



**CHARLOTTE  
PREPARATORY  
SCHOOL**

Head of School Search

# Charlotte Preparatory School

Charlotte, North Carolina

July 1, 2020



### OVERVIEW

Charlotte Preparatory School, a co-educational pre-K—8<sup>th</sup> grade school in Charlotte, North Carolina seeks a Head of School for July 2020. At every level and in every aspect of school life, Charlotte Prep provides an atmosphere in which students thrive. The School is well-positioned and stable and has enjoyed excellent leadership; the next head of school will have an opportunity to serve with an excellent Board of Trustees, a talented team of educators, and an enthusiastic and committed community of parents. The independent school landscape in Charlotte is exceptionally robust, and Charlotte Prep is ready to remove the “hidden” from its oft-described qualities as a “hidden gem” school!



### MISSION

*"Charlotte Preparatory School fosters lifelong learning and provides an exemplary educational experience founded on academic excellence, positive character, and leadership development in a diverse, inclusive community."*

Charlotte Preparatory School is a mission-driven school. Its mission arises from a firm set of deeply held foundational core beliefs: That People Matter, That School Structure Matters, and That Programs Matter. All strategic, structural, and programmatic questions are tested against these core beliefs before implementation.

Four pillars—courage, integrity, perseverance, respect—serve as values that drive the educational program. Evidence of the school's embrace of these pillars is abundant, from the encouragement of a growth mindset in students, to open and respectful discourse amongst teachers and parents or the determined spirit that drives the school's athletic teams.





## HISTORY

Charlotte Preparatory School was founded in 1971 by Maura Leahy Tucker as a pre-school named Charlotte Montessori School. During the following two decades the school added grade levels and moved (1992) to its present campus. By 1997 the School enrolled 209 students in Pre-Primary—5<sup>th</sup> grade. In the late 1990s Ms. Tucker decided to expand the School to 8<sup>th</sup> grade and rename it Charlotte Preparatory School, preserving the Montessori program in the Early School, and commencing construction of a new Middle School, which opened in 1999. In the following years, Charlotte Preparatory School was built into a well-respected proprietary (for-profit) school with a beautiful campus and a soundly developed program and excellent teaching staff. Enrollment grew to a peak of 442 students in 2008-09. The Financial Crisis of 2008 and the Great Recession that followed

had a heavy impact on the city of Charlotte due to its extensive banking and finance-based economy. Independent school enrollment declined across the city. At this challenging time, a group of parents coalesced around the idea of purchasing Charlotte Prep; in the spring of 2012 the School was converted to its current 501(c)(3) not-for-profit (NFP) status. A Board of Trustees was constituted and began its governance duties, hiring a new head of school, who in turn built an experienced and talented leadership and teaching team and collaborated with teachers to refine and expand the curriculum and program. While the competitive independent and parochial school marketplace in Charlotte remains exceptionally strong, Charlotte Preparatory School has repeatedly affirmed the benefits of its close community and nurturing academic environment, which allow its graduates to flourish in high school, college and beyond.



### CAMPUS FACILITIES

The Charlotte Preparatory School campus consists of an 11.5-acre campus with five buildings, several cottages, and four distinct and well-tended play areas. The campus is nestled in a leafy park-like setting, with efficient means for parents to drop off or pick up their students at school. The classrooms are light and spacious, and all of the halls and public areas are well-maintained and welcoming. The flow of the spaces is child-friendly, with both inside and outside areas designed for all kinds of learners – there are expansive spaces for Middle School team sports, and cozy play areas for small groups of younger children. A gym, several large meeting spaces, playing field, conference room, cafeteria, and spacious fine and performing arts studios mean that the school is able to carry out its mission with the academic, athletic and arts-appropriate facilities. The School owns two houses near the school, one of which is reserved for the Head of School.



### LOCATION

Charlotte Preparatory School is located on the corner of Sardis and Boyce Roads in the SouthPark neighborhood of Charlotte. The city of Charlotte is diverse and vibrant and has experienced rapid growth in the last several decades. A cosmopolitan city, Charlotte has a rich history, a lively arts scene, strong educational institutions, an economy powered by international corporations in banking and finance, and a multitude of distinct neighborhoods, parks, and attractions.





### THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Charlotte Prep prides itself on its small, diverse and tight-knit community; each and every student is known and enveloped by caring, nurturing adults.

