



**HEAD OF SCHOOL**  
**July 1, 2015**

**RENBROOK SCHOOL**  
**West Hartford, Connecticut**

## **THE SCHOOL AND ITS LOCATION**

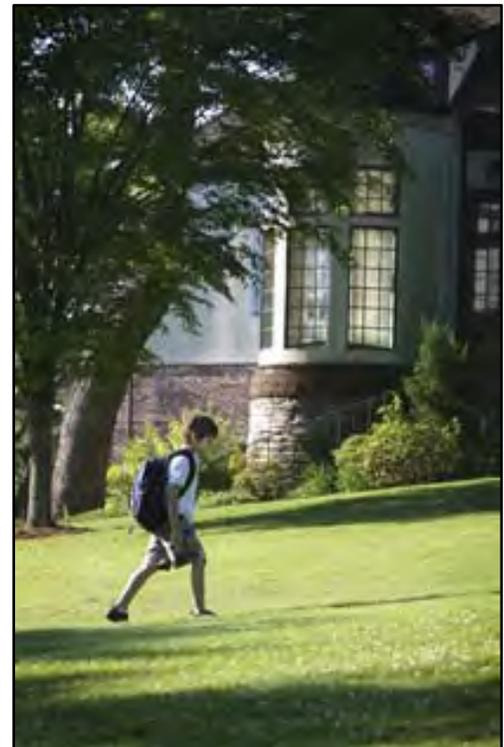
Renbrook School is located in West Hartford on the former estate of Frederick Rentschler, the founder of Pratt and Whitney Aircraft. The community is one of the most desirable in central Connecticut and is surrounded by equally upscale suburbs of Hartford, many of which contain well-known independent boarding schools. The school owns 75 acres of beautiful real estate and is housed in a building complex that is both decorative and functional. Renbrook is the largest independent elementary school in the Hartford area, is highly respected, and has a long, successful history of preparing students for top secondary schools, both boarding and day. Renbrook currently enrolls 440 students in grades PreK – 9.

## **SCHOOL HISTORY**

The school was founded in 1935 as the Tunxis School, in honor of the Native American tribe indigenous to the area. The school has roots in the work of John Dewey and has always stood for the education of the whole child via engagement and dynamic teaching. As it grew, the school

moved several times, and in 1956 was awarded its current site by Faye Belden Rentschler, the owner of the property. In 1958, in honor of the Rentschler family, the

school adopted the name of their estate “Renbrook” and moved to its current location. The school has flourished there, adopting many of the principles of the progressive movement but never losing sight of the disciplines crucial to a traditional education. Since then, the facilities have undergone a series of changes, modifications, and substantial additions.



## MISSION AND GOALS

Renbrook’s Mission Statement is:

*The mission of Renbrook School is to help all of our students fulfill their unique potential. We provide a rigorous enriched program of academic excellence in which students from diverse backgrounds can develop skills in a supportive and nurturing environment.*

*Our students strengthen their sense of self through many kinds of achievement; they learn to take appropriate risks and to respect the rights of the individual as well as the needs of the group. We value strong relationships between the school and its families, a sense of community within the school, and a tradition of service to others.*

In addition to fundamental guidance provided by the Mission Statement, in 2012 the school adopted a Strategic Plan that reinforces and furthers the values on which it was founded.

The six priorities of that plan are:

- Individual Student Achievement
- Outstanding Faculty and Staff
- Optimal School Structure
- Distinctive Benefits to Families
- Exceptional Campus Environment
- Financial Strength and Flexibility

The school is well on its way to achieving progress in each of these areas and the board is committed to Renbrook maintaining the pre-eminent place it has enjoyed in the community for many years.

## SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

Enrollment in 2013-2014:	440
Student to Teacher Ratio:	7 to 1 across entire school
Campus:	Three divisions, one large main building, one pre-school building
Operating Budget:	\$13 million
Financial Aid:	\$18.5% of budget
Students Receiving Aid:	27%
Annual fund-raising:	\$750,000
Endowment:	\$15 million
Annual Fund Goal for '14:	\$903,000
Memberships:	NAIS, CAIS, SSATB, CASE
Website:	<a href="http://www.renbrook.org">www.renbrook.org</a>

## CAMPUS

The Renbrook campus is second to none. On a mountainside and set back from a major East-West artery, the school's entrance and administration area are part of the French country-style estate of the Rentschler's. From the property, the skyline of Hartford stands out to the east. The entry and offices are stunning. There have been numerous additions – too numerous and complex to list – to this main house. Suffice it to say that the school is very well facilitated with spacious classrooms, math and science labs, an excellent dining facility, two gymnasias, two theaters, and a spectacular modern Library and Technology Center, complete with meeting and conference rooms. There are wooded trails, a high ropes course, terrific fields and athletic facilities, and a large pond. The only obvious facilities challenge is that of planning renovations and additions in ways that will be consistent with the exquisite estate the school is so fortunate to inhabit. Few schools can match Renbrook's remarkable home.



