

POSITION STATEMENT

Cary Academy

CARY, NORTH CAROLINA



HEAD OF SCHOOL SEARCH

START DATE: JULY 1, 2027





OVERVIEW

For nearly three decades, Cary Academy (CA) has charted a bold course, uniting academic rigor with authentic self-discovery, purpose-driven and experiential learning, and a deep commitment to equity and well-being. Today, this forward-thinking learning community stands as a leading independent secondary school, renowned for its academic excellence, innovative teaching, and an inclusive culture that values intellectual curiosity and character equally. CA's future-ready approach to education prepares students not only to succeed in college and career but to live meaningful, fulfilling lives of purpose and impact.

As the school embarks on the search for its next Head of School, it does so from a position of exceptional strength: financially stable, mission-aligned, and sustained by deep community engagement. Guided by a courageous, adaptive strategic plan, CA is poised to build on its strong foundation, continuing to raise the bar for academic excellence while advancing

innovation, affordability, and access, and well-being in the years ahead. With strong leadership, a vibrant community, and a clear sense of direction, CA offers an extraordinary opportunity for its next Head of School to steward a thriving institution into its next chapter of innovation and growth.

CA was founded in 1997 through the vision and generosity of Ann and Dr. James Goodnight and Ginger and John Sall, co-founders of SAS. Their goal was to create a new model of secondary liberal arts education that leveraged technology and innovation to enhance learning and human connection.

From the outset, CA embraced an ethos of exploration—inviting students and teachers alike to ask big questions, take risks, and imagine new possibilities for learning. Over twenty-nine years, it has evolved from an audacious idea into a thriving, mission-driven institution known for forward-looking pedagogy, high academic standards, and a dynamic culture of innovation.

In 2018, the school founded the Center for Community Engagement (CCE), which coordinates experiential learning, service, entrepreneurship, expeditionary learning, leadership, and equity programming that link student interests to meaningful and ethical community engagement and impact.

CA is home to a vibrant community of learners and educators who embody its founding principles, mission, and values. CA's student body reflects the intellectual dynamism and diversity of the Research Triangle region. The school currently enrolls 799 students in grades 6–12 (305 in the Middle School, 494 in the Upper School). With 62% of students and 42% of faculty and staff identifying as people of color and many identifying as members of the LGBTQIA+ community, CA is one of the South's most diverse independent schools.



Through a robust financial aid program—awarding \$3.1 million in need-based aid annually—the school ensures that students from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds can access and fully participate in the CA experience. The newly launched Charger Promise offers free tuition and additional “discovery stipends” to qualified families with a household income of \$100k or less, positioning CA as a leader in advancing affordability in independent education.

CA students are distinguished by their exceptional academic achievement and intellectual curiosity. In 2025, 80% of CA students earned an AP exam score of 4 or 5 (and 95% earned a 3 or above), and 29% were recognized by the National Merit Scholarship Program—testaments to the school’s academic rigor, expert teaching, and culture of excellence.

Students’ exceptional performance across these areas reflects CA’s academic distinction; graduates routinely earn admission to highly selective institutions, including Harvard, MIT, Stanford, Duke, and UNC-Chapel Hill, and are awarded competitive merit scholarships at a diverse range of prestigious institutions.

CA’s mission commitment to discovery, innovation, collaboration, and excellence shapes every aspect of school life. The school’s core values—respect, integrity, compassion, and equity—define interactions among students, faculty and staff, and families. The result is an intentionally balanced culture, one that is academically ambitious yet personally supportive and compassionate, which fosters connection over competition and is deeply rooted in shared values.

A strong sense of community infuses daily life, from the symbolic Handshake Ceremony that begins the year to bi-annual Quadchella concerts on the Quad, spirited Charger Cup and Spirit Cup competitions, and student-led Community Days.

Faculty and staff prioritize relationships, ensuring that every student is known and supported. The school’s culture of care is reinforced through its Student Support Services division, which provides wraparound academic support and social-emotional learning programming responsive to the evolving needs of the community.

