



**Position Statement for
Head of School
Blue Oak School
Napa, CA
July 1, 2022**



THE OPPORTUNITY

Blue Oak School turns twenty in 2022, and celebrates two decades as a proudly progressive school, with a vibrant curriculum and a warm, welcoming and inclusive community. The School seeks a dynamic leader who will emphasize its 21st century progressive curriculum, engage in the national dialogue on child-centered learning, add to the impressive gains in enrollment achieved in the past five years, and continue an ambitious building project to consolidate the campus. Blue Oak's next Head of School will support an expanding administrative team, build the School's reputation in the Napa Valley, and join a spirited and diverse community of learners. With a significant capital campaign under way, an eager donor/alumni base, the strong support of the Napa Community and a continuing healthy enrollment pattern in the upcoming years, Blue Oak is poised to grow and flourish. The School has been recognized by the County as a leader in addressing the Covid storm, and benefits from a dedicated and strategic Board of Trustees.

"Our fundraising has a wonderful 'down home' feel. It doesn't feel pretentious...it feels like a real community."

MISSION STATEMENT

"Blue Oak School offers a challenging and stimulating education to children of diverse backgrounds and interests. Balancing structure with choice and the requirements of the group with the gifts of the individual, the School holds itself to the highest standards of responsible educational innovation, so that students develop the skills and habits of learning that endure."

Through the culture and community of the School, teachers nurture the development of character and foster confidence, creativity, flexibility and curiosity in each child. Students, in turn, encourage each other to learn. Relationships among freedom, responsibility, community and environment are explored through studies that engage students as stewards in service to the School, the region, and the world.

Our Mission Statement and our Seven Core Principles of Teaching and Learning guide our daily work at Blue Oak, and they make our school a distinctive learning environment. Put simply, as a progressive school, we challenge children with meaningful work and we adhere to a "learning by doing" approach. Rather than asking children to memorize and "bank information" we create experiences for our students that promote their understanding of a new concept. This approach frequently propels us



out of the classroom and into the world as our students, for example, investigate government in downtown Napa, explore natural science in the fields of our partner farm, or spend the night at a nearby observatory to really see our solar system.

As progressive educators, we are heartened that the recent movement for the teaching of "21st-century skills" is gaining momentum. For more than a century progressive educators have touted the importance of creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration – what is currently being called the "4 Cs." So too have we long embraced a hands-on approach to learning that integrates the disciplines by challenging students to ask questions, research real-world problems, and design and build their own solutions. From the unit blocks in our kindergarten to the tools in our teaching kitchen to the 3D printer in the Middle School, we consider our whole school a "maker space."



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SCHOOL HISTORY AND LOCATION

Currently located on two campuses in the heart of downtown Napa, Blue Oak School is a co-educational, independent, progressive K-8 day school. The School was founded in 2002 by two families who wanted to create a progressive school where students would be encouraged to stretch and grow and given the tools to become independent learners. What began as a K-4 school with just over 70 students is now a thriving K-8 school with 175 students enrolled and 185-190 projected for next year.

While the majority of Blue Oak students come from Napa, the Blue Oak community includes families from a number of neighboring communities along with families who have recently arrived in Napa from New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Washington, Oregon, Hawaii, Australia, China, and the entire Bay area.

There has been significant turnover in the Head of School position during the last 20 years, and the School seeks stability and steadiness with this next transition. The current head, Dan Schwartz, is much loved and has made the decision to retire. He has helped the School turn the corner from some tumultuous years when the enrollment plummeted and morale flagged. While the turnaround has been successful, the administrative team is still lean, the endowment needs to be replenished, and there is a significant building project that will begin in 2021. The School wisely purchased property across the street from its landmark Polk Street building and has completed plans for a middle school classroom building and K-8 gymnasium.

The town of Napa has grown from a sleepy farming and retirement community to a dynamic center for wine-making, art and culinary crafts. With its extraordinary climate —plenty of daytime sunshine and cool nights—over six-hundred wineries and vineyards are nestled in the valley. The same climate that allows Napa to grow excellent grapes makes it possible for the region to grow nearly anything, all year round. This good fortune has drawn many notable chefs to the valley to make it one of the best places in the world to eat. The Napa Valley is also a destination for outdoor enthusiasts; cyclists, hikers and horseback riders find their way to the roads and trails in the valley or in the beautiful Mayacama Mountains. Napa has a thriving arts and music scene with numerous galleries such as the di Rosa Center for Contemporary Art, and the Hess Art Collection.