## PROGRAM

Renbrook School's regular and auxiliary programs are fully described on the school's website, [www.renbrook.org](http://www.renbrook.org). The vibrancy of the school and engagement of the students are well represented by the excellent website. This is a school that has a smart balance of traditional and innovative teaching and learning; it is both productive and creative. It's a community whose members truly want to be there. Renbrook is clearly an academic institution with great offerings and high standards, but it pushes its students just the right amount and in the right ways. It makes it safe for students to venture beyond their comfort zones and as a result, to discover new talents. In its traditional academics it is both rigorous and humane. In its innovations, it is exciting and substantive. The school uses the Responsive Classroom in the lower grades and has a number of initiatives that operate under the "Bringing Learning to Life" umbrella in the upper grades. Each of these involves project-based, hands-on, engaging student experiences.

The early childhood years at Renbrook

*Continued on next page*





(beginner's through kindergarten) form an especially pivotal program. Many parents take advantage of the excellent teaching and curriculum at this level and are introduced to the school in these years. There is local competition for these families and Renbrook does well in attracting them. However, hanging onto them in higher grades where public schools compete, is more difficult.

Renbrook has created a great balance of academics, arts, and athletics. The school fields competitive teams in a number of sports, where participation and sportsmanship are stressed, and has outstanding programs in music - both choral and instrumental – as well as drama and a first-rate fine arts program. This well-rounded approach typifies the school's history and mission. Leadership and character development are stressed by all at the school and there are ample opportunities for community service, for in-school leadership, and for developing great values and purpose. Secondary schools report that Renbrook

graduates frequently take positions of leadership when they matriculate, evidence of the effectiveness of the school's considerable strengths in this regard.

The Center for Teaching and Learning was launched last year and is a center for the renewal and development of faculty. Outside speakers, workshops, and hands-on work are all part of the program. The goal is to create a collaborative

learning center where teachers will sharpen their mastery of the pedagogy needed to teach 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Center in meeting this goal will be important.

The school has a large summer camp program with over 600 enrollees that is very successful and well known in the nearby communities. It employs many faculty and alumni and adds considerably to school's revenues. Campus facilities available for the summer program include tennis courts, three pools, a ropes course, and a pond with boathouse.



## THE COMMUNITY OF THE SCHOOL

Schools reflect their communities and Renbrook is no exception. Greater Hartford has a large professional population, working in insurance, aerospace, medicine, education, and government. Hartford itself is the second largest city in New England and has many of the resources – and some of the problems – that one might expect. The suburb of West Hartford is a community of gracious older homes and has more of a village feel, especially in its downtown and shopping area. Education is highly valued by the immediate community, and also by the State of Connecticut, which made a commitment years ago to creating some of the nation’s best public schools by having the highest paid teachers in the U.S.

The Renbrook community is consistent in describing its salient and distinguishing characteristics. Parents praise a dedicated, effective, and hard-working faculty. The teachers set a high bar academically and behaviorally, care about the whole child, pay attention to all the students’ needs, and create the friendly and welcoming environment in which students can feel loved and safe. Parents applaud the school’s ability to combine rigor



and expectation with warmth and understanding, and feel that faculty know and support all students. Parents expressed mutual respect and appreciation and faculty cite a partnership with parents in a state of healthy balance.

### Students and Enrollment

Renbrook’s current enrollment of 440 is considerably lower than its peak ten years ago of 580 students. There were many factors that contributed to this drop and it is hard to know which of these were most influential. The school may simply have been in an enrollment bubble created by some of the demographic and economic forces in the area 15 years ago. Regardless, there was steady attrition between 2000 and 2010, accelerating in the prolonged economic recession that followed 2007-2008. Most of the attrition seems to have come from 5 surrounding towns – Avon, Simsbury, Farmington, West Hartford, and Bloomfield –



*Continued on next page*



### Faculty

The Renbrook faculty are experienced and dedicated. While many have been there for a number of years, there is a cohort of teachers who are newer to the school and bring experience from elsewhere. Together they form a strong team, dedicated to the students and to the mission of the school. Parents identify the faculty as “skilled and caring” and the teachers are appreciated and supported. Faculty development funds have been used appropriately and the Center for Teaching and Learning is leading efforts to ensure that all of the faculty are current in pedagogy.

all communities with very strong public schools. The good news is that enrollment has stabilized and is gradually increasing. Renbrook is now able to plan effectively for a “right-sized” school. The school has also begun a “Glastonbury Express” bus that picks up students from farther afield than the school’s historic catchment area. This has brought new families into the mix. In addition, the school has begun a small international student program for grades 6 to 9 that involves “home stays” with Renbrook families.

The students at Renbrook clearly appreciate their school. They all know one another and report that they are challenged and encouraged, and that their teachers want them to do well.

