

RG 175

Change as Opportunity

HEAD OF SCHOOL SEARCH COMMONWEALTH ACADEMY Alexandria, Virginia



Commonwealth Academy, a coeducational college preparatory school for grades 3-12, is seeking a Head of School to begin July 1, 2019. The School is in beautiful Alexandria, Virginia, a city on the western bank of the Potomac River, approximately 7 miles south of downtown Washington, DC. The school enrolls approximately 165 students and offers a unique mission and program, which is a carefully crafted compendium of academic rigor and support for learning differences with an emphasis on executive function and attention deficit.

Commonwealth Academy is fully accredited by the Virginia Association of Independent Schools



and is a member of the National Association of Independent Schools. Currently the school is led by an acting head of school who was a long-term teacher and administrator at CA. Faculty and staff are dedicated and well-credentialed and form excellent relationships with both students and parents. The tenure of the faculty is strong as the members are committed to the type of education offered at Commonwealth.

MISSION

The mission of Commonwealth Academy is to serve various kinds of students, average to superior in ability, who benefit from small classes where instruction can be tailored to different learning styles. More specifically, CA seeks to empower students who demonstrate organizational, attention or executive function issues, to reach their highest potential academically and personally. The School is a welcoming community, conducive to academic risk-taking while assuming personal responsibility and social success by learning compensatory strategies.

To learn more about
Commonwealth Academy:
www.ca-empowers.org

This specific mission was created and is lived daily at the school. There is strong commitment to appreciation of each student's individual strengths in an atmosphere of support. Students grow in self-confidence as they progress through the Commonwealth program and gain greater understanding and acceptance of their own learning differences.

HISTORY AND FACILITIES

Commonwealth Academy was opened for a small group of high school students in 1997 and moved to the Del Ray community in 2002, a lovely residential area. In its twenty-year history, the School has achieved dramatic and healthy growth and expansion and is currently highly respected in the greater Washington community for its unique program. In 1998 the Middle School was established for grades 6-8 and in 2010 the Lower School was opened for students in grades 3-5. There is a careful admissions process designed to make sure that prospective students will benefit from the rigorous academic program and mission to support identified learning differences. The Admissions Office evaluates student testing results and abilities to ensure that each applicant would fit with and benefit from the Commonwealth Academy program.



School Motto:
"We Empower the Child, Empower the Mind"

Housed in two adjacent buildings, the School provides 26 large and bright classrooms equipped with Smartboards or Promethean boards which are designed to assist students with focus and comprehension of material being presented. This building also houses the administrative offices and other support services of the school. The second building is the Susan J. Johnson Arts and Athletic Center, which has a gymnasium, multi-purpose room, and is also used for theater and community meetings. The campus is completely wireless, and technology is a major focus. Learning tools include laptop computers, iPads, Kindles, and Chromebooks for student use in classrooms. All technology provides assistive methodology. The facilities include a dedicated Maker Space and media center.

PROGRAM

Commonwealth Academy is committed to offering and continuously developing an academic program which provides needed support and progressive challenges for each student. An emphasis on current trends and research in this type of educational offering as well as continuing knowledge of child development and technology is designed to provide students and graduates with 21st century skills and readiness for higher education and beyond.

The curriculum is rich and carefully designed and implemented by the faculty to meet the needs of individual students. The classes are very small, limited in general to no more than 10 students, allowing for intense attention to each learner, whether to offer remediation or acceleration in individual subjects. The website offers great detail about the curriculum and all aspects of the Commonwealth program. (www.ca-empowers.org)

"I am so thankful to Commonwealth for never giving up on me." –Graduate

Lower School

In this division there is an emphasis upon the development of skills and strategies to assist and strengthen every student. Ability groupings are used in mathematics and Language Arts where students receive remediation, grade level or accelerated instruction as identified and needed. Orton Gillingham/Wilson is used for reading instruction and support.

Middle School

Classes in this division are designed to provide the academic foundation needed for success in High School. Accommodation for individuals are embedded in the curriculum and instruction is differentiated as needed. The Middle School program is progressively challenging, using project-based learning, and cross-curricular design as well as other strategies. Transition to High School is well-planned.

High School

The oldest students in the School are presented with a rigorous academic program in the college-preparatory curriculum of this division. Support for executive function and differentiated instruction is available for student demonstrating need. Honors courses are offered as well as Advanced Placement. The unique Diploma Certificate program allows an individual to explore an academic discipline or topic in depth.

