



Head of School Position Statement  
**Children's Community School**  
Van Nuys, California  
July 1, 2021



## Children's Community School: Head of School Search



### FOREWORD

Wherever he is, whenever he hears about Children's Community School, John Dewey smiles. Among all the schools these days that claim themselves to be progressive, this school uniquely is. Children's Community School embraces the belief that progressive education is a philosophy, not a methodology. In fact, its legal name is "The Foundation for Excellence in Education, dba Children's Community School and Children's Art Institute." Dewey loves it.

Devoted to Dewey's vision of educating students for life in a democracy, CCS remains true to his many inspirations: multi-grade classrooms; students and teachers on a first-name basis; little or no homework; a big library; no textbooks; major emphasis on independent reading and research including a Social Studies curriculum that employs field work and primary and secondary sources and is fully integrated with the arts and hands-on materials such as woodworking and block building; a faculty whose assignments have them cycle through all the grades over time; repeated opportunities for collaborative and

project-based learning; no testing or graded report cards – narrative reports throughout the grades; recognition of the importance of the arts as another way of thinking, essential to students' understanding of the world.

### PEOPLE AND PLACE

Founded 40 years ago, Children's Community School reflects the same zeal today in students, parents, and teachers, that animated its founders in 1980. CCS is infinitely fortunate to have had one of its founders at the helm ever since. His steady hand has enabled the school to remain true to its mission as a paragon of progressive education.

The school's intentional siting in a mixed-income/multi-ethnic location was evidence of its commitment to enrolling a diversity of students. Indeed, as a faculty committee recently wrote, "CCS was founded as a neighborhood school with a mission of socioeconomic diversity. We agree wholeheartedly with this mission and wish to uphold the school's commitment to socioeconomic and social



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justice by ensuring that they remain central to the search for a new Head of School.”

Van Nuys is in the San Fernando Valley, northwest of Downtown Los Angeles. While technically a suburb, it is very urban: apartment houses and single and multi-family homes along with more expansive homes and the Valley’s Civic Center, a commercial spread along Van Nuys Boulevard that attests to the area’s diversity and vitality, which are reflected in the composition of the school. Parents and faculty are fiercely proud of the location, many claiming it’s a major reason for sending their children to CCS or working there.

The campus itself is functional but rustic. It is cozy, contributing to the warm vibe that permeates the school. While small – it occupies half a city block – it is not cramped and there is room for everything in the program and everyone in the school. The campus is the embodiment of the community it seeks to serve. In fact, not many schools are as intimately involved with their surrounding area as CCS is. Sponsoring an annual Health Fair for the broader community many of whose residents don’t have regular health care providers, CCS students interact frequently with their neighbors, including visits to Luigi the Tailor, Happy Dogs, the western wear store, the nearby fire station, and other traditional parts of the school’s embrace of experiential education.



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It is difficult to put into words the unbridled enthusiasm of the CCS community – from parents to teachers to students and administrators. Everyone involved with the school is crazy about it – honestly! Some of the following observations from parents seem to strike universal chords: “It’s the lack of negative energy and pressure.” “It’s the focus on creativity and expression.” “Appreciation of cultural identity.” “Children are truly the center of all decisions: no politics, no money, or parent agendas.” “It’s a forward-looking community where education is a constant matter of study.” “It’s an alive environment, open to changes.”

Faculty and staff are similarly enthusiastic: “We focus on the child being an informed citizen of the world.” “Faculty and staff are empowered and important at CCS.” “Our emphasis on socio-emotional development.” “Individualized learning.” “The autonomy we’re given is a reflection of the trust that administration has in us.” “Creativity in the classroom is key and the integration of the arts is an integral part of the work.”

And this, which gets to the essence of the CCS experience: “Our dedication to having difficult conversations with both adults and children – race, socioeconomic disparities, religion, violence, world events – we talk about them all at CCS and there’s just no way to make the world better without trying to figure them out.”

### DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

It is unusual to have an entire section of a Position Statement devoted to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, but it is a topic so crucial to understanding Children’s Community School that not including it would be wrong. Repeatedly invoked by parents as a primary reason for their child’s being at the school, invariably seconded by faculty and staff as a reason for their continuing at the school, diversity is a lived value at CCS that is not only inescapable but universally embraced.



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From the school's commitment to the neighborhood, to the 31% of the student body receiving Financial Assistance (of whom nearly half receive close to full aid), to the geographic, economic and racial composition of student body and staff, it is simply a fact of life.

