

POSITION STATEMENT

The Girls' Middle School

PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA



DIRECTOR OF ADVANCEMENT SEARCH

START DATE: AS SOON AS POSSIBLE UNTIL JULY 1, 2026



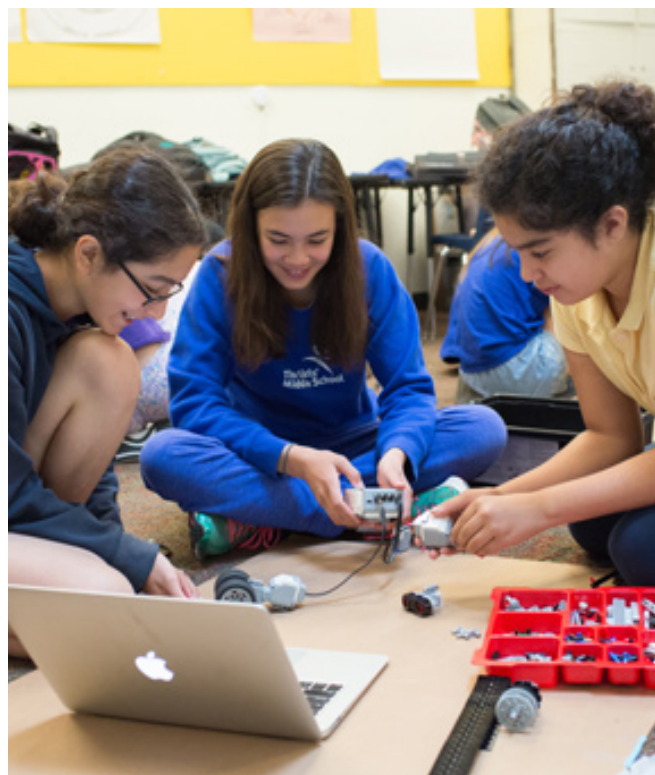
THE OPPORTUNITY

An intimate, mission-driven school dedicated exclusively to the education of adolescent girls, The Girls' Middle School (GMS) in Palo Alto, California, offers a joyful, rigorous, and student-centered learning environment for grades 6–8. GMS helps learners discover academic confidence, intellectual curiosity, and leadership through an intentionally designed program that balances strong academics, project-based and experiential learning, social-emotional skill building, and a whole-child approach. Rooted in a belief that the middle school years are formative for identity, purpose, and voice, GMS prepares girls to engage the world with curiosity, conviction, and compassion.

Guided by a devoted and talented Head of School, Christine Fairless, and an engaged Board of Trustees, GMS seeks a strategic, collaborative, and entrepreneurial Director of Advancement to lead and grow a comprehensive advancement program that will expand philanthropic participation, deepen alumni and family engagement, and secure the long-term resources necessary to sustain and strengthen the School's mission. This is an exceptional opportunity for a passionate advancement leader who thrives in a close-knit school community, who is energized by relationship-building, and who is eager to design and implement bold, contemporary fundraising strategies that align with GMS's vision for educating girls to lead with confidence.

MISSION, SCHOOL CULTURE, AND PROGRAM

GMS is committed to educating girls at a pivotal stage of development—helping students build academic resiliency, leadership capacity, and a strong sense of self. The School's curriculum is designed to be intellectually challenging while



responsive to the social-emotional needs of adolescents. Teachers design interdisciplinary, inquiry-based units that encourage collaboration, critical thinking, and creative expression. Small classes and a low student-to-teacher ratio ensure that each girl is known and supported by adults who are committed to nurturing both academic growth and personal development.

Life at GMS celebrates curiosity, kindness, and resilience. Students are encouraged to take risks, reflect on setbacks, and support one another's growth. The School's culture is intentionally inclusive and supportive: advisory programs, restorative practices, and multifaceted leadership opportunities weave together to create a community where girls practice agency, empathy, and civic-mindedness. Traditions and community gatherings create strong bonds among students, families, and faculty—forming a place where faculty and staff take pride in mentoring adolescents through a transformative stage of life.