PROGRAM

Learning at CA is a profoundly personal journey toward purpose and self-discovery. The flexible, inquiry-driven curriculum emphasizes depth, reflection, and agency, empowering each learner to design pathways that align with their interests and aspirations. Academic excellence is at the heart of this approach, rooted in academic rigor, high expectations, inspired teaching, and a culture that encourages curiosity and intellectual risk-taking.

In the Middle School, learning is exploratory and interdisciplinary. In addition to foundational academics, students explore interests and develop vital skills—critical thinking, digital citizenship, upstanding character, empathy, leadership, and self-advocacy—that prepare them to become thoughtful and engaged community members and to assume greater agency in the Upper School.

The Upper School offers 47 Advanced (ADV) courses—rigorous, college-level classes that replace the traditional AP model, allowing for more flexibility and depth while maintaining equivalent challenge—alongside electives, independent studies, and interdisciplinary projects that invite deep exploration.

Coordinated through the CCE, experiential and expeditionary learning are central to this philosophy. Learning opportunities like X Days, Discovery Term, and the Work Experience Program connect classroom inquiry and personal interests to real-world purpose and engagement. Global learning experiences encourage all students to step outside their comfort zones and broaden their perspectives, cultivating resilience, adaptability, and purpose-readiness for life beyond CA.

The arts are a vital part of the CA experience, promoting creative expression and exploration for every student. Offerings include fine arts, digital arts, video production, theater, movement, band, chorus, and orchestra. Class-based, divisional, and all-school performances and showcases throughout the year give students a chance to share their crafts with the broader community.

Athletics at CA emphasize skill development, growth, teamwork, and resilience. With 55 teams across 16 sports (including competitive and club play opportunities) and 77% student participation, every Charger can compete and contribute. Student-athletes develop leadership, sportsmanship, and community pride—qualities that mirror the school's academic ethos. Chargers regularly top conference and state championship podiums; many go on to play at the collegiate level.





Students lead and learn through more than 100 clubs and organizations reflecting academic, cultural, artistic, and service-based interests. Dedicated time within the school day underscores CA's belief that discovery and purpose-driven learning happen beyond the classroom. Alongside interest-based groups, students engage in co-curricular programs and competitive teams such as the nationally recognized Speech and Debate program—named a School of Outstanding Distinction at the 2025 National Tournament—and the 2025 national champion U.S. Association for Young Physicists Tournament team. The eight-month Leadership Academy develops student leaders through workshops, mentorship, and community projects, equipping them to guide with empathy, integrity, and purpose. Together, these opportunities reinforce CA's holistic approach to academic excellence—developing minds, purpose, and leadership in concert.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion have been core commitments since CA's founding. In 2024, the school reaffirmed this through its Universal Declaration—an unequivocal commitment to justice, equity, and compassion and a rejection of all forms of hate and bigotry. The strategic plan builds on this foundation, centering wellness, equity, and connection as essential to educational excellence.

Equity is intentionally woven into curriculum and culture, with programs such as Dialogue Across Difference, affinity and alliance groups, and Community Days fostering empathy and connection. Employees participate in regular professional development opportunities focused on equity, while faculty and staff affinity groups—such as White Employees for Racial Justice, Employees of Color, and LGBTQIA+—offer opportunities to deepen understanding and collaborate on issues of equity.

ADMINISTRATION, GOVERNANCE, AND FACULTY

Under Head of School Dr. Mike Ehrhardt, who has served since 2013, CA has flourished academically and institutionally. During his tenure, the school has launched transformative academic initiatives, expanded financial accessibility, strengthened wellness and equity programs, completed significant campus enhancements, and developed the 2025–2030 Strategic Plan. His planned retirement in June 2027 comes at a time of institutional strength, continuity, and optimism.

CA's Board of Directors provides visionary, mission-driven leadership and strategic oversight. Meeting four times each year, the Board operates at the strategic level, ensuring long-term institutional health while empowering school leadership to execute daily management. Board members demonstrate deep commitment to the school's mission and values and were critically engaged in shaping the 2025–2030 Strategic Plan. Standing committees—including Executive, Finance, Governance

and Nominating, Advancement, Audit, and Equity and Inclusion—reflect the Board’s stewardship of CA’s financial strength, integrity, and equity commitments. Together, these committees sustain thoughtful governance practices, fiscal responsibility, and a culture of accountability and innovation.