**Students** – students at Charlotte Preparatory School are happy and filled with pride and delight in their school community. The hallmark of the School, visible in each and every corner of campus, is the close and loving relationship between teachers and students. The multiple dimensions of student diversity enrich the classroom discourse and enliven the school. Charlotte Prep has the most diverse student body of any independent school in Charlotte (41% using NAIS guidelines); students and teachers hail from 43 countries, so the school has a distinct international feeling, deepening the diversity. Students dive into new experiences with a remarkable willingness and excitement; whether signing up for a new sport in Middle School, trying out for a role in the musical, or stepping up to a leadership challenge, students are encouraged and acculturated to take risks and try new things. 100% of Charlotte Prep's

graduates matriculate at their first or second choice high school, and anecdotal evidence shows that they flourish as well-rounded, confident, resourceful and enthusiastic participants in all dimensions of high school life.

**Faculty** – Charlotte Preparatory School has a deeply committed, diverse and excellent faculty. They collaborate with one another, embrace the school's ethos of lifelong learning and growth, enjoy autonomy, and develop curriculum that reflects research and "best practices" in the classroom. Faculty have created a "hands-on" curriculum, with increased STEM challenges, tremendous fine and performing arts curriculum, and lively opportunities for their students to explore and follow their natural curiosities and affinities. They are beloved by students and parents, and are at the heart of the warmth that permeates the school campus.

**Administration and Staff** – The leadership team at Charlotte Prep consists of a Director of Enrollment, three Division Heads (Early, Lower and Middle Schools,) a Director of Finance and Operations, Director of Athletics, Director of Community Life, and a jack-of-all-trades in the form of a long-time administrator who serves as the Executive Assistant to the Head of School and School Operations Manager. Communications and marketing are shared responsibilities, and the team has a protocol that helps deliver timely information in the form of newsletters, all-school communications, admissions materials and





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promotion of special events. Staff members (a nurse, a counselor, assistants to the division heads, a receptionist, and buildings-and-grounds staff) keep the school operations running smoothly.

**Trustees** - Charlotte Preparatory School's leadership structure follows the typical independent school model. It is governed by a self-perpetuating Board of Trustees which holds the School in trust. The primary responsibilities of the board of trustees are to pursue the corporation's best interests: to determine and guide the character, mission, and culture of the School; to establish overall policies for the School; to develop strategic plans; to assure the financial stability of the School; and to cause the policies that the Board adopts to be effectively implemented. In addition, the Board recruits, selects, hires, and evaluates the Head of School. Currently, Charlotte Preparatory School's Board of Trustees consists of 15 members, including the Head of School.

**Parents** – Parents at Charlotte Preparatory School delight in the small and caring community much as their children do; regardless of when their families join the School community, parents are warmly welcomed and feel immediately connected to other families. There are a significant number of international families at Charlotte Prep, the result of years-ago efforts that have developed into a strong word-of-mouth (and well-earned) reputation that the school quickly and effectively welcomes families from Germany, Hong-Kong, or India. Parents like that the School is small—indeed, many choose Charlotte Prep for that reason — and while they understand that the school should grow, they caution against “losing the heart of the school” by becoming too large. In the parent community, examples of kindness and caring abound, from gracious and thoughtful support for parents experiencing health issues or a family crisis, to easy solicitation of volunteer support for a school project. Like many schools, parent leaders mention that there is a core group that does the lion's share of the volunteer work, but they are confident that they can keep the enthusiastic spirit of volunteerism — whether building sets for the school musical or coordinating fund-raising events — healthy and growing.



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### THE PROGRAM

While the School was founded as a Montessori school from Pre-K through fifth grade, the choice to change the name from Charlotte Montessori to Charlotte Preparatory tells the story of the decision to open a middle school. The Lower and Middle School program became more "traditional" when the Middle School opened with the first sixth-grade class. Subsequent years saw the addition of seventh and eighth-grade classes until the school grew to two classes per grade level from kindergarten through eighth grade. The curriculum prepares students to succeed at the wide variety of high schools they attend upon graduation, but more importantly, students at Charlotte Preparatory are presented with a smorgasbord of opportunities in academics, arts, and athletics, delivered through a hands-on, engaging program. The School is a lively and energized learning environment.