ACADEMICS AND DISTINCTIVE PROGRAMS

GMS offers a rigorous, developmentally attuned academic program emphasizing collaborative learning and appropriate risk taking across math, science, humanities, computer science, and art classes. Project-based learning and experiential education are hallmarks of the program, providing students with opportunities to engage in sustained inquiry, community-based projects, and real-world problem solving. A focus on executive function, study skills, and metacognitive strategies assists students in becoming independent, self-directed learners.

Distinctive program elements include:

- **Computer Science** curriculum that includes programming skills, computational thinking and applied engineering opportunities.
- Serious engagement with a broad range of **Arts and Media** is central to the GMS approach to education. In these courses, students learn to be comfortable with pushing their limits, become creative problem solvers, and think critically about the visual, musical, and dynamic cultures of which they are both consumers and producers.
- **Intersession** which offers a path to expand student learning beyond the classroom. Twice a year, academic classes are put on hold for a full week while girls are encouraged to try activities that are either entirely new to them or that they want to explore deeply. The girls create, experience, make, and engage. Past offerings have included community service, fiction writing, LED jewelry making, rowing, gardening, cooking with chocolate, songwriting, surfing, documentary photography, food blogging, and debate.
- In 7th Grade, students participate in a year-long **Entrepreneurial Program** that challenges teams of students to design a novel physical product that they manufacture and market to both investors and customers. During the year, each team launches a small company with seed funding from the School. The course apex is a celebratory night during which students present their companies to a panel of respected Silicon Valley investors and sell their products to assembled community members.
- In **lieu of traditional letter grades**, girls at GMS receive extensive and qualitative feedback along with individualized attention from faculty to set annual goals, reflect on progress and challenges, and identify opportunities for future growth.

ARTS, ATHLETICS, AND WELLNESS

Arts and creativity are central to life at GMS. Visual art, music, theater, and media arts give students varied avenues to express themselves, build confidence, and take intellectual risks. Performance and exhibition opportunities celebrate student work and encourage cross-grade collaboration.

Athletics and movement programs emphasize skill development, teamwork, and lifelong wellness. Participation in physical education, interscholastic sports, and outdoor education promotes physical health, resilience, and a balanced approach to adolescent development. Wellness is integrated across the curriculum through mindfulness practices, counseling supports, and proactive approaches to social-emotional learning. GMS is proud to have an all-girls skateboarding program and contest for its students!

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND BELONGING

GMS is committed to fostering a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community where every girl belongs and thrives. The School views diversity broadly and intentionally cultivates an environment in which multiple perspectives are honored, differences are sources of strength, and students learn to navigate a complex, interconnected world with empathy and cultural competency. The next Director of Advancement will partner closely with school leadership to ensure that fundraising, outreach, and stewardship practices reflect GMS's commitment to access, belonging, and opportunity.

HISTORY AND LIVING IN PALO ALTO

Founded in 1998 by Kathleen Bennett, GMS was established to provide a school that would nurture and empower a diverse group of girls during their critical adolescent years. Today, the school is still guided by the vision Bennett articulated in her original prospectus for GMS, and it remains at the heart of the School's mission:

The Girls' Middle School educates girls at a crucial time in life. We create an inclusive environment where academic growth is nourished. A GMS girl discovers her strengths and expresses her voice while respecting the contributions of others.

The founding faculty and staff first taught classes in September 1998 in the school's original location in Mountain View, California, to a pioneering sixth grade class of 35 girls. In 2011, GMS moved to a new home in Palo Alto. Currently, GMS enrolls approximately 200 girls from more than 45 elementary schools around the San Francisco Bay Area. The new facility that will serve as the School's permanent campus allows for growth of the student body in the future.



