opportunities that the school presents. It's clear that every student is "seen and supported" at Blue Oak, and students delight in the close relationships they have with teachers and coaches. When asked what they would change about Blue Oak, one sincerely responded:



"Honestly, there is nothing I would change. This is a great place to be!"
--5th grade student

Among various efforts to create an inclusive community, the school does not "nickel and dime" families, choosing to have tuition include all field trips (including overnights and its prized "Breakaway" program), sports, technology and other costs. Additionally, from its earliest years, the school has attracted and retained a strong representation of Latino families using its "Nuestro Futuro" scholarship program to support and message its commitment to the community. This program has been re-launched this year as the "Foundations to Futures" program with the aim of strengthening its message that a rich learning environment is grounded in a broadly diverse school population.

The faculty of Blue Oak consists of 30 teachers, teaching assistants and specialists. Additionally, there are 10 support staff. All embrace the "whole child" ethos of the school, and the progressive pedagogy. Teachers enjoy autonomy and seek to strengthen the scope and sequence of the curriculum, and collaborate around key principles and policies with innovation and creativity.

While professional development funds have been limited, Blue Oak hopes to significantly increase the opportunities that teachers have to develop their craft and deepen their knowledge of “best practices” for progressive educators. The recent adoption of the “Awakening Wisdom” program has helped the teaching community clarify shared values, intentionally build its culture, and articulate practices such as developing agendas for discussion, creating an effective decision-making matrix, and establishing agreements for collaboration and protocols for conflict resolution. The school was originally part of the Progressive Education Network (PEN) and will likely rejoin now that the consuming building project has been completed.

The administrative team includes the Head of School, the Assistant Head of School for Enrollment Management, CFO, Director of Advancement, and the Community Programs Director. In addition, there are Coordinators at both the Lower and Middle School levels and a Senior Curriculum Coordinator. Thoughtful, but challenging, staffing adjustments have resulted in a streamlined administrative team. Collaboration and shared responsibility are essential to ensure the success of community events, key initiatives, and communication.

“Our kids are comfortable with themselves and confident that their opinions matter.”
--Blue Oak Teacher

Blue Oak has an enthusiastic and “all in” Parents’ Association whose primary goals are to create community within the parent body and to support parent education. Parent leaders help plan annual fundraising events, coordinate chaperones for school trips, welcome new families, and collaborate with school personnel to ensure effective communication across all aspects of school life, from carpooling to the health and wellness of students and the traditions that foster a sense of belonging at the school.

The school is governed by a dedicated group of 16 trustees who, in close partnership with the Head of School, guide Blue Oak’s strategic direction. Most trustees are also parents at the school, and care is taken to “onboard” trustees such that they understand the importance of strategic (versus operational) leadership. In recent years, the board has worked closely with the Head of School to fund and complete a major building project and develop a balanced, pragmatic budget. This process has involved the challenge of downsizing the staff; the Head of School has managed this process with support from the board, focusing on well-managed admissions projections, carefully crafted spending goals, and development goals that are both aspirational and pragmatic. In partnership with the rest of the community, the Board will proudly launch its next Strategic Plan this winter. The plan will provide a compass for the incoming Head. The Blue Oak community looks forward to the momentum that a sparkling new building, an inclusive strategic planning process and a dynamic new leader will bring to the school.



“Blue Oak School is essential to maintaining a diversity of school choice in Napa Valley and our bright, thoughtful and compassionate graduates are key to the success of the Napa Valley. As Trustees, we are deeply committed to these beliefs.”
--Blue Oak Trustee

The first eighth-grade class graduated from Blue Oak in 2007, and there are great stories about loyal and enthusiastic alumni of the school. Students have attended high schools in the Bay Area, across the country and around the world (with students attending boarding schools such as Cate, Thatcher, the International School of Geneva, Phillips Exeter, St. Paul's, Shanghai International School, Stevenson and Putney) and matriculated at colleges across the country. For more information about the community, see [here](#).