A debt-free institution with a substantial endowment and a record of successful, year-after-year fundraising, CA ensures that tuition dollars directly support student programs and experiences.

Enrollment remains strong, reflecting sustained high demand from mission-fit families across the Triangle. A school of choice, admissions are highly selective, with a holistic process that identifies mission-fit candidates who will thrive in a collaborative and academically challenging environment.

Employees reflect CA’s deep commitment to lifelong learning. Highly qualified—80% holding advanced degrees—faculty are known for expertise, innovation, and authentic relationships with students. Empowered to design curriculum aligned with their passions, faculty collaborate across disciplines, pilot new ideas, and model the curiosity and courage they seek to inspire. Supported by robust professional development and grants, they thrive in a culture of trust, creativity, and possibility that makes CA an exceptional place to teach and learn.

In 2025, the CA community adopted its most recent strategic plan to guide the school through 2030. Developed through a highly collaborative, year-long process that engaged students, faculty, staff, parents, alumni, and board members, the plan reflects a shared commitment to academic excellence, programmatic innovation, community, wellness, and equity. Designed as a compass rather than a fixed map, it articulates three strategic bearings:

1. Curiosity to Impact – reimagining learning with purpose and possibility.
2. Thrive Together – building a connected community rooted in wellness and equity.
3. Opportunity and Empowerment – expanding access, affordability, and professional growth.

Together, these priorities chart a course for CA’s next chapter, continuing a tradition of academic excellence and cultivating a learning community where purpose thrives, and opportunity is accessible to all.

<https://compass.caryacademy.org/>



CAMPUS AND FACILITIES

A meticulous 65-acre campus reflects CA's mission and values—modern, collaborative, and purpose-built for exploration. Facilities include recently renovated Middle and Upper School buildings; the 22,000-square-foot Center for Math and Science with advanced laboratories and state-of-the-art makerspace; and Berger Hall, which houses a 500-seat theater, black box performance space, and multimedia studios supporting a full spectrum of creative endeavors.

At the heart of campus is The Hub, CA's entrepreneurial learning lab, café, and retail store. Operated by students with faculty mentorship, The Hub provides hands-on experience in business management, marketing, staffing, and financial operations—translating entrepreneurial ideas into real-world practice.

Athletic amenities include a fitness center and a state-of-the-art weight room equipped with new Keiser A400 series machines (making CA the only middle or high school in North Carolina with this advanced training technology). A world-class Mondo track and grass stadium field anchor the school's comprehensive athletic complex, serving as hubs of Charger spirit and community.

The campus also offers ample outdoor spaces, including the central Quad, where students and faculty gather for recreation, reflection, and connection. Every space—academic, artistic, entrepreneurial, athletic, and social—reinforces the belief that environment shapes learning and community.

For more detailed information about the school visit www.caryacademy.org.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The next head of school at Cary Academy should be prepared to collaborate effectively with a dedicated board of trustees and a devoted school community to fulfill the school's mission and to lead the school wisely and confidently into the future by embracing current challenges and seizing new opportunities. These challenges and opportunities include but are not limited to the following:

- CA has experienced remarkable growth and the development of a healthy culture, infrastructure and program. The next head of school will be charged with sustaining that positive trajectory into the future. While there is no need nor appetite for rapid change, the school is committed to ongoing innovation and that intention will need to be lead and fulfilled.

- CA has been fortunate to have experienced a long period of stable, enlightened, highly competent leadership under a respected and admired head of school. While this certainly positions the school in exciting ways for its next leader, that person will need to have the qualities of character and ability necessary to succeed to the headship with steady confidence.
- The ethos and identity of Cary Academy include a deep commitment to academic achievement and excellence. The school draws students, families and faculty in significant measure due to this culture and the great outcomes it delivers. Yet there is a concurrent dedication at the school to student well-being, ongoing change and innovation, and breadth of opportunity for students. This creates tension and pressure, especially for students and faculty. The next head of school must have a vision for excellence in education that can balance this tension for both faculty and students, as well as the communication skill to develop broad support for it.
- Innovation is a core concept and value that has underpinned Cary Academy since its founding. The opportunity to pursue interesting, valuable and experiential inspirations in education and overall school experience makes CA unique and exciting for both students and faculty. Yet too many experiments can make for an element of confusion about institutional direction and exhaustion for the people engaged there. The next head must have the capacity to offer the leadership to help others better manage and understand this dilemma.
- CA has talented and dedicated administrators and leaders. The school is reaching an age and degree of complexity when it is time to consider the structure of the school administration and how it might function optimally in the years ahead.