Located in the heart of Silicon Valley, GMS benefits from the intellectual, cultural, and philanthropic resources of Palo Alto and the broader Bay Area. The city offers an exceptional quality of life—outstanding public libraries and museums, vibrant community nonprofits, abundant outdoor recreation, and proximity to leading universities and innovative industries. Families and faculty drawn to Palo Alto value academic excellence, community engagement, and opportunities for collaboration with local organizations. GMS reflects this environment through partnerships and initiatives that connect students to meaningful local learning opportunities.

FAST FACTS

Founded: 1998

Location: Palo Alto, CA, 30 miles from San Francisco, CA

Who We Are: Independent, all girls' middle day school serving grades 6–8

Enrollment: Approximately 200 students

Student to Faculty Ratio: 7:1

Diversity: 65% students of color

Tuition and Tuition Assistance: \$50,128; 28% of students receive tuition assistance



HEAD OF SCHOOL AND BOARD OF TRUSTEES

A proud Bay area native, Christine Fairless joined GMS as the Head of School in July 2022. A longtime middle school educator, Christine taught math and science in both private and public schools for over 15 years. Following that experience, she pursued her master's degree in Learning, Design, and Technology in the School of Education at Stanford University. A dedicated educator, Christine is focused on providing opportunities that allow students to explore their identities and find their passions. As a former college basketball player, Christine is an avid Golden State Valkyries fan!

Led by Chair Archana Upadhyay, the Board of Trustees is entrusted with establishing policies and plans consistent with the mission of GMS. Composed of 22 voting members, the Board focuses on ensuring fiscal sustainability and long-term strategic planning. The Board is highly supportive, with 100% participation in the GMS Fund as well as The Bennett Scholars Program.

Parent to a GMS graduate, Archana is especially appreciative of how GMS teaches girls to advocate for themselves and provides a safe environment to take risks. Archana has a background in Molecular Oncology Research and Project Management. She has also been on several school Foundation Boards over the years and in addition to serving as the current chair of the GMS Board, she is also President of the Mountain View Los Altos High School Foundation.



PHILANTHROPIC AND FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

As an independent middle school committed to educational excellence and access, GMS relies on philanthropic support to fund scholarships, curricular innovation, faculty professional development, and capital priorities. The school operates with a balanced mix of tuition revenue and charitable contributions, and leadership has articulated ambitions to expand scholarship support, strengthen the endowment, and fully renovate a recently purchased property that will directly enhance the student experience.

Currently, GMS is in the midst of a \$30 million capital campaign, having raised \$15.4 million to date, the largest fundraising effort in the school's history. The campaign's impact will be transformative, providing long-term sustainability through purchased property and a full-scale renovation that will serve as the school's permanent campus. The GMS Fund, the school's annual giving program, represents 10% of the operating budget. Last year, the Fund raised \$700,000, but there is significant room to increase both support and participation. The Bennett Scholars Program, supporting high-achieving students who are from under-resourced elementary schools or represent the first person in their families to be college-bound, is a unique initiative that provides both full tuition and wrap-around support to 10 girls per year.

The school raises approximately \$1.6 million annually to make this transformative experience possible for eligible students. The endowment is valued at \$6 million - increasing this critical strategic asset is a priority.

The Director of Advancement will join GMS at a pivotal moment—one in which there is both enthusiasm and clear opportunity to make a lasting impact through the successful and timely completion of the school's ambitious and bold campaign to ensure a forever home for GMS. Additionally, the Director will broaden the donor base, cultivate major and planned gifts, grow annual giving, and develop alumni and family engagement strategies that translate into long-term philanthropic partnership. This role offers a rare chance to design and implement best practices, build a resilient advancement operation, and tell compelling stories about how investing in girls' education changes trajectories.



KEY RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE DIRECTOR OF ADVANCEMENT

Reporting to the Head of School and serving as a key partner to the senior leadership team and Board of Trustees, the Director of Advancement (DoA) will lead and professionalize all aspects of the school's fundraising and constituent engagement work. The DoA will build genuine and meaningful relationships both internally and externally; have a proven track record of fundraising success; demonstrate a deep understanding and appreciation for the school's mission and aspirations; approach the work with a sense of possibility, tenacity, and professionalism; and will build, inspire and invest in a high-performing team to foster long-term stability and growth.