Charlotte Prep deploys a child-centered, research-based curriculum from which its students can derive the greatest benefit. In order to ensure that its curriculum reflects the best in what brain science and developmental psychology reveal, the School employs a "continuous curriculum improvement cycle." This model calls for the School to regularly

review its existing curriculum and compare it against best practice for maximum efficacy. In the School's seven-year history as a non-profit, academic administrators and teachers have together:

- Adopted the Math in Focus curriculum (Singapore Math).
- Implemented Columbia University's Units of Study for Language Arts.
- Transitioned the history curriculum towards a broader social studies curriculum, to intentionally include geography and government/civics.
- Transitioned to the Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) methodology for the School's Spanish curriculum.
- Developed a system and staff to support learning at the School.
- Integrated STEM and technology subject matter across the curriculum.
- Expanded the fine and performing arts curriculum to include art, music, chorus, band, and drama across all grade levels. There are 20+ arts performances each year.
- Instituted both summer reading and math programs to minimize learning loss.
- Instituted a small online foreign language program for new middle school students who are not ready for the advanced Charlotte Prep Spanish curriculum or who have studied another language at their prior school.
- Developed a hands-on, inquiry-based science curriculum that leverages the potential of the School's renovated science spaces.

The continuous review and improvement of the School's programs has not been fully articulated to parents, so a key characteristic of the School's next leader will be his/her ability to articulate the strengths of the curriculum and clarify the research that backs the changes teachers and administration have instituted.

### LEADERSHIP TRAITS AND QUALITIES

Top amongst the leadership qualities that will be vital for the next Head of School at Charlotte Preparatory will be exceptional communications skills; the school's marketing efforts, both internally and externally, will depend upon a gifted storyteller—a leader who can explain how the Montessori Early School's emphasis on curiosity, exploration and independence fuels the Lower School's inquiry-based science program or middle school students' exceptional self-advocacy skills. Whether acknowledging or appreciating, describing or advocating, networking or recruiting, communication skills will be vital for the health and vitality of the School.

Faculty, parents, and students will be appreciative of a visible, engaged and accessible leader; students used the words "playful" and "funny" in their sought-after traits, and parents cited "approachable" and "grounded" as qualities they seek, and the faculty championed "transparency" and "engagement." Warmth and openness, and an ability to connect with children ranging from age 2 ½ to 14, will help Charlotte Preparatory School's next leader inspire the community to join together for the challenges the School faces.

Charlotte Preparatory also seeks a leader who is a passionate advocate for the pre-K-8, small school model.

Knowledge of the Montessori philosophy and program would be an advantage, as part of the School's marketing challenges involve describing how the Montessori approach is carried into the K-8 program, and why it is at the core of strengths Charlotte Prep students demonstrate both within and beyond the school community.

The next Head of School will be a strong advocate for teachers, with significant experience as a classroom teacher and a bone-deep understanding of how to create and sustain a community of learners.

The Head of School leads a high school placement team that works with 8th grade families as they explore high school options beyond Charlotte Prep. The ability to lead this individualized process that includes personal advocacy for all 8th grade students will be crucial.





### OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

There are several key realms in which opportunities and challenges are intertwined:

- **Enrollment:** The School's enrollment (currently at 346) is twenty to sixty students below the desired number. Because of the configuration of the School as a small pre-K- 8 in a market with large, well-resourced K-12 schools, some families seeking an independent high school leave Charlotte Prep when a spot at a K-12 opens. There is attrition out of the Montessori Early School, which is widely recognized as the "the best show in town" for pre-school children, as families leave for public school, or a spot at one of the many options that begin in kindergarten.
- **Development:** The School does not have a development director or department. Tuition covers the cost of running the School, and a \$200,000 parent-led annual fundraising effort brings funds for inspiring projects and improvements around campus. When combined with the need to (re)connect with alums, and develop an effective marketing and communications plan, this realm of the School's operation will need both immediate and sustained attention.
- **Strategic planning and finance:** While the School has been in existence for almost fifty years, as a non-profit it is just seven years old. The opportunity to create an inspiring vision for the future and develop the financial structure that will power that vision are two key opportunities. The School services debt, competes in a robust independent school market, supports an ambitious array of programs and will require astute financial leadership in order to move to the next level.
- **Faculty:** Attracting, supporting and retaining strong faculty will necessitate examining salaries and benefits, sustaining improvements in a competitive and dynamic market, as well as creating more professional development opportunities and a nourishing collaborative environment for professional growth. For example, while the School sustains a generous 50% tuition remission program for faculty children enrolled at Charlotte Prep, there are nearby schools who provide 100% tuition support, and the School's retirement match is less than some local competitor schools.



Learn more about Charlotte Preparatory School at: <https://www.charlotteprep.org/>

### TO APPLY

Candidates interested in applying for the Head of School position may do so by going to: <https://rg175.com/candidate/signup>

Questions may be directed to: Catherine Hunter [cshunter33@gmail.com](mailto:cshunter33@gmail.com) and/or Tony Featherston [tfeatherston@rg175.com](mailto:tfeatherston@rg175.com)

The deadline for receipt of full application materials is **December 15, 2019**