Support for D/E/I is strong and widespread. A parent comments that "diversity is truly happening here and exceptionally valued." Another reports that the "emphasis on diversity is inclusive and not alienating." And the CCS Social Justice Inquiry Group envisions "a student and staff population that will be increasingly diverse in the school's future. In order to attract more student and staff diversity at Children's Community School, the members of our CCS community must see themselves reflected not only in the student and staff population but also in the leadership of the school."



## FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATION

Rarely does one encounter a faculty so enthusiastic about where it works, the support it receives, the opportunities for creativity and curriculum design it is afforded, and the professional development that is encouraged as the one at CCS. Explaining such devotion is not difficult: there is deep mutual respect and collaboration between them and their Head; they're given lots of autonomy; having a teaching partner is empowering; a premium is placed on creativity; and professional growth is an expectation.

Although the teachers vary in years of experience, and turnover is low, the faculty seems to skew toward the young side. A teacher with twenty years' experience has the exuberance of a rookie, and new teachers seem wise beyond their years. The result is a felicitous blend in which the common denominators seem to be devotion to a student-centered pedagogy, creativity, collaboration, and professional development.

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If one were to draw an organizational chart for Children's Community School, it would look like an inverted pyramid with the Head and the admin team at the bottom, supporting the program that goes on above them. Every aspect of the school's administration is geared toward enabling the classroom teachers and specialists to do their jobs exceptionally well.

Collaboration is truly a fact at CCS and the Head has stated that "overt leadership makes teachers passive," so the emphasis throughout the school is on teamwork, creativity, and initiative.



### GOVERNANCE AND FINANCE

CCS is overseen by a volunteer Board of Trustees, currently numbering 12 including the Head of School although the by-laws permit 15. Nine Trustees are past parents, three are current parents one of whom is an alumna. Given the number of former parents, it is not surprising to learn that the Board is non-intrusive and leaves the management of the school to the faculty and staff.



The Board has six regularly scheduled meetings and one retreat each year, with a high-functioning committee system that includes an executive committee along with committees on finance, advancement, trusteeship, facilities, and master site planning, along with an ad hoc committee planning the celebration of the school's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020. The Board is eager to become more diverse and better reflect the school community.

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Not surprisingly, CCS is a very tight ship when it comes to financial management. Every penny counts and the school's exchequer is surprisingly robust for only 120 students and a huge commitment to financial aid. Beyond income from tuition and fees, the summer camp/Art Institute adds additional revenue and voluntary support is commendable, especially in view of the number of families that receive heavy assistance. As if any were needed, parent support for the annual fund and the yearly gala is further evidence of families' fierce attachment to the school. Operating on a balanced budget, CCS has no bad debts, pays down its mortgage, puts money away in reserve, and funds faculty development to a generous degree.



### OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Expecting the next Head of School to be as calm, confident, and sagacious as the current 40-year Head is unreasonable, but what is not at all unreasonable is for that person to be well steeped in progressive education, patient, collaborative, a good listener, thoughtful, and reflective; someone willing to link arms moving forward rather than having to be out front. Key to that person's success will be strengthening the school's commitments to diversity and financial aid, cornerstones of CCS's success.

Among the specific challenges facing the school in the next few years are maintaining and expanding the broad economic, racial, and cultural diversity that makes CCS's mission attainable; growing enrollment; space optimization; students with learning differences; keeping tuition within bounds while expanding financial aid; retaining the existing strong faculty and hiring excellent teachers when necessary; and continuing to improve faculty and staff benefits.



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Perhaps more subtle are challenges surrounding school culture, which everyone wants to be maintained. As one parent has suggested, "Keeping its soul despite the departure of the founding head will be the challenge," while another has written of the need to keep students optimistic despite the current assaults on democracy and climate that assail them without ceasing.

### APPLICATION PROCESS

To be succinct, "find a leader whose inclination is to lead from the heart." That leader should demonstrate "unassuming confidence, willingness to hear multiple views, kindness, deep belief in the wisdom of children and the contributions of education to the transformation of society."

Are you that person? If you are, please register as a candidate on the RG175 website and apply online at: <https://rg175.com/candidate/signup>

The application includes: a letter of interest, resume, writing sample/personal statement, and the names of five current references.

For more information, contact RG175 Consultant Tom Hudnut: [tom@tomhudnut.com](mailto:tom@tomhudnut.com)

The deadline for receipt of full application materials is **April 1, 2020.**