FACILITIES AND FINANCES

The School's facilities are excellent, with large, light-filled and inviting classrooms, libraries on both campuses, multi-purpose rooms, offices, labs, as well as art and music studios. Outdoor play and gathering spaces are varied and welcoming. Plans for the middle school building project are well advanced and funding is secure. The current middle school facility has been sold but the School has leased it until the new middle school facility is completed. With the refurbishments the School has made on the current Middle School site, the facility is a spacious, attractive and effective learning environment. Blue Oak is nonetheless eager to realize the benefits and efficiencies of a consolidated campus.

Financially, the School has strived to attend to key indicators of school well-being, sustaining healthy compensation and benefits, active fundraising, and focusing on enrollment and management of the tuition assistance budget. Two PPP loans (513K and 533K) have enabled the School to get through the Covid crisis and improve the balance sheet. The next head of school will have to work closely with the board's finance committee to make sure that the recent financial stability is maintained, the building project is tightly managed and successful, the endowment is replenished and the 18 million dollar capital campaign—currently in the quiet phase—maintains momentum. The School has the capacity for 216 students (single sections in kindergarten through 5th grade at 18 students per grade, and double sections of 18 at 6th through 8th grades). Once the School reaches full enrollment, and is staffed appropriately, there will be much greater ease in the budget.





THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Students at Blue Oak are lively and engaged with the myriad activities and challenges that the School presents. Forty five percent are students of color; from its first years the School has attracted and retained a strong representation of Latino families. With Napa's growing Latino population the School has welcomed first generation students to excel academically and develop as citizens and leaders in the area's rapidly growing Latino business and cultural realms. Students are "seen and supported" at Blue Oak, and delight in the close relationships they have with teachers and coaches. They remark at how much *fun* it is to learn at Blue Oak, with one student commenting "I don't know how they do it, but they just

make you want to do the work, even when it is not your favorite subject!" and another remarking "It's impossible to shrink into the shadows here."

The faculty of Blue Oak consists of 30 teachers, teaching assistants and specialists. Additionally there are 10 support staff. All embrace the "whole child" ethos of the School, and the progressive pedagogy. There is strong alignment and collaboration.

The administrative team includes the Head of School, the Assistant Head of School and Director of Admissions, the Director of Advancement and Finance, and a newly appointed Director of Teaching and Learning. The School is poised to re-examine and develop the administrative structure to ensure continuing organizational

and educational objectives; the new head will have the opportunity to invite key senior level talent and continue building an effective and collaborative team.

Blue Oak has a Parent's Association whose primary goals are to create community within the parent body, and to support parent education.

The School is governed by a dedicated group of 14 trustees and a standing committee that includes the Head and Assistant Head, a faculty representative and the President of the Parents Association.

The first eighth grade class graduated from Blue Oak in 2007, and there are currently 325 loyal and enthusiastic alumni of the School.



PROGRAM

Lower School

Blue Oak's Lower School hums with student curiosity and creativity. In the Lower School, the process of learning, problem-finding, problem-solving, and inquiry are stressed, promoting a deeper understanding of materials, increased student motivation, resulting in students developing a deep love of learning. Engaged learners who love what they are doing, taught by bright, caring and committed teachers leads to high levels of student achievement at Blue Oak.

The Lower School curriculum at Blue Oak is focused on fostering imagination, curiosity, independence, self-reliance and team work. There are rich Lower School programs in studio and culinary arts, in music, physical education, and Spanish—all key ingredients in a Blue Oak education. Students start with

iPads in the younger grades and are introduced to laptops in third grade. There is also a focus on experiential education and a 5th grade trip to an outdoor center for several days. Each Lower School class has a job, instilling a sense of connection and responsibility to the school community, and echoing the words of Blue Oak's founder that, "children thrive when they are given honest to goodness work."

Middle School

Blue Oak Middle School is a small community designed to inspire and care for sixth, seventh, and eighth graders as they transition into early adolescence. Blue Oak Middle School classes are small, allowing for individual attention, a strong personalized relationship between the student and teacher, and small-group instruction. The Middle School schedule is built on long blocks of time, recognizing that students learn best when time in school is organized to promote

"Blue Oak School is an active member of the national Progressive Education Network....our work with children draws on a rich historical and intellectual heritage."

student-directed inquiry and experiential learning.

Blue Oak Middle School teachers continue to challenge their students with meaningful academic work as they also nurture each student's non-cognitive tool-set—important behaviors and dispositions including social resilience, academic perseverance, and a flexible mindset. These behaviors are explored through the Middle School Advisory program. Each Middle School teacher works with a small group of advisees, helping students to develop a sense of community as they also focus on their social skills.

Middle School students take classes in math, science, humanities, studio art, PE, Spanish, music, and drama, as well as participating in a rich and varied electives program. Elective classes are multi grade, and are designed to be "head, hands, and hearts on," challenging students to "go deep." There is also an 8th grade class in High School readiness that introduces students to high school options as well as preparing them for the application process. Finally, in the Spring semester Eighth graders create a Capstone Project, a sustained investigation using primary and secondary sources, and interviewing an expert, culminating in presenting their project to the school community in May.