Those who are confident, creative, and organized are encouraged to apply. Ideal candidates will be forward-thinking, able to establish clear priorities, action-oriented but collaborative, a gifted problem-solver and highly relational, stay abreast of trends and best practices, and last, but not least, committed to girls' education!

Responsibilities include:

Strategic Leadership

- Develop and execute a comprehensive advancement plan aligned with the School's mission, strategic priorities, and long-term sustainability goals.
- Serve as a visible and collaborative member of the School's leadership team, contributing to institutional strategy, culture, and decision-making.
- Build, manage, and mentor a high-performing advancement team, including responsibility for hiring, professional development, performance management, and annual budgeting for the office.

- Strengthen systems, policies, and workflows that support efficient prospect management, gift processing, stewardship, and reporting.

Fundraising and Engagement

- Lead and grow the annual fund to increase participation across parents, alumni, trustees, faculty/staff, and friends.
- Identify, cultivate, solicit, and steward major and principal gift prospects in partnership with the Head of School, trustees, and volunteer leaders; carry a personal portfolio of high-value prospects.
- Plan, oversee, and successfully execute capital and endowment campaigns, working collaboratively with campaign volunteers and external counsel as appropriate.
- Design and implement alumni and parent engagement programs that activate communities to support the School financially and advance the mission of the school.
- Partner with Admissions and Program Offices to ensure coherent, compelling storytelling across channels that reinforces fundraising priorities and stewardship.
- Ensure best practices in donor recognition, stewardship, data integrity, and compliance with gift policies.

Board and Volunteer Partnership

- Support and prepare trustees and volunteer leaders to be effective ambassadors and fundraisers, including briefing materials, cultivation strategies, and solicitation support.
- Staff relevant Board committees and volunteer leadership groups, fostering cohesion and accountability in advancement efforts



LEADERSHIP QUALITIES, PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES, AND QUALIFICATIONS

Leadership Qualities and Personal Attributes

- Deep commitment to the mission of educating adolescent girls and an enthusiasm for middle-school education.
- High emotional intelligence, excellent interpersonal skills, and the ability to build authentic relationships across constituencies.
- A collaborative, visible, and approachable leadership style coupled with the capacity to inspire and manage change.
- Strategic thinker who is operationally savvy—able to set priorities, marshal resources, and execute plans with attention to measurement and continuous improvement.
- A pragmatic, hands-on approach: willing to engage in day-to-day fundraising activities while building long-term systems and capacity.
- Exceptional communicator and storyteller, able to translate programmatic impact into compelling philanthropic opportunities.
- A sincere commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging and the capacity to integrate those principles into fundraising and engagement strategies.

Qualifications

- Minimum of 7–10 years of progressive fundraising experience, preferably in independent schools, higher education, or nonprofit organizations; experience with middle- or independent-school constituencies highly valued.
- Demonstrated success managing a portfolio of major gift prospects and cultivating a broad base of donor support.
- Experience leading teams and building efficient advancement operations, including familiarity with CRM systems and data-driven advancement practices.
- Strong organizational, project management, and financial acumen; experience preparing compelling proposals, stewardship plans, and reports.
- Bachelor's degree required; an advanced degree or relevant professional certification preferred.
- Comfort serving as a public ambassador for the School and a willingness to participate in evening and weekend community events.

Salary Range

\$185,000 - \$205,000

TO APPLY

GMS is partnering with RG175 to identify exceptional candidates. Interested applicants should submit a cover letter that clearly articulates their interest in and fit for this role, a current résumé or CV, and a list of professional references (references will not be contacted without candidate permission).

Please submit materials to the [RG175 website](#). For inquiries about the search or to nominate a candidate, please contact: James E. Pattison: jpattison@rg175.com

The Girls' Middle School seeks candidates who will embrace and advance its commitment to creating an equitable and inclusive learning community. Individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences are strongly encouraged to apply.