The school has made significant efforts to diversify the student body in the last 20 years and now enrolls 27 percent students of color. Graduates attend leading secondary schools in the area, with some going off to boarding schools. Notably and unlike many comparable New England schools, Renbrook has not only stuck with its 9<sup>th</sup> grade program, but it has also deliberately expanded leadership opportunities for the class, creating a capstone year to compete compellingly with other schools’ freshman programs.

Some recent decisions regarding administrative changes have stirred debate, but faculty loyalty to the school remains strong and unquestioned. Maintaining faculty morale and strong faculty development programs will be important to the next Head.

### Administration

In addition to the Head, there is a full complement of administration, including two division heads, development and admissions directors, business manager, and communications director as well as staff members for several of these offices. With the enrollment shrinkage, there have been

*Continued on next page*



questions raised about the size of the administration but the school is dealing with these questions. Regardless, the next Head will need to address this issue as part of the ongoing “right-sizing” efforts.

**Parents**

The Parent Association is an active and well-organized group that works both as a volunteer fund-raising organization and a parent education group. Families come from far and wide and there has been particular support for families new to independent schools and for families of color.

**Alumni**

Renbrook has an extensive alumni group and has worked to keep that group engaged and informed. The school’s first-rate publications have helped hold the alumni close and there is an active alumni association. The school has a number of parents, teachers and board members who are alumni of the school.



**BUSINESS MANAGEMENT, FINANCES & FUND-RAISING**

Renbrook’s financial metrics are very typical of those in the independent school community. It is largely tuition driven and counts heavily upon its Annual Fund, special events income, and auxiliary program income to balance its operating budget. Business management is strong, board financial oversight is astute, and the school wrestles just as other schools do with the issues of access, affordability, competitive compensation, program development and capital improvements that come with major cost implications.

The endowment has grown to \$15.1 million over the years but the school has also taken on debt. In connection with the recent library addition (2009), the school issued a bond under a Connecticut sponsored program to help complete the project. Current debt is at \$7.8 million, financed at a very reasonable tax-exempt rate.



## GOVERNANCE

Renbrook’s Board of Trustees consists of 22 voting members, who each serve up to two four-year terms. The board generally meets monthly and Trustees regularly take advantage of appropriate professional development opportunities afforded by CAIS and NAIS. As is the case in most day schools, many are current or past parents. The incumbent Head’s long-serving predecessor is widely acknowledged for her ability to develop and even to guide the board in a firm and directive manner. There is agreement among all parties that this is a crucial relationship.



## OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR NEW LEADERSHIP

Renbrook’s next Head will have an opportunity to take a unique and successful school to an even higher level. The challenges and opportunities include, among others:

### Marketing and Enrollment

- Work closely with the admissions and communications offices to effectively position and market the school, especially to define the “value added” proposition for Renbrook in light of the strong local public schools
- Right-size Renbrook. The school needs to reach consensus on size and appropriate staffing for that size school.
- Be the face of the school and provide the vision, energy, and especially the leadership needed guide the school’s progress and momentum

### Academic Leadership

- Provide the expertise to lead in the areas of:
  - Supervision, faculty and staff development, compensation, and evaluation
  - Evaluation of new initiatives

### Financial Management

- Help align the school’s revenues and expenses to create a robust, stable long-term financial model for Renbrook.
- Examine and work to advance all aspects of fund-raising, both annual and capital
- Implement the school’s compensation initiatives for faculty and staff

### Governance

- Work in partnership with the Board to create open lines of communication and clarity in areas of policy, practice, and responsibilities
- Help the faculty understand the role of the Board and its functioning.

## THE CANDIDATE

### Professional Qualities

The Renbrook community will seek professional qualities that include the following:

- Strong leadership in independent schools
- Work with a board of trustees
- Demonstrated success in marketing and enrollment management
- Financial management
- Evidence of academic leadership in an elementary or middle school setting
- Teaching
- Fund-raising

### Personal Qualities

The next Head of School will ideally possess many of the following personal qualities, as expressed by a variety of teachers, parents, and students:

- Enthusiastic, energetic, out-going personality
- Ability to connect to students
- Personal warmth and compassion
- Excellent listening skills
- Strong communication skills, both orally and in writing
- Thoughtful and reflective
- Great sense of humor
- Decisive without being impulsive
- Collaborative
- Comfortable in his/her “own skin”

## APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Candidates should send a cover letter, resume, statement of educational philosophy, and a list of five references to:

Clay V. Stites  
Resource Group 175, LLC  
124 Gaffney Road  
Dartmouth, MA 02748  
508-636-4984  
clay.stites@comcast.net

OR

Thomas M. Evans  
Resource Group 175, LLC  
90 Great Western Road  
Harwich, MA 02645  
774-237-0349  
tmevanscca@comcast.net

For additional information about the school, visit its website: [www.renbrook.org](http://www.renbrook.org)

Renbrook School is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religious creed, age, sex, marital status, national origin, ancestry, disability or sexual orientation.