

POSITION STATEMENT

The Athenian School

DANVILLE, CALIFORNIA



LEADERSHIP SEARCH

HEAD OF UPPER SCHOOL

Start Date: July 1, 2027



Overview

Athenian is a “both and” school. It both cherishes its stunning 75-acre campus and breathes in the energy and innovation that have made the Bay Area renowned the world over. It is both steeped in the progressive educational ideals baked into the school’s identity from its founding and welcoming to the advances in science and human development that have emerged in recent years. The school community is both heartwarming individualistic and profoundly communal. The campus and program are both rooted in place and deeply committed to global thinking. Athenian can both rely on the strong foundation created 60 years ago and look forward to a robust future built on those ideals.

After a period of leadership transition, Athenian seeks an Upper School Head who will provide steady and energetic leadership for the division while partnering closely with a dynamic new Head of School, faculty, and administrative colleagues to help shape the next chapter of Athenian’s story. This is an exciting moment in the school’s history, and a leader who is both grounded and visionary will find the Athenian community to be a vibrantly engaging place.

In the handwritten mandala the founding head of school created, the language is prescient and powerful; spending time with Athenian students affirms that they have internalized the need to be the critical and

analytical thinkers, open and curious learners, and spirited community members the founder envisioned. It is also clear that they love and respect their teachers, who let them explore and serve as the “warm demanders” of excellence and engagement.

The distinctive programs of the school are numerous. AWE (Athenian Wilderness Experience) brings students and their backpacks into an experience that transforms their lives: not a single night, or two, or even a week of time in the wilderness, but a 26-day journey with a three-day solo. No one completes that trip without a deepened sense of self, a reverence for nature, a commitment to the environment, a joyous experience of the power of teamwork, and a lasting love



of the fellow students and guides who shared the experience and made it memorable and transforming. Athenian Wilderness Experience isn't the only experiential learning at Athenian; March Term, Global explorations, artistic and athletic ventures, robotics explorations, and leadership opportunities are also cited by students as central to their love of the school. The Athenian community honors students who step up to try something new, tackle a seemingly impossible problem, or teach a curious fellow student; it's a learning community where "sticking your neck out" is appreciated and honored.

Mission

We offer a challenging academic program with a difference: intellectual inquiry is active, learning is interactive, the disciplines are interrelated, and analysis and creativity thrive simultaneously. The acquisition of knowledge becomes authentic and joyous.

We cultivate the personal qualities of each student to become an integrated human being with integrity, strong moral character, aesthetic sensitivity, and physical well being. The Athenian community requires students to face life directly through open communication, while developing their inner strength to exceed their perceived potential and emerge compassionate, responsible adults.



We instill an appreciation of the reciprocal relationship between the individual and cultures, society and the natural world. We value the power and beauty of multiculturalism within our diverse community. We embrace the principles of democratic governance, stewardship of the environment, respect for human dignity, and service as a way of life.

"Our students go deep, get granular and approach coursework in new and meaningful ways to find the unexpected answers and unseen connections."

—Athenian Teacher

"The kids who love what they love wholly, without any sort of shame or embarrassment, the ones who approach everything with an open and curious mind, those are the kinds of kids who thrive here."

—Athenian Student

Athenian By the Numbers

Upper School Students: **338**

Middle School Students: **189**

Zip Codes in Student Population: **68**

Students of Color: **63%**

Students who Receive Financial Aid: **23%**

Acres - Athenian's Campus: **75**

Students who Travel to School by Bus: **2/3**



The Upper School at Athenian

At its founding, the school promised to build each student's "ability to solve problems, to analyze and synthesize, to handle data, to see relationships and infer meanings, to generalize from concrete particulars, to judge evidence, and to discriminate in the receipt and use of information." With remarkable foresight, the Upper School faculty created special opportunities such as March Term, Global Programs, and the Athenian Wilderness Experience. Decades before social media and AI, Athenian students were urged to "detect bias in the use of words and images by all the media, to detect validity, inconsistency and propaganda" and to develop the ability to express ideas clearly in both writing and speaking. Over the years, faculty have continued to craft challenging campus-based experiences in the Carter Innovation Studio, Black-Box Theatre, art studios, science labs, and mathematics and humanities classrooms.

A founding member of [Round Square](#), the school was originally intended to be primarily a boarding school; its commitment to internationalism is significant, and even as the boarding program is being sunsetted; the school retains its distinctive embrace of world cultures and internationalism through the Round Square student exchange program and numerous global study opportunities.

At Athenian, students learn to love the natural world by simply walking up to the arts building from the dining hall...or by hiking along one of the school's trails at the foot of Mount Diablo. Experiences in Yosemite or Death Valley, March Term courses such as "California Water or California Fire" or even overseas journeys in Central America or Sub-Saharan Africa deepen that appreciation and love and create graduates who are ardent lifelong environmentalists. The school seeks to stoke curiosity, foster independence and build internal discipline in students, and the program is designed to help students live in community while becoming themselves.

To learn more about Athenian's Upper School program, visit [this full description of the curriculum](#) and opportunities.