- The growth and expansion of Cary Academy over recent decades, as well as the dramatic increase in the complexity of school programs and operations, require that the next head of school must be an accomplished systems-thinker and systems-implementer, as well as being facile with data and its effective utilization.
- Cary Academy recently launched an especially thoughtful, forward-thinking, and adaptable strategic plan. The next head of school will need to fulfill the promise of that strategic plan in the years ahead.
- The next head of CA must demonstrate a clear, authentic alignment with the mission, values and core ethos of the school, including its deep institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.



QUALITIES AND QUALIFICATIONS

The successful candidate to be Head of School at Cary Academy will be a mission and values-driven leader who will embody and demonstrate most, if not all, of the following skills, qualities, characteristics and experiences:

- Demonstrated success as an inspirational, visionary, caring, wise and collaborative leader and educator.
- Ability to serve as a visible, energetic, active and engaged presence in the CA community.
- Breadth of experience and perspective relevant to school leadership and familiarity with school life, academics and programming in a highly complex grades 6-12 day school.
- Personal integrity, high emotional intelligence and inspirational spirit, along with warmth, enthusiasm, and a sense of humor.
- Demonstrated experience as a strategic thinker and implementer of strategic vision.
- Capacity to serve as an ethical, firm, decisive and transparent role model for administrators, faculty, staff and students, and capacity to call on others to be their best selves in a community.

- Financial acumen, fundraising experience, entrepreneurial ability, and a record of ambitious and data-driven innovation and change.
- Demonstrated success as a systems thinker, able to manage and lead complicated organizations with keen insight, efficiency, vision and sincere concern for the welfare of a community.
- Significant experience with building and supporting inclusive, equitable and broadly diverse communities.
- Talent in identifying, selecting, retaining and inspiring outstanding teachers, staff and administrators, as well as for supervising, motivating and developing them, and encouraging their professional growth.
- Skill and experience in fostering interconnections across the institution, breaking down silos and developing effective teams, especially among the senior leadership.
- Ability to forge authentic relationships with a wide range of people both within the constituencies of the school and externally, including students, parents, alumni, and wider community members.
- Superb written, oral, and interpersonal communication skills.
- Hold an advanced degree.
- Willingness to lead in alignment with the mission, history, core values, and strategic vision for the future of the school.



APPLICATION PROCESS

To be considered, a candidate must submit the following:

- A cover letter detailing your interest in the school and the qualifications that make you a compelling candidate,
- A resume or c.v.
- A statement of educational or leadership philosophy,
- An additional writing sample, submitted in a single pdf with the philosophy statement (optional)
- Five confidential references with contact information

Candidates should upload their application on the RG175 website:

<https://rg175.com/login>

The deadline for receipt of full application materials is **January 15, 2026**. Candidates are encouraged to submit their materials as early as possible. The school anticipates making a final decision by the end of **April 2026**.

For more information, please contact RG175 consultants:

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Notice of Non-discrimination

To provide equal employment and advancement opportunities to all individuals, employment decisions at Cary Academy are based on merit, qualifications, and skills. Cary Academy is committed to a policy of non-discrimination and equal employment opportunity for all employees and qualified applicants without regard to sex, race, color, national or ethnic origin, ancestry, sexual orientation, gender identity/ expression, religion, disability, genetic information, possession of sickle cell or hemoglobin C traits, or any other characteristic protected under applicable law. Cary Academy makes reasonable accommodations for qualified individuals with known disabilities, in accordance with applicable law. This commitment is evident in all aspects of Cary Academy's employment practices and policies, including recruiting, hiring, job assignment, promotion, compensation, discipline, discharge, benefits, and training.