College Placement

Graduates of CA have been accepted to colleges and universities throughout the nation. A strong college counseling program is in place to assist





Diversity

Commonwealth Academy is committed to diversity and currently has students from more than 20 countries or ethnic backgrounds enrolled. More than 24 languages are spoken by families.

Governance and Finances

Commonwealth Academy is governed by a dedicated board of

students and families in making college choices. Recent students have been accepted to American University, Carnegie Mellon University, Brown University, College of William and Mary, Earlham College, Franklin and Marshall College, George Washington University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the University of Virginia, to name only a few examples. An extensive list of college acceptances may be found on the school website along with alumni statements about their experiences at Commonwealth Academy.

trustees, most of whom have been or are currently parents. The Board oversees the policies and priorities of the School and is working on updating a detailed strategic plan. Finances, fundraising, and admissions reports are provided to the board on a regular basis.

The School operating budget is approximately \$6.8 million dollars; salaries comprise almost 50% of the budget. Financial aid/Scholarship is approximately \$550,000. While there is no endowment, the School does maintain a reserve fund. An outside firm conducts an annual audit. Salaries are competitive, and benefits are above average.





PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL QUALITIES OF THE NEXT HEAD OF SCHOOL

The ideal future leader for Commonwealth Academy:

- Holds an advanced degree with a minimum of an M.A. and is a skilled and experienced educator and teacher.
- Works effectively with people and builds trust in the community by openness, good communication, and listening. Works to understand the unique culture of the School and is sensitive to the impact of change on the entire community.
- Possesses a knowledge of learning differences and willingness to support the School mission to support students who need individualized attention and guidance.
- Recognizes the role of the Head of School in the external community and understands marketing, admissions, and enrollment while emphasizing professional development opportunities for faculty and staff.

- Is willing to support teachers in the complexities of their work in the classroom and able to make difficult decisions and follow through with appropriate actions.
- Possesses a knowledge of school finance, fundraising, compensation, and benefits for employees. Has experience in hiring practices and evaluation of performance of employees.
- Is approachable, warm, thoughtful and has a good sense of humor.
- Can work effectively with the Board of Trustees and bring vision and ideas for the future.
- Collaborates with the appropriate groups and individuals when making decisions while providing strong leadership.
- Has strong personal integrity, leads by example and fosters a caring community by promoting a strong character curriculum.



OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN THE

Commonwealth Academy has a unique and valuable place in the education community and it will be important for the next Head of School to be able to articulate that role. The combination of strong academics and support for learning differences, particularly in the areas of executive function and ADHD, can provide students with the ability to develop strategies for success, whether at Commonwealth or in higher education. A strong leader is needed and hoped for by the school community, one with the ability to be the "face of the School" and continue the path forward.

The next Head of School at Commonwealth Academy will bring an ability to know the school and be known outside the campus. The ability to bring the mission and program to the outside community while getting to know the students, faculty and staff and parents as well as working effectively with a strong and effective Board of Trustees is essential. A successful leader at CA will be highly involved and knowledgeable about the program of the School.



The School has experienced unexpected change in recent years, following the retirement of a successful and long-term Head of School. This change has been a bit unsettling internally, particularly with the faculty and staff, and therefore building trust is important. A new leader will be most successful by committing to a stay of a minimum of five years or more, thereby bringing stability and strategic vision. It will be a challenge to determine, with the Board of Trustees, the future of the school facility, with various options available when the current lease ends in 2023. The enrollment of the school is planned to grow to a maximum of 250 students in the future.

Alexandria is a beautiful city and the proximity to Washington, DC, offers many advantages. The school community seeks strong leadership, and the new Head of School will be welcomed enthusiastically, with the hopes for a future for a Commonwealth Academy that will continue to live its mission with energy and belief in its students.

APPLICATION

Interested candidates should send a **single electronic file**, which includes a cover letter, resume and statement of educational philosophy, indicating experience and understanding of the needs of the students who enroll at Commonwealth Academy as well as those who teach and guide them. While there is no firm deadline, it would be useful to have materials and indications of interest in this outstanding opportunity by September 10, 2018.

Materials or questions should be addressed to:

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 Search Consultant
 Resource Group 175
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 646-261-5761 cell