Priorities, Opportunities and Challenges

The Six Pillars of Round Square are very much alive in the minds and spirits of teachers, students, and alumni of Athenian. Internationalism, Democracy, Environmentalism, Adventure, Leadership, and Service are the key drivers of inquiry at the school. The next Upper School Head will join colleagues in bringing these abstract concepts to life in a consistent and rigorous manner.

Honor what is distinctive about Athenian while helping it evolve

Athenian's progressive roots, commitment to educating the whole person, experiential approach to learning, and close relationships between students and adults are central to its identity. At the same time, families expect an outstanding academic program that prepares students exceptionally well for college and life after college. Athenian need not choose between these things. The opportunity is to "double down" on what makes Athenian distinctive and carefully consider innovative new directions while continuing to strengthen an ambitious and engaging Upper School program.



"The goal is to create a space of wonder, awe, and inspiration in parallel with functional knowledge and intellectual grasp."

*—The school's founder,
Dyke Brown*

Build greater coherence working in close collaboration with faculty and administrative colleagues.

Athenian faculty value their independence, creativity, and ownership of their work, and with good reason. Over time, however, departments, programs, and practices have sometimes developed independently of one another. The Upper School Head will have an opportunity to bring people together around common expectations and priorities, encourage greater collaboration, and create greater consistency without losing the creativity and independence that faculty prize.

Strengthen the 6 through 12 experience.

While the Upper School Head's primary responsibility is grades 9-12, there is an opportunity to work closely with the Middle School Head and others—admissions, marketing, and communications most notably—to think more intentionally about the Athenian experience. Greater connection across divisions, departments, and programs will help students and families see the arc of an Athenian education from sixth grade through graduation.

Be present and build community.

Relationships are at the heart of Athenian culture. Students are well known by their teachers, and many adults look out for them. The effective Upper School Head should be similarly accessible and engaged in the life of the school - a central figure in the daily life of the school whom people know and trust. A sense of humor and a delight in the life of the community, whether cheering at the sidelines of a game or donning a backpack for a hike in Yosemite... these will be qualities deeply valued by students, teachers, and parents. The option to live on campus—as Upper School Heads have done in the past— would enhance this need to be present in the life of the community.



Help write the next chapter of Athenian's community story.

The planned sunset of the boarding program marks a significant transition for a school whose residential life has helped shape its familial culture and international character. The next Upper School Head will arrive in time to understand and honor that legacy while helping determine how its most valuable qualities—close relationships, community, independence, and an international outlook - continue to live within the Upper School. Charter membership in the Round Square program was—and is—a critical piece of the school's identity. There is a significant philosophical, practical and distinctive legacy of the internationalism that the school enjoys—exploring how to continue

to honor that legacy in substantive ways will be a central challenge for the next Upper School Head.

Athenian is at an important moment in its history. There is real energy around a new Head of School, deep affection for the school and its mission, and an opportunity to bring greater clarity and coherence to an Upper School already rich in talented people, strong relationships, and distinctive programs. There is excitement about the future of the school and delight in its forward momentum; the new Upper School Head will be a critical part of that momentum and a valued partner of the team as it crafts a healthy, vibrant future for Athenian.



"It's chill and it's intense here at the same time!"

—Teacher, in her 8th year at the school

Essential Attributes/ Leadership Qualities

The successful candidate for Upper School Head at Athenian will bring most or all of the following qualities and will be:

- A spirited educational leader with a clear sense of what excellence in teaching and learning looks like in a progressive, academically rigorous environment, honed through classroom experience and professional growth. Teaching a class is an option, though not a requirement.
- A team player who functions as an equal partner and supportive colleague within the leadership team.
- A collaborative and skillful consensus builder with the courage and experience to make hard decisions when necessary.



- A leader who knows and understands the power of experiential education—not only with the natural world, but with science, technology, and the arts.
- Capable of partnering with and guiding fellow educators in meaningful professional growth and curricular development and alignment. The school welcomes a leader who honors and respects faculty voice while building a shared sense of purpose and commitment to the school's future.
- An unflappable leader who balances humility and confidence, collaboration and decisiveness. Equally as adept in listening and consulting as in making critical decisions.
- A clear, compelling and frequent communicator in settings ranging from 1-on-1 meetings to an auditorium of hundreds. Demonstrated facility at describing the academic/intellectual strengths of progressive education to a lay audience.
- An energetic and present leader who will delight in the everyday work at Athenian together with passionately engaged faculty, students and families.



The Athenian Way is a promise of an expansive, ongoing journey of knowledge seeking. Education at Athenian is a 24/7, 360° full-tilt pursuit."



Salary/Housing

Salary range is \$190,000-240,000.

Living on campus is encouraged but not required. The available house for the Upper School Head is 4 bedrooms, 2.5 bathrooms and approximately 2,400 square feet.

How to Apply

This search is supported by Resource Group 175. The application deadline is November 1, 2026; applications should be made through the RG175 website:

www.rg175.com/login

Candidates whose experiences and leadership align with this role are encouraged to contact Cathy Hunter (cshunter33@gmail.com) and/or Steve Morris (steve.morris@rg175.com) for an exploratory conversation well in advance of the deadline.

The Athenian School does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, ethnic origin, age, physical disability, sexual orientation, or any other category protected by applicable law in the administration of our educational policies, hiring policies, admissions policies, financial aid programs, athletics, and other school-administered programs.