The Blue Oak curriculum is based on the following seven principles of teaching and learning.

1. Children “learn by doing.”

At Blue Oak School students do not just read about science, they hypothesize, experiment, and build their own apparatus. They devise mathematical models and apply them; they read literature and create their own stories. They compose music, and they do original research.

2. Curriculum is child-centered and developmentally appropriate. Learning takes place in a meaningful context and is tied to children’s needs and interests. In this way, education at Blue Oak fosters each child’s all-important internal motivation to learn.

3. The curriculum builds from a foundation.

Lessons draw on what a student already knows to extend his or her established base of knowledge, recognizing the importance of what Lev Vygotsky deemed “the zone of proximal development.”

4. Understanding, rather than memorization, is stressed. When understanding is achieved memorization follows. Students who understand carry their knowledge with them out into the world and can transfer it to new situations.



5. The process of learning is emphasized. When the process is central, there is no need to cheat, no need for parents to do homework, no need to avoid risks. Risk-taking and experiencing an occasional failure are embraced.

6. The curriculum is integrated. Blue Oak School faculty blend disciplines to stimulate understanding from different viewpoints and to show the real-world application of

knowledge. Teaching is extended through literature, music, art, science and mathematics.

7. Inquiry is at the heart of the curriculum. Important questions are asked and addressed. “We only learn,” John Dewey so rightly put it, “when confronted with a problem.”

The School has a strong and well-articulated academic and social-emotional learning program across the disciplines and grades. Thorough descriptions of courses and the particulars of the curriculum are available on the website.





Diversity, Equity and Inclusion advocate. The next leader at Blue Oak will need to embrace and imbed a commitment to diversity and equity for all constituencies. These efforts will undoubtedly include assessing hiring practices, building the Nuestro Futuro scholarship program and providing on-going opportunities for parents, teachers and students to deepen the culture of belonging that has been built in the School's first 20 years.

Strategic Planner. The School's next head will work closely with the board of trustees to envision key initiatives and sustain the path forward.

Dynamic communicator. Blue Oak seeks a leader who will be able to communicate policies and initiatives across all constituencies and share the stories that vivify the Blue Oak community. The next Head of School will reach beyond the school campus and engage with Napa leaders, business owners and non-profits to further enhance the School's reputation

LEADERSHIP QUALITIES AND TRAITS

The School hopes that its next leader will be approachable and warm, engaged and energetic, and deeply familiar with progressive pedagogy. Blue Oak's next leader will be a strategic thinker with superb communication skills, and a person who relishes daily interactions with students, parents, and teachers.

Impactful enrollment manager: While enrollment is on an upswing, and there is confidence that the School will fill to its current capacity of 216, steadying admissions and financial aid is a critical challenge for the School. Not only does Blue Oak seek to increase its diversity and the overall number of students, but also to understand the changing marketplace and sustain effective marketing and outreach efforts.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

Caring community builder. the School seeks a leader who will cherish and nurture the Blue Oak community, which has long been characterized by warmth, kindness and respect. Visible and connected throughout the school community and beyond, the next Head of School will embrace the School's mission statement and educational philosophy and engage fully with the community.





and the community's understanding of its mission and pedagogy.

Financial sustainability. The Head of School will support the financial health of the entire School through rigorous, disciplined management of the School's financial resources, and oversee the building/completion of the Middle School classrooms and gymnasium. In addition, the Board, Head and Finance committee will work to replenish the School's endowment and reserve funds, with the Development team completing the current capital campaign and continuing to support important fundraising objectives. While facilities are well-tended, the next Head of School will maintain the original and newly completed campus responsibly and efficiently. Lastly, the Head of School will seek the appropriate staffing as well as competitive compensation and benefits to assure that Blue Oak will continue to attract and retain an excellent teaching and administrative team.

Organizational health. The School seeks a leader who will help update Human Resources personnel, policies and practices that promote fairness and transparency for all employees. As enrollment builds, there are likely to be administrative structural challenges ahead; the Head of School will need to assure a collaborative and high-functioning senior leadership team to support both on-going and new initiatives at the School.



APPLICATION PROCESS

Candidates interested in applying to become Blue Oak's next Head of School may apply online at: <https://rg175/candidate/signup>.

The application includes a:

- Letter of interest
- Resume
- Writing sample (can be an article, educational philosophy, or personal statement)
- List of five references

Please contact Hamilton Clark (hamilton.clark@rg175.com) or Catherine Hunter (cshunter33@gmail.com) with questions.

The deadline for receipt of full application materials is **July 15, 2021**.