ADMISSIONS, FINANCES AND FUNDRAISING

Blue Oak School has entered an exciting new chapter, grounded in strategic enrollment management, prudent financial oversight and investment, and a growing culture of philanthropy. All of this underscores the Board's commitment to long-term sustainability and mission alignment.

The main entry points for enrollment at Blue Oak are Transitional Kindergarten, Kindergarten, and 6th grade, though new students join most grades each year as space allows. Beyond weekly tours and open houses, the school engages the Napa community through its Farmers Market presence, summer camps, enrichment programs, and partnerships with local organizations. For the 2025–26 academic year, 45% of students self-identify as students of color, and the school

dedicates significant resources annually to tuition assistance. 38% of BOS families receive tuition assistance, with awards ranging from 15% to 95% of tuition costs. Looking ahead, the enrollment strategy centers on growing the Middle School. The new downtown campus enables growth from one to two sections per grade, accommodating up to 20 students each, effectively doubling enrollment while preserving the close-knit culture that defines Blue Oak.

Philanthropy plays a central role in sustaining and advancing the school. Families and friends contribute nearly \$150,000 annually through the Acorn Fund, while Auction Weekend has raised more than \$500,000 in recent years for operations and tuition assistance. The launch of the Foundations to Futures program has renewed the School's commitment to access, and the \$19 million Building Dreams Campaign has already reshaped the campus with a new Middle School, gymnasium, and instructional kitchen. Blue Oak's current fiscal focus is debt reduction, bolstered by the Founders' matching grant opportunity for this fiscal year.

Looking ahead, the next Head of School will inherit a community energized by recent fiscal and philanthropic accomplishments and ready to move forward with clarity and ambition. Priorities will include maintaining balanced budgets, reducing reliance on annual giving, growing enrollment and tuition revenue, and inspiring philanthropy through aligned admissions, marketing, and fundraising strategies. With campus expansion complete, the school is poised to deepen engagement and secure long-term sustainability through its new strategic plan.



PROGRAM

Through the culture and community of the school, teachers nurture the development of character and foster confidence, creativity, flexibility and curiosity in each child. Students, in turn, encourage each other to learn.

Relationships among freedom, responsibility, community and environment are explored through studies that engage students as stewards in service to the school, the region, and the world.

The Blue Oak academic program is marked by a remarkably thorough list of guiding principles. These driving principles were developed early in the school's history.

"At Blue Oak, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication aren't trends, they're the foundation of how we teach." --Blue Oak Teacher



The Blue Oak educational program is marked by adherence to seven driving principles:

- Children learn by doing
- Curriculum is child-centered
- Curriculum builds from a strong foundation
- True understanding is emphasized
- The learning process is honored
- The elements/disciplines of the curriculum are integrated with one another
- Inquiry is at the heart of the curriculum

Blue Oak teachers strive to bring “curiosity, confidence and the joy of discovery” to life and to emphasize the importance of building a sense of purpose in each child. They understand concepts such as the “zone of proximal development” and the researched elements of motivation and drive, translating them both for parents eager to “learn about learning” and for the students in their classrooms, whether those children are in transitional kindergarten or eighth grade.

The Blue Oak curriculum explores all core competencies through its progressive lens and with the goal of maximizing experiential learning and the delivery of a learning experience that speaks to each child. Although Blue Oak refers to its art, music, library and information technology, physical education and mindfulness curriculum as “specialist subjects,” these classes are not treated as secondary or negotiable. A Blue Oak education is intentionally well-rounded. Blue Oak also takes pride in its Spanish program taught in TK through 8th grade. The 8th-grade class is equivalent to a high school Spanish I course. The Spanish program is a differentiator in the Napa education market and acknowledges the deep connection to the Hispanic community that makes up a third of the Napa County population.

To learn more about the academic program at the school, see [here](#).



STRENGTHS, OPPORTUNITIES/CHALLENGES AND ATTRIBUTES

Blue Oak is a warm, engaged community of students, families, faculty, and staff. The joy-filled culture in which childhood is protected is a treasured quality of the school. The next leader at Blue Oak must preserve the school's fervent belief in allowing "kids to be kids." As one community member shared, "The school has so much potential...it's so close to being exceptional."

Blue Oak's mission-aligned faculty has a healthy mix of veteran and newer educators, and the commitment to individualized teaching and learning extends from students to teachers.

Strengths

- Warm, engaged and proud community of families, faculty, and staff
- Joyful, happy and hospitable students who love going to school
- Strong commitment to individualizing teaching and learning for students
- Progressive-inspired, inquiry-driven curriculum grounded in the school's seven Core Principles
- Rich interdisciplinary projects and robust enrichment/auxiliary offerings
- Three consecutive years of clean audits and balanced budgets

- Exceptional Lower School building and a newly constructed Middle School building (opened 2024) directly across the street, featuring light-filled classrooms with dedicated science, art, and music facilities, along with an expansive gymnasium
- Outdoor spaces throughout the Lower and Middle School buildings that facilitate learning, play and socializing
- Successful alumni in high school and beyond
- Dynamically developing auxiliary and community programs

Opportunities and Challenges

- Effectively articulate the school's value proposition and progressive identity
- Increase enrollment (over time, the school seeks to add between 20 and 40 new students, focused on middle school, where the school increases from one section per grade level to two)
- Strengthen the professional development program and continue building shared cultural norms
- Refine curriculum to honor autonomy, build excellence, and increase alignment across grade levels and divisions as well as create consistent adherence with the school's seven Core Principles
- Continue to improve communication and collaboration between faculty and administration
- Support and retain high-quality faculty while thoughtfully anticipating and managing transitions of veteran staff
- Strategic and disciplined focus on continued balanced budgets, thoughtful staffing ratios and debt management
- Broaden and continue to strengthen the culture of philanthropy
- Continue integrating programmatic innovation into the new Middle School space
- Build broader visibility and partnerships within the Napa community

The Ideal Head of School

- Warm, approachable, and committed to building authentic relationships with all stakeholders
- An inspiring and visible presence on campus and beyond, with a genuine commitment to connecting with and contributing to the vibrancy of the Napa community
- Visionary educator with an understanding of progressive education and its most effective application today
- Emotionally intelligent and courageous, with the ability to navigate tough decisions with clarity and care
- A highly skilled and compelling communicator and storyteller who can steward Blue Oak's educational mission and impact
- Skilled in enrollment management, marketing, and community engagement
- Committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion with the capacity to serve a wide range of learners
- Collaborative leader who supports faculty agency and professional growth

SALARY RANGE AND BENEFITS

The anticipated salary range for this role is \$240K - \$265K. Compensation slightly above this range may be considered for candidates with exceptional experience. Blue Oak School offers a comprehensive benefits package including a retirement plan with employer contribution, comprehensive insurance benefits, and support for professional growth.

Blue Oak School does not discriminate on the basis of age, gender, race, color, religion, national or ethnic origin, sexual or gender identity in its hiring processes and actively promotes the principles and practices of diversity throughout the school community.



TO APPLY

Candidates interested in applying to become Blue Oak's next Head of School may apply online at:

<https://rg175/candidate/signup>. The application should include:

- Letter of interest
- Resume
- Writing sample (can be an article, educational philosophy, or personal statement)
- List of five references

The deadline for receipt of full application materials is **October 17, 2025** for a start date of **July 1, 2026**. Candidates are always encouraged to submit their materials before the final deadline.

For an initial inquiry or to nominate a potential candidate for this exciting leadership position, please contact one of the following RG175 consultants:
Catherine Hunter: **cshunter33@gmail.com**
Steve Morris: **steve.morris@rg175.com**